

# Haldimand County 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

## Discussion Paper E: Why a Ward Boundary Review?

The objective of a Ward Boundary Review is to conduct a comprehensive review of Haldimand County's electoral arrangements to develop an effective and equitable system of representation. Although there is widespread support for reviewing the wards in Haldimand County, the present electoral map must still be evaluated as a way to help identify which features need to change to achieve effective representation (see topical Discussion Paper D) and which features might remain in place.

Haldimand County's present ward design dates from 2001 when the municipality's population was approximately 43,700. Today the population is more than 50,000 and projected growth could take that number to over 65,000 by 2036. As a community changes, so should its electoral arrangements, more than ever when there are perceptible and inequitable discrepancies in the population of existing wards, as will be discussed below.

A necessary step in a ward boundary review is to assess the extent to which the existing wards meet the guiding principles for a ward system that achieves the goal of effective representation. In this Discussion Paper, the status quo will therefore be subject to the same "tests" as any alternative designs; that is, does the present system meet the principles associated with representation by population (population parity), protection of communities of interest, present and future population trends, and physical and natural boundaries? This assessment will assist the Consultant Team in identifying the strengths and weaknesses.

### Preliminary Insights into the Haldimand County Ward System

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Before developing alternatives to the current system in the ward boundary review phase, it is appropriate to apply the same guiding principles to the current system to determine whether it is actually still viable and, if not, what shortcomings need to be considered in designing alternatives. If the current system successfully meets the guiding principles, no ward boundary review would be needed at this time. Where individual principles are reasonably successful, those features may not need to be changed.

**Representation by Population (Population Parity):** One goal of this review is to design a system of representation that achieves relative parity in the population of the wards, with some degree of variation acceptable in light of population densities and



other demographic factors across the municipality. The indicator of success in a ward design is the extent to which the individual wards approach an “optimal” size.

In a symmetrical ward system where each ward elects the same number of councillors, optimal size<sup>[1]</sup> can be understood as a mid-point on a scale where the term “optimal” (O) describes a ward with a population within 5% on either side of the calculated optimal size, which is itself identified by dividing the overall population of the municipality by the number of wards. The classification “below/above optimal” (O+ or O-) is applied to a ward with a population between 6% and 25% on either side of the optimal size. A ward that is labelled “outside the range” (OR+ or OR-) indicates that its population is greater than 25% above or below the optimal ward size. The adoption of a 25% maximum variation is based on federal redistribution legislation but is widely used in municipalities like Haldimand County where there are population clusters of different sizes as well as rural territory and anticipated residential developments in the future.

When the present ward configuration was implemented, the overall population of Haldimand County was approximately 43,700. By 2011, it had reached approximately 44,900, meaning that the optimal population size for a ward would be 7,479 with an acceptable range of variation between 5,609 and 9,349. Population data for 2011 (see Figure Gi) indicates that the population of none of the wards was “optimal” and two of the six wards fell “outside the range.” A ward system composed of these wards appears not at that time to have met the representation by population principle as we have defined it. By 2021 only one ward is classed as “optimal” and two others fall outside the optimal range of variation. This inequity had been recognized by County staff as far back as 2016 but for various reasons a review was not undertaken.<sup>[2]</sup>

By 2021 the imbalance had persisted, since the divergence in population between the largest and smallest wards increased from 5,515 to 7,612. Over the history of this ward configuration, the population of Ward 3 has been consistently well above the optimal range and the Ward 5 population has been consistently well below the optimal range.

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[1] This calculation can also be considered the “average” ward population.

[2] Report CLE-10-2023 Ward Boundary Review Project – Scope and Budget, page 2.



Table Ei – Ward Population Distribution 2011 and 2021

Ward	Area (SqKm)	2011			2021		
		Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range	Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range
Ward 1	311.2	6,993	0.93	O-	7,515	0.92	O-
Ward 2	252.7	6,205	0.83	O-	6,732	0.82	O-
Ward 3	41.1	10,948	1.46	OR+	13,379	1.63	OR+
Ward 4	354.5	8,219	1.10	O+	8,307	1.01	O
Ward 5	210.3	5,433	0.73	OR-	5,767	0.70	OR-
Ward 6	100.5	7,079	0.95	O-	7,516	0.92	O-
<b>Total/Average</b>	<b>1,270.3</b>	<b>44,876</b>	<b>7,479</b>		<b>49,216</b>	<b>8,203</b>	

Since the population of two of the current six wards in Haldimand County fails to meet the population parity principle and only one ward is at the optimal point, the present ward configuration does not meet this principle and options that place a high priority on population parity in 2024 should be developed.

**Protection of Communities of Interest:** Electoral districts in Canada are not traditionally considered to be merely arithmetic divisions of the electorate designed to achieve parity of voting power. Rather, they are part of a system “which gives due weight to voter parity but admits other considerations where necessary.”<sup>[3]</sup> One of the customary other considerations is “community of interest.” The rationale is that electoral districts should, as far as possible, be cohesive units and areas with common interests related to representation. As phrased in the guiding principles, ward boundaries should not divide communities of interest.

Haldimand County includes distinctive communities of interest. It is one of the reasons why a ward system continues to make sense.<sup>[4]</sup> The previous sections demonstrate that the existing wards fall short of meeting the population principles, but do they constitute an acceptable system of representation if the communities of interest are used instead as the primary measure of success?

The initial generalization is that in terms of communities of interest in Haldimand County there is only one ward that unequivocally meets this principle. Ward 3 is based primarily on the former separate Town of Caledonia and a small rural area between the urban neighbourhoods and the municipal boundaries with Hamilton, Brant, and Six Nations. Although historically the former Town of Dunnville served as the focal point for the southeast corner of the County of Haldimand, that area is now divided into two wards, so that the former Town is included in Ward 6 with a portion of the closely connected rural population surrounding it, which is itself divided into two wards. The former Villages of Jarvis, Hagersville, and Cayuga are distinctive, compact settlement

<sup>[3]</sup> Reference re *Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)* [1991], known as the Carter decision, page 35.

<sup>[4]</sup> See Discussion Paper C on the case for retaining wards in Haldimand County.



areas but are included in large geographic wards dominated by predominantly rural economic and social communities of interest.

Wards 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 are largely defined by the historic Townships that existed in the County of Haldimand from the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1970s. The main exception is the inclusion of the Cayuga settlement and a small area to the east with the former South Cayuga Township rather than with the former North Cayuga Township. Having said that, our research suggests that the importance of the historic Townships lies mostly in the way some of the boundaries have persisted (see below) rather than as contemporary communities of interest.

In those same wards, rural residents constitute a significant proportion of the population but only Ward 5 could be considered a “rural ward” since the settlement areas are very small and, even then, the lakeshore hamlets and cottages add another community of interest to that ward.

In four of the six wards, the rural population is combined with urban settlements meaning that a rural voice is segmented and unlikely to be as influential as it might be in a different configuration. As well, if the ward boundaries remain unchanged, the forecast for population growth around Caledonia (combined with forecast growth in Hagersville) suggests that the present Ward 4 will be a much less coherent entity than it is today.

On the whole, the present configuration of wards, built on the foundations of the pre-regional government municipalities, are only partially successful at meeting this principle.

**Consideration of Present and Future Population Trends:** Ward boundary reviews consider anticipated population trends to ensure that the ward structure provides effective representation beyond the 2026 municipal election. Future population growth in Haldimand County over the next decade will be concentrated in the Caledonia area adjacent to the County’s boundary with the City of Hamilton (now Ward 3). More moderate growth is forecast in Hagersville, located in the present Ward 4, an otherwise predominantly rural area. Given the limitations on expanding municipal services over the next decade, the current ward configuration will not likely grow into parity but further away from it, as the forecast population increase is concentrated in the most populous existing ward. As a result, if left unchanged, the present ward configuration will not likely achieve population parity over time and will fall short of meeting this principle as well.

**Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries:** This principle seeks to include wards that use geographical and topographical features to mark boundaries while reflecting communities of interest and keeping the wards compact and easy to understand.



The boundaries of the present wards in Haldimand County are, for the most part, clean and clear-cut since they follow the boundaries of what can be called the historic municipalities along numbered roadways. A few exceptions can be found in the Ward 3 boundary around the Caledonia urban area and the Ward 1/Ward 4 boundary south and west of Hagersville.

In future, a significant natural feature that now actually inhibits travel within four of the wards, the Grand River, could be used to re-imagine representation in Haldimand County, subject to the application of the guiding principles.

Overall, the wards are largely successful in meeting this principle.

**Effective Representation:** The specific principles listed above are all subject to the overriding principle of “effective representation” as enunciated by the Supreme Court of Canada.<sup>[5]</sup> The concept of effective representation was derived from the equality provision of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: the “voting power” of citizens should be as close to parity as possible so that the voice of each one in the deliberations of government will be represented evenly and fairly. The Court noted that relative parity of voting power was a prime, but not an exclusive, condition of effective representation since other factors – such as those summarized above – contribute to the achievement of effective representation.

In Haldimand County, there are different relationships between constituents and councillors in terms of present and future population distributions and community groupings that hinder the achievement of effective representation. Specifically, one councillor has twice as many constituents to serve (and represent) as another. The present configuration embeds a dilution of the votes cast by certain electors compared to others and weakens the democratic expectation that when the six councillors decide on a matter before them, should each vote is cast on behalf of a relatively equal number of residents.

The present ward boundaries fall short of meeting this over-arching principle. They do not, in our assessment, ensure effective voter representation.

**Overview:** No ward design is likely to meet all the principles in their entirety; however, the best designs maximize adherence to the principles, especially in relation to representation by population and effective representation. It is our understanding of existing case law that deviations from the specific principles can be justified by other criteria drawn from the Carter decision in a manner that is more supportive of effective representation. *Our preliminary assessment points to the conclusion that a ward boundary review in Haldimand County is necessary.*

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<sup>[5]</sup> Reference re *Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)* [1991], known as the Carter decision, page 35.



Figure Giv: Existing Haldimand County Ward Configuration Evaluation Summary

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle? <sup>[1]</sup>	Comment
<b>Representation by Population</b>	<b>No</b>	Two of the six wards exceed the $\pm 25\%$ range of variation.
<b>Protection of Communities of Interest</b>	<b>Partially Successful</b>	Only two of the four wards include coherent communities of interest.
<b>Consideration of Present and Future Population Trends</b>	<b>No</b>	Population growth will not overcome the existing population imbalance.
<b>Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries</b>	<b>Largely Successful</b>	Most boundaries are regular and/or visible lines. A significant natural boundary is not used.
<b>Effective Representation</b>	<b>No</b>	The relationships between constituents and councillors hinder the achievement of effective voter representation.

<sup>[1]</sup> The degree to which each guiding principle is satisfied is ranked as “**Yes**” (fully satisfied), “**Largely Successful**,” “**Partially Successful**,” or “**No**” (not satisfied).

## Topical Discussion Papers A to E

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

- Discussion Paper A – The Haldimand County Electoral System
- 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?