

Haldimand County 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper A: The Haldimand County Electoral System

Background

Haldimand County has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Robert J. Williams, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Ward Boundary Review.

The primary purpose of the study is to prepare Council to make decisions on whether to maintain the existing ward configuration or to adopt an alternative. Matters that are integral to a comprehensive review include the following:

- Is it appropriate to consider dissolving the wards to elect all councillors at-large (in what the *Municipal Act* calls a “general vote” system)?
- Is it appropriate to consider changing the composition of council (its size and/or how council is elected) as part of the review?
- If councillors will continue to be elected in wards, what guiding principles will be observed in the design of the wards?

This Ward Boundary Review is premised on the legitimate democratic expectation that municipal representation in Haldimand County on election day and throughout the term of Council will be effective, equitable, and an accurate reflection of the contemporary distribution of communities and people across the municipality.

Setting

The present-day Haldimand County was incorporated on January 1, 2001, under the *Town of Haldimand Act, 1999* with “the status of a city and a local municipality for all purposes” as a result of the dissolution of the Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk and the City of Nanticoke. The Act (section 3) established a council composed of the mayor elected by general vote and six other members, with one “elected for each ward.” Section 46 authorizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make regulations establishing wards “for the purposes of section 3.” These boundaries were set out in Ontario Regulation 94/00 “Ward Descriptions and Boundary Adjustment,” dated February 25, 2000.



According to a report to Council in August 2023, “There have been minor adjustments made to the wards related to urban boundary changes, but on the whole, the current ward boundaries are similar to what was established in 2001.”^[1]

Few municipalities in Ontario have experienced the kinds of structural change that culminated in the present-day Haldimand County. A brief summary of those reforms is helpful to understand the origins of the electoral arrangements to be examined in this review and to clarify the names associated with geographic areas in the County.

The 1849 *Municipal Corporations Act* (often referred to as the *Baldwin Act*) established a two-tier system of local government that lasted in its original form into the 1960s and is still operative in many areas of Southern Ontario. The Act established a classification system of municipalities that distinguished between what are called upper-tier and lower-tier municipalities (that is, a two-tier structure of municipalities).

Basically, lower-tier municipalities (sometimes referred to today as “area municipalities”) included cities, towns, villages, and townships that were incorporated under the terms of provincial legislation to govern a defined area, while upper-tier municipalities, called counties or regions, were composed of all the non-urban lower-tier municipalities in a given area. In this system, certain responsibilities were delivered by the individual lower-tier units for their own residents, while others were delivered by the county to residents of all member municipalities.

To add complications to this arrangement, when a lower-tier municipality’s population surpassed a specified level, it was designated a city and was separated from the geographic county in which it was located. A city was what can be called a “single-tier” municipality since it was responsible for all municipal services that, in a county, are divided between the two tiers.

The original County of Haldimand was an upper-tier municipality established under the 1849 *Municipal Corporations Act* that included 10 townships, two towns, and three villages but no separated cities. Under provincial legislation passed in 1973, the lower-tier of the County of Haldimand was reorganized into two towns (Dunnville and Haldimand) with a portion of its territory combined with municipalities in Norfolk County to create the City of Nanticoke. The lower-tier municipalities in the two counties were reorganized and subsumed under a reformed upper-tier structure referred to as a Regional Municipality.

Of relevance here is that in the Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk, the Town of Haldimand was governed by a council of 18 members consisting of a mayor elected by general vote, three local and regional councillors, and 15 local councillors. The Town of Dunnville Council consisted of 10 members (a mayor elected by general vote, two local

^[1] Report CLE-10-2023 Ward Boundary Review Project – Scope and Budget (August 29, 2023).



and regional Councillors, and seven local councillors) and the City of Nanticoke Council numbered 13, consisting of a mayor elected by general vote, three local and regional councillors, and nine local councillors. Although the original legislation provided that all councillors were to be elected by general vote, the Minister (the Treasurer of Ontario and Minister of Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs) was assigned the authority by order to “divide into wards any area municipality.”

The net effect was that between 1973 and 2001 local councillors in the two-tier Regional Municipality were elected in 31 wards, compared to the present-day six-ward configuration. Research indicates that the present wards were largely drawn by combining various wards used during the regional government period. As noted at the outset, despite its name, Haldimand County is now a single-tier municipality, not an upper-tier municipality as it had been for over 100 years.

Topical Discussion Papers B to E

Discussion Papers will be available to residents, each addressing one of the topics to be considered in this review:

- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Method of Election
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper E – Why a Ward Boundary Review?