



2024 Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review

City of Burlington

Interim Report

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1. Background

The City of Burlington has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., Dr. Robert J. Williams, and Dr. Zachary Spicer, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review (C.C.W.B.R.).

The study aims to provide Burlington Council the necessary information to decide whether to retain the current electoral structure or implement changes. This report presents preliminary observations on alternative electoral options. This review is grounded in the democratic principle that municipal representation in Burlington should be effective, equitable and reflective of the city's neighborhood communities.

2. Study Objective

The project has several key objectives:

- Develop a clear understanding of the present electoral system, including its origins and operations as a system of representation;
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the present electoral system based on guiding principles adopted for the study;
- Develop and conduct an appropriate consultation process in accordance with Burlington's public engagement practices to ensure community support for the review and its outcome;
- Prepare population projections for the development and evaluation of alternative electoral structures for the 2026, 2030, and 2034 municipal elections; and
- Deliver a report that will set out recommended alternative council composition, size and ward boundaries to ensure effective and equitable electoral arrangements for Burlington, based on the principles identified.

In October 2024, the Consultant Team prepared a series of Discussion Papers that set out:

- The parameters and purpose for the review;
- The basic electoral arrangements in Burlington;
- Council's legislative authority to change electoral arrangements in the City; and
- An initial assessment of the City's current ward boundary system.



[Discussion Paper D](#) provided a set of guiding principles that will inform the study and the work of the Consultant Team, as follows:

- Balancing the current population distribution among the wards (referred to as the “representation by population principle”);
- Balancing the future population distribution among the wards based on projections (referred to as the “future population trends principle”);
- Respecting established neighbourhoods and communities (referred to as the “communities of interest principle”); and
- Respecting geographical features and the defining of natural and infrastructure boundaries (referred to as the “geographic representation principle”).

Taken together, these principles will contribute to achieving the over-arching principle of effective representation.

Each principle is described in detail in [Discussion Paper D](#) and can be found on the Get Involved Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review project page.^[1]

The purpose of this Interim Report is to:

- Provide a summary of the work completed to date;
- Provide a summary of the information received from the public engagement sessions and tools, such as the survey and [project page](#) on Burlington’s Get Involved platform; and
- To receive direction from Council on next steps of the study, specifically in relation to the current representation principles that sees all councillors sit on both Regional and City Council with all councillors elected in wards.

3. Work Completed To Date

In March 2024, Council voted to proceed with a council composition and ward boundary review (report [CL-03-24](#)). Work completed to date includes:

- Research and data compilation;
- Interviews, presentations, and meetings with councillors, the mayor, and municipal staff; and

[1] www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview



- Public consultation on the existing council composition, size, and ward structure.

Interviews with senior staff, Council, and meetings with the City's project team for phase 1 of this study were conducted both virtually and in person. Public consultation began in September 2024 at the Food for Feedback event. Watson's Consultant Team also presented to Council on October 7, 2024, and conducted a first phase of public consultation in October 2024 (six in-person sessions at six locations throughout the City and one virtual session.)

4. Existing Electoral Structure

Burlington City Council consists of seven members: the mayor, elected at-large and six councillors, each representing one of six wards. The current structure has been in place since 1997, when council was reduced from seventeen members. The *Municipal Act, 2001*, establishes that the council of a "local municipality" must consist of "a minimum of five members, one of whom shall be the head of council" (subsection 217 (1) 1) and that the head of council (the mayor) "shall be elected by general vote" (subsection 217 (1) 3). Furthermore, the "members, other than the head of council, shall be elected by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards" (subsection 217 (1) 4). With seven members, Burlington has two council members above the minimum of five required under the *Act*.

All members of Burlington Council also serve on Halton Region Council. In response to a composition change at Halton Region in 1997, Burlington City Council adopted a resolution to reduce its size by adopting "two principles regarding representation." (Staff Report CL 58/96 (Dec 5, 1996), appended to Staff Report CL-27-24):

- i) "The Mayor should be one of the City of Burlington's representatives on Regional Council.
- ii) That the Regional Councillors from the City of Burlington should sit as both City and Regional Councillors."

The resolution continues, "THAT there be one Alderman per ward in the City of Burlington" and "THAT of the seven representatives from the City of Burlington sitting on Regional Council one shall be the Mayor of the City of Burlington, who shall be elected by a general vote and...that the balance of the Council of the City of Burlington be composed of six members who are elected by ward." Those six members, the



resolution states, “shall be elected by ward, and sit on both the Council of the City of Burlington and the Council of the Regional Municipality of Halton.”^[2]

Since the adoption of these representation principles, Burlington Council has remained the same size with seven members in total. The last ward boundary review took place in 2005, ahead of the 2006 municipal election. The City’s six wards were adjusted, but changes to council composition were not considered as part of this review. At the time of the 2005 review, Burlington had a population of approximately 160,000. Since then, the City’s population has grown by almost 30,000, to 186,950, according to 2021 Census population data.

Given that the allocation of seats on Regional Council is not decided by the City of Burlington, these representation principles have been interpreted as meaning that all members of local council also serve on Regional Council and that the composition of Burlington Council could not be adjusted beyond seven without an adjustment at Regional Council. The Consultant Team explores the implications of these representation principles on composition to a greater degree in this report.

^[2] Staff Report CL 58/96 (December 5, 1996).



5. Existing Population and Forecast Growth in the City of Burlington

As previously discussed, a basic premise of representative democracy in Canada is the notion that the geographic areas used to elect a representative should be reasonably balanced with one another in terms of population. A detailed population estimate for the City of Burlington, including its constituent wards and communities, will be prepared to allow for evaluation of the existing ward structure and subsequent alternatives in terms of representation by population, beginning with the most recent Census (2021). This estimate will include the population not captured by the 2021 Census.

The City of Burlington is expected to experience significant population growth over the next decade and beyond. For this reason, it is important that this study assess representation by population for both existing and future-year populations. Following the study terms of reference, the analysis will consider representation of population over the next three municipal elections through to 2034. A population and housing forecast for the City will be prepared for the 2024 to 2034 period, consistent with the City's 2024 Growth Analysis Update (ongoing) and will be assessed through the next phase of this study.

It is important to note that the planning landscape is evolving rapidly. This review will reflect the current information, but changes in population and planning policies may lead to different outcomes moving forward. Given the uncertainties in this evolving landscape, the Consultant Team recommends that the City continue to monitor population and elector numbers to ensure equitable representation by population across the wards. If population projections aren't realized or growth patterns are different from estimates, another review may be required at some point in the future.

5.1 Existing Population and Structure

As mentioned, this study needs to look at both the existing and future population distribution. Total population figures are currently being reviewed, spanning out to 2051. Burlington's 2021 Census population was reported at 186,900. The City's total population is estimated to reach over 193,000 by 2026 (excluding Census



Undercount).³ As shown in Table 5-1, the 2021 Census population is presented by ward. The optimal population range is within 5% of the average ward population (31,158). No wards can currently be classified as falling within the optimal range. The acceptable population range is within 15% of the ward average population. Three of the six wards (Wards 3, 4, and 5) fall above the 15% acceptable range (as outlined in [Discussion Paper E](#)), while the remaining three wards are within the acceptable population range.

Table 5-1
City of Burlington
2021 Population by Ward

Ward	Ward Population (2021)	Share Of Population	Variance	
Ward 1	28,542	15%	0.92	O-
Ward 2	26,785	14%	0.86	O-
Ward 3	23,692	13%	0.76	OR-
Ward 4	36,441	20%	1.17	OR+
Ward 5	36,049	19%	1.16	OR+
Ward 6	35,439	19%	1.14	O+
Total	186,948	-	-	-
Average	31,158	-	-	-

5.2 Forecast Population Growth

The City of Burlington is currently undertaking an important study to update its population, housing, and employment growth forecast to 2051. This update will form a key input in the City's updates to a number of land use planning, transportation, infrastructure and capital expenditure planning studies to be completed by the City in the coming years, such as the City's Official Plan and Targeted Realignment Exercise.

The ongoing 2024 Population and Employment Growth Analysis Study will explore different growth scenarios for Burlington, ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 new housing units per year. This is based on available land capacity and long-term forecasts considering local supply and demand. The review aims to guide Burlington's planning and growth management up to 2051, within the context of the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area's

³ Draft population projections - 2024 Population and Employment Growth Analysis Study, Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.



growth outlook. Initial findings estimate Burlington's population growth estimated to fall between 240,000 and 290,000 by 2041. Population growth to 2035 will be detailed by sub-geographic units and presented according to the current and all proposed alternative council composition and ward structures in the later stages of this Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review.

6. Public Consultation

The first phase of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review (C.C.W.B.R.) incorporated a public engagement component that were delivered virtually and in-person and designed to:

- Inform residents of Burlington about the reasons for the review and the key factors considered in the review; and
- Engage the residents in a manner that provides valuable input to the evaluation of the existing council composition and ward structure and the development of alternative ward boundaries.

As a soft launch for the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review, the Consultant Team and City staff attended Burlington's Food for Feedback on September 14, 2024. The event attracted approximately 2,000 people, with over 100 Burlington residents providing initial thoughts and feedback on the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review.

Six in-person consultation sessions were conducted on the following dates:

- October 7, 2024;
- October 9, 2024;
- October 10, 2024;
- October 21, 2024; and
- October 23, 2024 (x2 – one afternoon and one evening).

In addition, one virtual public consultation session was conducted on October 15, 2024. The Consultant Team's presentation and other information about the review, including the video recording of the Virtual Public Open House, are available on the project's Get Involved Burlington page: www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview (see Appendix B for more details).



Through the public consultation sessions, a survey, a Q&A, and the online comment/feedback form, participants were invited to provide their input/opinions with respect to the following:

- Existing council composition – Is six councillors and the mayor, for a total council of seven members, an appropriate number?
- Existing ward structure – What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current ward structure?
- Guiding principles – Which guiding principles should be given the greatest priority in the development of ward boundaries?

The feedback and comments collected through the public consultation process are reflected in the analysis presented below and will help inform the preliminary set of ward configurations moving forward. While public input from consultation offers valuable insight into the review, it is not relied on exclusively. The Consultant Team used the public's input in conjunction with its professional expertise and experience in C.C.W.B.R.s, along with best practices, to inform the observations and direction sought in this report. It should be noted that public participation was robust with high engagement in comparison to other composition and ward boundary reviews the Consultant Team is involved in.



7. What We Heard

To promote public engagement in the C.C.W.B.R., the City of Burlington created a [project page](#) on the Get Involved Burlington platform for all necessary documents to give residents an informed voice. All communications directed residents to that page, through social media and other forms of outreach, such as the five Get Involved e-newsletter articles sent in fall 2024 to approximately 7,000 e-newsletter subscribers. Residents were able to visit the site, read context about the study, download background reports, leave comments/suggestions, ask questions and, most importantly, complete a survey. The Consultant Team prepared a whiteboard-style explainer video describing the overall process of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review.

The public survey was a key tool for collecting input from as many residents as possible and gave some of the best high-level insight into the views and perspectives of Burlington's residents. The level of participation in the survey was fairly high, with 216 people responding to some or all questions; the detailed summary of these results can be found in Appendix A. The survey results tended to confirm what earlier research had begun to indicate:

- A little under half the survey respondents (45%) thought having six local and regional councillors, with one elected from each ward, was adequate for their needs.
- Of those who felt that the size of council was inappropriate, approximately 7% indicated they would prefer a smaller council and 34% of the respondents felt it was too small, and they wanted to see the size of council increased.
- Most importantly for the next phase of the project, respondents prioritized the principle of representation by population, with 31% of respondents ranking it as the most important to them. A significant percentage of respondents, however, also thought that balancing projected demographic trends should be the top priority (26%).
- Furthermore, 25% believe that respecting communities of interest is the most important principle as the study progresses. Geographic representation was prioritized by the fewest number of people (18%).

The survey also included questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the current boundaries of each respondent's ward, where the respondents could choose more than one answer from a list. The survey results showed that:



- The greatest strength of their ward is that they know who their ward councillor is (152). Ninety-five respondents indicated that knowing their ward's boundaries is a strength, and 76 respondents felt that communities and neighbourhoods in the ward are similar and connected. Sixty-six respondents believe their ward has the right number of residents and 65 believe it is the right size.
- Respondents found that the two greatest weaknesses of their ward are that each has too many residents for one councillor to cover (55) and that communities and neighbourhoods are spread out over multiple wards (54). Forty-three respondents believe their ward's area is too large.

The survey also included several questions that were not multiple choice and, instead, allowed respondents the opportunity to give longer, written responses about issues they considered important. In total, 112 respondents (52%) gave their views on what they regard as the strengths and weaknesses of the existing ward system. There were three major recurrent themes that arose in these responses.

First, many indicated that they believed the size of council was too small and that councillors had too many obligations placed upon their time, from sitting on both local and regional council and participating in the work of various agencies, boards, and commissions. Conversely, other respondents argued that Burlington Council is the right size, and they feel well represented.

Second, many respondents further highlighted the importance of communities of interest principle, with some worrying that differing community needs within wards may not be adequately addressed if changes to the ward boundaries or composition were explored (e.g., Wards 3 and 6 both have rural and urban communities).

Third, some respondents expressed worry about future growth, namely from the Major Transit Station Areas (M.T.S.A.s) within the City of Burlington and the importance of prioritizing the projected demographic trends principle in this review.

In summary, the Consultant Team has found that the themes and considerations raised by Burlington residents has been largely consistent across all forms of engagement, including the in-person sessions.



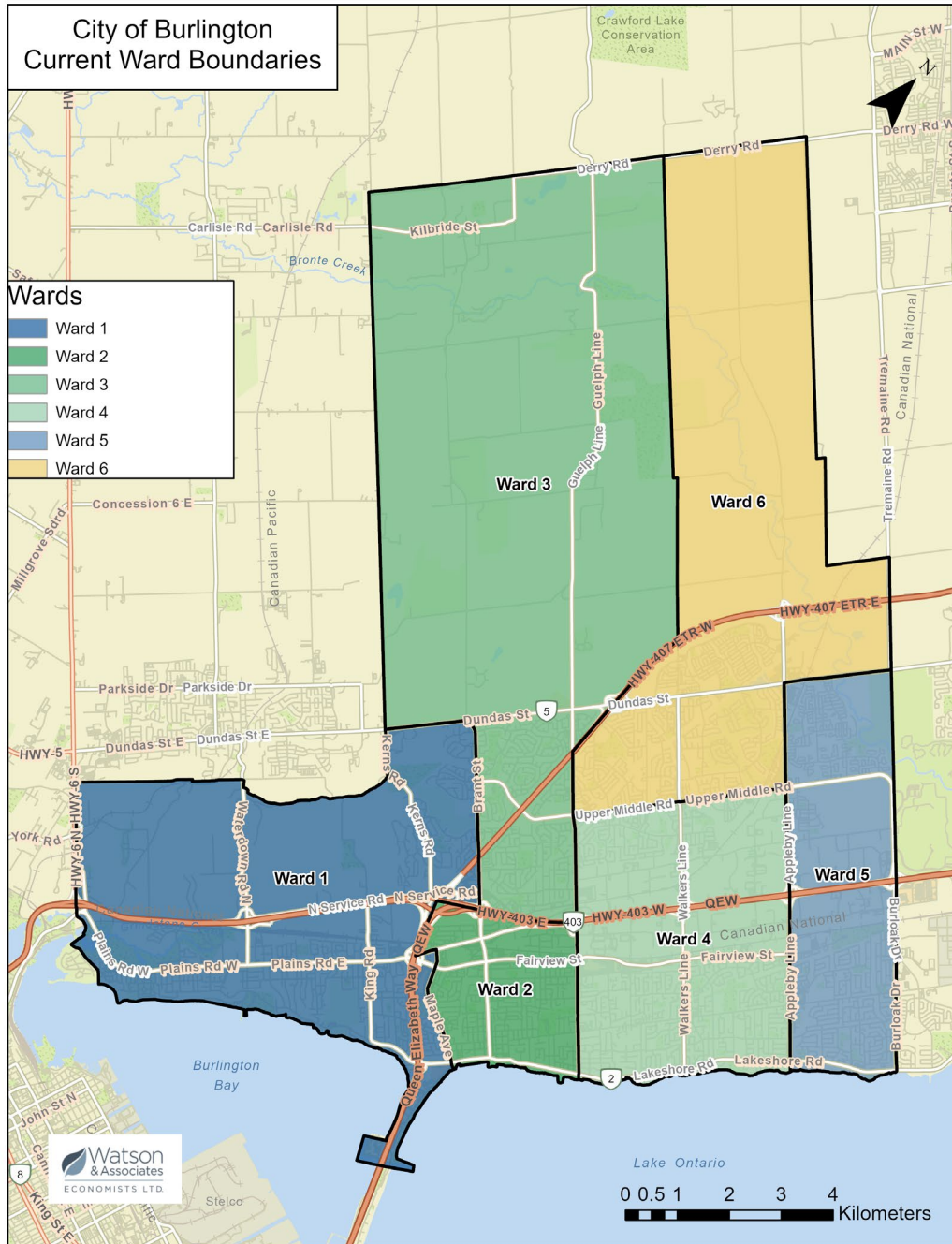
8. Evaluation of the Existing Ward Structure

A preliminary evaluation of the existing ward structure, included in [Discussion Paper E](#), addressed the wards in terms of the guiding principles. The survey, conducted as part of the first phase of public consultation, asked respondents to assess the current wards in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, as outlined in section 7 of this report. These responses add depth to that preliminary assessment.

This section revisits that evaluation, integrating information received during consultation and addressing certain challenges identified in parts of the existing ward system. A map of the existing ward system is presented in Figure 8-1.



Figure 8-1
Existing Ward Structure



In [Discussion Paper E](#), the Consultant Team provided an evaluation of the ward system. It was determined that the current system was successful in respecting communities of interest and, therefore, somewhat successful in providing for effective representation.



[Discussion Paper E](#), however, also determined that current population disparities between the wards posed a challenge in providing for effective representation. As mentioned earlier, three of the wards are outside the acceptable range of variation ($\pm 15\%$), with the difference between the greatest and least populated wards being almost 13,000 residents. These disparities are expected to worsen over time, as the City's population grows, and development around urban transit corridors continues to intensify.

Overall, it was concluded in [Discussion Paper E](#) that a Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review was necessary, primarily due to current and expected projected population disparities.

8.1 Representation by Population

One of the basic premises of representative democracy in Canada is the belief that the geographic areas used to elect a representative should be reasonably balanced with one another in terms of population. This is the concept of representation by population (“rep by pop”) or “one person, one vote” – where the vote of any one person carries roughly the same weight as that of any other person. In some places (such as parts of the United States) this principle of population parity is enforced rigorously – almost to the exclusion of any other factor – so that there is no noticeable variation in the population of electoral units within a particular jurisdiction.

In the Carter decision,^[4] however, the majority of the Supreme Court understood that Canadian electoral law has never been driven by the need to achieve “full parity” in the population of electoral divisions. The Court concluded that some degree of variation from parity (“relative parity”) may be justified and, at times, even necessary “on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation.”

Since there are variations in the densities and character of communities and neighbourhoods across Burlington, the guiding principles make clear that some flexibility in applying the principle of representation by population is acceptable. That is, the concept of “equitable” (that is, fair) representation – not necessarily “equal” representation – is legitimate, although the closer the population of the wards is to parity, the more the entire design can be assessed as successful.

[4] Reference re: Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Saskatchewan) [1991] 2 S.C.R.



As a working premise, a range of variation of 15% above or below the optimal ward population will be considered acceptable in this review. This is a generous range of tolerance from parity, and more restrictive than long-standing parameters for the federal redistribution process. In the absence of any guidance in the *Municipal Act, 2001* or provincial regulations, however, it is a reasonable range of variation for a largely urban municipality like Burlington.

The goal in any case will be to reduce the range of variation among the wards as much as possible. In the Consultant Team's experience, however, developing wards within a narrower range of population variation can make the successful achievement of the other recognized guiding principles more difficult.

The degree of parity in each ward will be determined through the calculation of what will be called an "optimal" ward population in Burlington, a figure computed by dividing the population by the number of wards in the City. The population of a ward will be considered "optimal" when it falls within 5% above or below that number. A ward population would be considered within the acceptable population range if it is between 5% and 15% of the "optimum" population. Populations that are above or below 15% of the "optimal" population are considered outside the acceptable range. It is important to remember that, as the overall population of the City changes, the "optimal" population size of a ward will also change.

8.2 Future Population Trends

As noted above, population growth over the next decade within Burlington will be large but concentrated in and around the M.T.S.A.s: the Aldershot GO Station M.T.S.A., the Burlington GO Station M.T.S.A., and the Appleby GO/Urban Growth Centre M.T.S.A. These M.T.S.A.s are in the present Wards 1, 2, and 5, although growth around the M.T.S.A. in Ward 5 will also likely impact Ward 4. Combined, these planning areas are projected to accommodate between 50,000 and 70,000 more residents by 2051. Additionally, significant growth is also expected in Ward 1 along the Plains Road corridor and in downtown Burlington (Ward 2).

The population growth principle is directed towards maintaining a balance through subsequent municipal elections. It is generally not practical to change electoral boundaries for every election; hence, the wards designed in 2024 will seek to



accommodate anticipated changes in the size and distribution of the population and electors over the next three elections in 2026, 2030, and 2034.

As in the previous population principle, the goal is to design a system that will form wards that are generally in equilibrium to one another as growth takes place. The concept of an optimal ward size (with an associated range of variation) will be used to assess the success of the individual wards and the overall configuration, making use of a population and housing forecast for Burlington and its communities for the 2025 to 2035 period.

8.3 Communities of Interest

The communities of interest principle addresses two perspectives: what is divided by ward boundaries and what is joined together? The premise is that a municipality like Burlington is home to many residential neighbourhoods that may have deep historical roots, but communities can also be social, economic, or religious in nature, depending on the history and composition of the municipality in question.

The first priority is that communities ought not to be divided internally; as a rule, lines are drawn around communities, not through them. Secondly, as far as possible, wards should be cohesive units composed of areas with common interests related to representation, not just contrived arithmetical divisions of the City.

Wards should have a “natural” feel to those who live within them, meaning that they should have established internal communication and transportation linkages and boundaries should be drawn taking existing connections into consideration. This is done to avoid creating wards that combine communities with dissimilar interests and no obvious patterns of interaction.

Burlington has traditionally been composed of several identifiable communities of interest of varying sizes and types. In [Discussion Paper E](#), the Consultant Team identified some 22 identifiable communities. At present, most ward boundaries respect these communities within Burlington. Given the complexity of the entire urban community, it would be unlikely that all the current wards would consist of coherent collections of communities of interest, but the configuration can be considered largely successful in meeting the principle.



8.4 Geographic Representation

Ward boundaries should be easily recognizable and take advantage of natural and built geographic features such as arterial roads, waterways, and railway lines. Often these features already tend to separate communities within the City anyway, which usually explains their historical use as boundary lines between existing wards and communities.

The most significant physical boundary in Burlington is the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW), which effectively bisects the municipality. Not only is this a major transportation corridor, but there also tends to mark cultural and economic distinctions between the populations living on either side. As a result, it is more than just a physical barrier. The QEW, however, crosses through the present Wards 1, 4, and 5, but is used to divide Wards 2 and 3. As a result, it is used inconsistently.

Overall, the present Burlington wards do not consistently adhere to natural boundaries that are identifiable and proper markers.

8.5 Effective Representation

As said in [Discussion Paper D](#), the guiding principles are subject to the overarching principle of “effective representation,” meaning that, to the extent possible, each resident should have comparable access to an elected representative and each councillor should speak on behalf of an equal number of residents. Deviations from population parity can be justified if they contribute to more effective representation.

Effective representation is not based on the performance of incumbent councillors. It is, rather, a concept that is premised on serving the on-going relationship between residents and elected officials, not just on the way the resident is “counted” on election day, although that is an important component of a fair system of representation. The expectation should be that the wards support the capacity of councillors to represent their constituents, rather than hinder councillors performing those responsibilities. Are the individual wards plausible and coherent units of representation? Are they drawn in such a way that representatives can readily play the role expected of them? Do they provide equitable (that is, fair) access to councillors for all residents of the municipality?

On the whole, Burlington’s present wards come close to achieving effective representation in 2024. Primarily, population imbalances undermine the achievement of



this principle over the next decade and in a few cases have an impact on the capacity of some councillors to serve residents today.

It is possible to meet all these shortcomings by redividing the municipality to provide better, more effective representation through the application of the entire set of guiding principles, as will be demonstrated below.

[Discussion Paper D](#) and this report provide an initial evaluation of the current ward system, and the analysis has revealed aspects that fall short in some regard to meet the ward boundary principles set out for the C.C.W.B.R. The Consultant Team has since taken the feedback received through the various engagement activities and again, for the most part, members of the public have confirmed many of the initial perceptions. Overall, the present wards constitute a plausible system for the 2026 municipal election, but the same cannot be said about its capacity in the future as evaluated in Figure 8-2.



Figure 8-2
City of Burlington
Present Burlington Ward Configuration Evaluation Summary

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle?	Comment
Representation by Population	No	Three wards are outside the acceptable range of variation; the difference between the largest and smallest is 12,944 residents.
Future Population Trends	No	The population disparity between the present wards will likely increase as development in and around urban transit corridors intensifies.
Communities of Interest	Largely Successful	Current ward boundaries comfortably contain single, identifiable communities of interest, although much of the rural population of the City is spread out through three wards.
Geographic Representation	Largely Successful	The most significant physical barrier (the QEW) is used inconsistently.
Effective Representation	Partially Successful	Effective representation is hindered by uneven population distribution in 2024 that is expected to worsen over time.

The degree to which each guiding principle is satisfied is ranked as “**Yes**” (fully satisfied), “**Largely Successful**,” “**Partially Successful**,” or “**No**” (not satisfied).

Note: Figure 8-2 has been revised to include the evaluation of geographic representation as presented in [Discussion Paper E](#).

In addition to evaluating the current wards and considering alternative designs, part of the Consultant Team’s mandate concerns the composition of council. Questions about the size and composition of council were put to the public in the first phase of consultation and the general findings are addressed below. The issue of composition, however, is contingent upon two representation principles previously adopted by Council (noted above) that have been interpreted to mean that all councillors serve on



both Halton Regional Council and the City of Burlington Council, and, by extension, there can only be six wards in the City.

9. Alternative Council Composition Configurations

The evaluation of the current ward system in Burlington suggests that there are some identifiable shortcomings when evaluated against the guiding principles for this C.C.W.B.R. The Consultant Team concludes that it is worthwhile to examine alternative options and configurations of the existing ward system. However, as referenced in the earlier section, the Consultant Team was also tasked with a review of current council size (composition) and such an analysis has a direct impact on determining any preliminary options for new ward configurations.

Two main factors show a need to explore changes to composition. The first is population growth. Since the current composition was adopted, the City has grown by more than 50,000 residents. A natural question stemming from this growth is whether a council of seven members provides the capacity to represent a community of this size. In [Discussion Paper B](#), the Consultant Team compared the size of Burlington's Council to other similarly sized municipalities (Figure A). Burlington Council was much smaller than all other municipalities, including those closest in size – Richmond Hill and Oshawa. Burlington Council is also the smallest in Halton Region. Oakville (14 councillors), Milton (eight councillors), and Halton Hills (10 councillors) all have larger councils. Increasing the size of council would not make Burlington an outlier among similarly sized municipalities. In fact, it would do the opposite and make it more aligned in terms of composition.

The second factor is the workload associated with serving as an elected representative. Each member of council sits on several local agencies, boards, and commissions. They take part in committee, council, and community meetings. They field requests for service and information from residents and play an active role in the civic life of their wards. Each member of Burlington Council also serves as a member of council of the Regional Municipality of Halton, meaning that they play an active role in governing two municipalities. At the Region, they also have a host of responsibilities related to committee and council work. Each local councillor now also serves as a deputy mayor with a specific portfolio of policy responsibilities. One member also serves as the ceremonial deputy mayor for emergencies and ceremonial duties on a rotating basis. This is a taxing load, again begging the question about whether there are enough



members around the council table to adequately fulfill their various responsibilities and meet community expectations. We repeat a point made earlier: this not a judgement of the performance of incumbent members of Council, but we believe it is reasonable to ask whether the expectations of serving effectively as an elected official in Burlington are hampered by the small number of people serving on the City's Council.

As mentioned above, the representation principles adopted by a previous Council concerning local and regional representation appear to have limited the exploration of alternative composition arrangements. Again, those principles made clear two aspects about the City's representation structure: 1) the mayor should sit as one of the City's representatives on Regional Council, and 2) the City's remaining representatives on Regional Council should also sit on local Council and be elected in wards. Since the City of Burlington cannot independently adjust the number of representatives it is given on Regional Council, these representation principles have been interpreted to mean that the composition of the local council is fixed and cannot be adjusted. The language of electing "one alderman" per ward (by extension, perhaps best considered a third principle) has led to the impression that representation locally is fixed at seven members.

Under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, section 217, a local municipality has the authority to change the composition of its council as long as there is "a minimum of five members, one of whom shall be the head of council." On this basis, members of the current Council are not bound by the representation principles adopted by an earlier council. However, before the Consultant Team can consider changes to composition, direction must come from Council on how to proceed. Below, the Consultant Team outlines the decisions (and subsequent implications) available to Council.



10. Next Steps

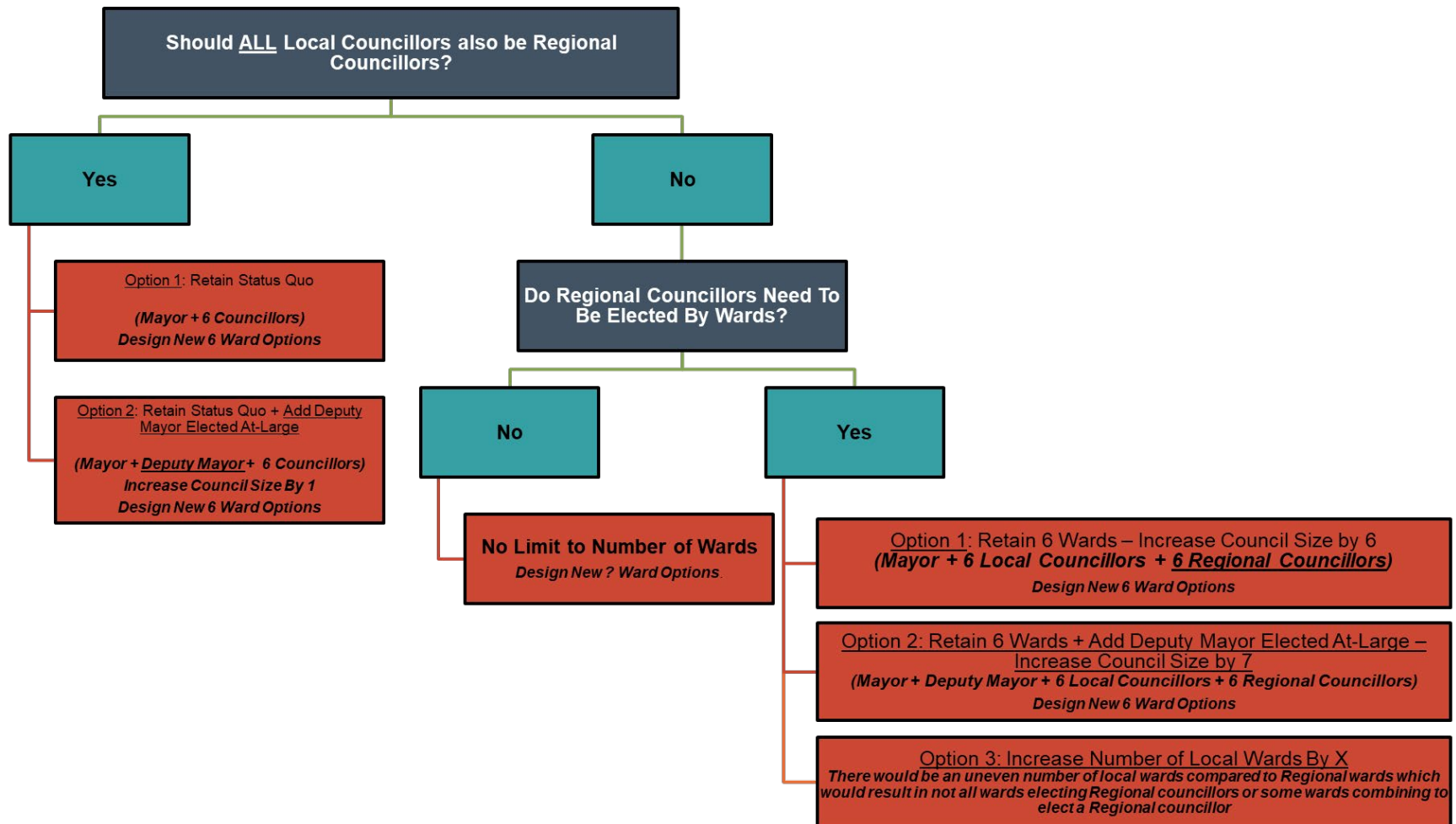
Before the Consultant Team can develop ward configurations for 2026 and beyond in Burlington, Council is requested to consider **two** key questions:

1. Should **all** City councillors also serve on Regional Council?
2. If Regional councillors do **not** have to be local councillors, should Regional councillors still be elected by ward?

A flow chart presented in Figure 10-1 outlines the different configurations of council based on the questions presented above.



Figure 10--1
Council Composition Flow Chart





10.1 Should All Local Councillors also be Regional Councillors?

Decision Point 10.1a: Yes, All Local Councillors Should also be Regional Councillors

The two representation principles adopted by Council in 1996 have been interpreted as requiring that all local councillors should also serve on Regional Council. If Council believes that these principles should remain in place, there are two options available for the Consultant Team.

The first would be to keep the existing composition (mayor and six councillors elected by ward who all also sit on Regional Council). As described above, the existing boundaries for six wards present challenges to effective representation in the City of Burlington. In this scenario, the Consultant Team would design new ward boundaries, based upon the guiding principles, to strengthen the existing system but would not propose new composition configurations (i.e., options presenting more than six wards would not be considered). As already discussed, this configuration has a number of drawbacks related to representation and workload.

A second option available under this scenario would be to increase council size by one representative using the authority granted under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, section 217 through adding a single deputy mayor elected at-large, who would not serve on Regional Council. There are no specific references in the Ontario *Municipal Act, 2001* to the office of the deputy mayor. As described in [Discussion Paper C](#), there is a great degree of variation across Ontario with regard to the selection method and assigned duties and responsibilities of a deputy mayor, meaning that direct election is an option available to Council. With this change, the number of wards would not change. Voters in Burlington would still elect six councillors from six wards and a mayor at-large. Each of these individuals would also serve on Regional Council.

In the estimation of the Consultant Team, adding an elected deputy mayor, who would not be elected by ward and would not sit on Regional Council would not violate the two principles adopted by Council concerning the City's representation in 1996. Through this pathway, Council could increase its size by one member and still endorse the concept that all Regional councillors should also be local councillors. The benefit would be the addition of an elected official whose sole responsibilities are addressed to the City and its governance rather than dividing time and energy to governing two



municipalities. It would also alleviate some responsibilities from councillors who currently split deputy mayor responsibilities as well as providing some relief to the mayor.

Decision Point 10.1b: No, All Local Councillors do not Necessarily Need to also be Regional Councillors

Council may also decide that all local councillors do not necessarily need to also be Regional councillors, thereby setting aside the two principles endorsed by the previous Council in 1996. This would create a wider array of composition options. By selecting this option and endorsing the idea that all councillors do not necessarily need to serve also on Regional council, it would not necessarily endorse a composition change. Rather, it would allow the Consultant Team to explore the implications of a change to composition during this review. The status quo would still be a choice available to Council, even if the two principles addressed above are no longer applied.

If Council were to endorse this idea, the Consultant Team would require clarification on a further question: If Regional councillors do not have to be local councillors, should Regional councillors still be elected by ward?

10.2 If Regional Councillors do not have to be City Councillors, Should Regional Councillors Still be Elected by Wards?

The two principles endorsed by Council in 1996 describe a composition structure where “there be one Alderman per ward in the City of Burlington” and that “the six members of Regional Council other than the mayor shall be elected by ward.” The Consultant Team requires Council direction on whether this arrangement should continue.

Decision Point 10.2a: Yes, Regional Councillors Need to be Elected by Ward

If Council were to decide that those who serve on Regional Council need to be elected by ward, three options become available to explore by the Consultant Team. The first option would keep the current six-ward model (re-designing the wards to better adhere to the guiding principles) but have each ward elect both a local and Regional councillor. This option may be familiar to residents of Burlington, since it is the practice in neighbouring Oakville. This would create a council of thirteen members: the mayor,



elected at-large, six local ward councillors who would serve only on City Council and six Regional councillors, who would serve on both City and Regional Council.

The second option would incorporate an elected deputy mayor into the system described above. This would create a 14-member Council: the mayor, elected at-large, who would serve on Regional Council; a deputy mayor, elected at-large, who would not serve on Regional Council; six local ward councillors who would serve only on local Council; and six Regional councillors who would serve on both local and Regional Council.

The third option would keep the seven members who serve on Regional Council (the mayor and six local and Regional councillors) but include an undetermined number of local councillors. Under the first option, voters would select two representatives per ward (one local and one Regional). Under this model, Council could decide how many local wards to have, creating an uneven number that would result in Regional councillors being elected in certain wards but not others. For instance, voters could select local councillors from nine wards, but only six of those wards would elect Regional councillors as well. Alternatively, the six Regional councillors could be selected from some combination of local wards. Clearly a system that is easy to understand would be the preference, but the actual number of wards that successfully meet the guiding principles would enter the picture.

Decision Point 10.2b: No, Regional Councillors Do Not Necessarily Need to be Elected by Ward

If Council decides that Regional councillors do not necessarily need to be elected by ward, a number of possible configurations are available. The Consultant Team could design any number of ward configurations, including those that would have Regional councillors elected at-large.

10.3 Further Considerations

The evaluations presented herein are preliminary; they reflect the application of the core principles for this review to the distribution of population and communities within Burlington. The focus for Council from this report should be squarely on the continued application of the representation principles described in section 9 of this report. This decision-making and the associated actions by the Consultant Team are outlined below.



Question	Decision	Next Steps
<p><i>Should All Local Councillors Also Be Regional Councillors?</i></p>	Yes	<p>The Consultant Team will explore alternative ward designs using six wards that adhere to the guiding principles. These alternative designs, including the possibility of directly electing the deputy mayor, will be put to the public during the second phase of consultation.</p>
	No	<p>Council will need to decide whether Regional councillors need to be elected by wards. Subsequent action by the Consultant Team will depend on Council direction.</p>
<p><i>Do Regional Councillors Need to be Elected by Wards?</i></p>	No	<p>The Consultant Team will study the composition of council, designing new wards based upon assessment of the optimal number of councillors for Burlington, including the design of how to elect Regional councillors.</p>
	Yes	<p>The Consultant Team will explore three options. The first keeps six wards, with voters in each ward electing a Regional and local councillor for a total of 13 members of council (including the mayor). The second has the same composition but introduces an elected deputy mayor. The third explores an increase of wards, with Regional councillors being elected in some but not all or elected through a combination of wards.</p>

The Consultant Team will proceed based on Council direction and consult broadly with the public in the second phase of engagement within the parameters described above. Receiving clarity on Council’s stance on the representation principles described in this report will produce a more meaningful engagement experience for residents of



Burlington by defining the parameters of composition options. This will allow the public to deliberate and provide insight on plausible alternatives to the current composition and ward system. This insight will be crucial to inform the next stage of this review.

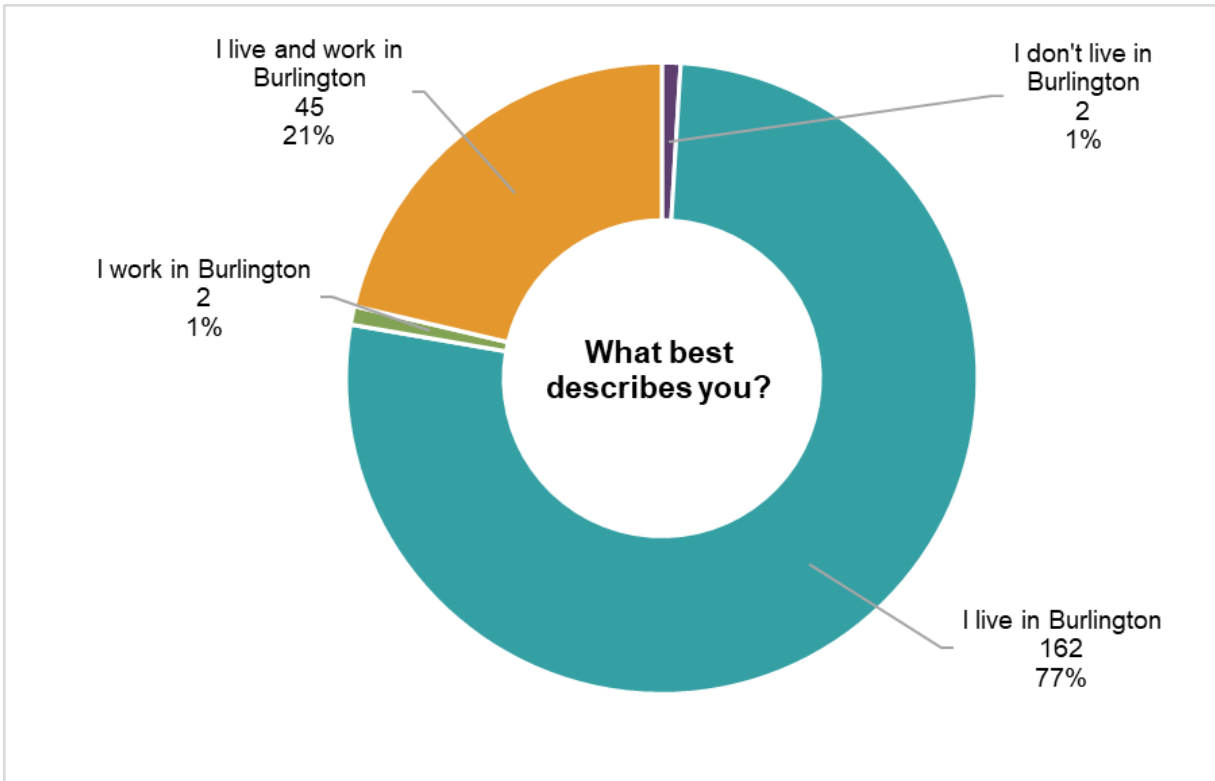
It should be noted, by setting aside the representation principles endorsed by the previous Council in 1996, the current Council is not necessarily approving a change in composition. Instead, Council is merely providing authority to *explore* a change in composition. The status quo remains an option available to Council throughout the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review project.

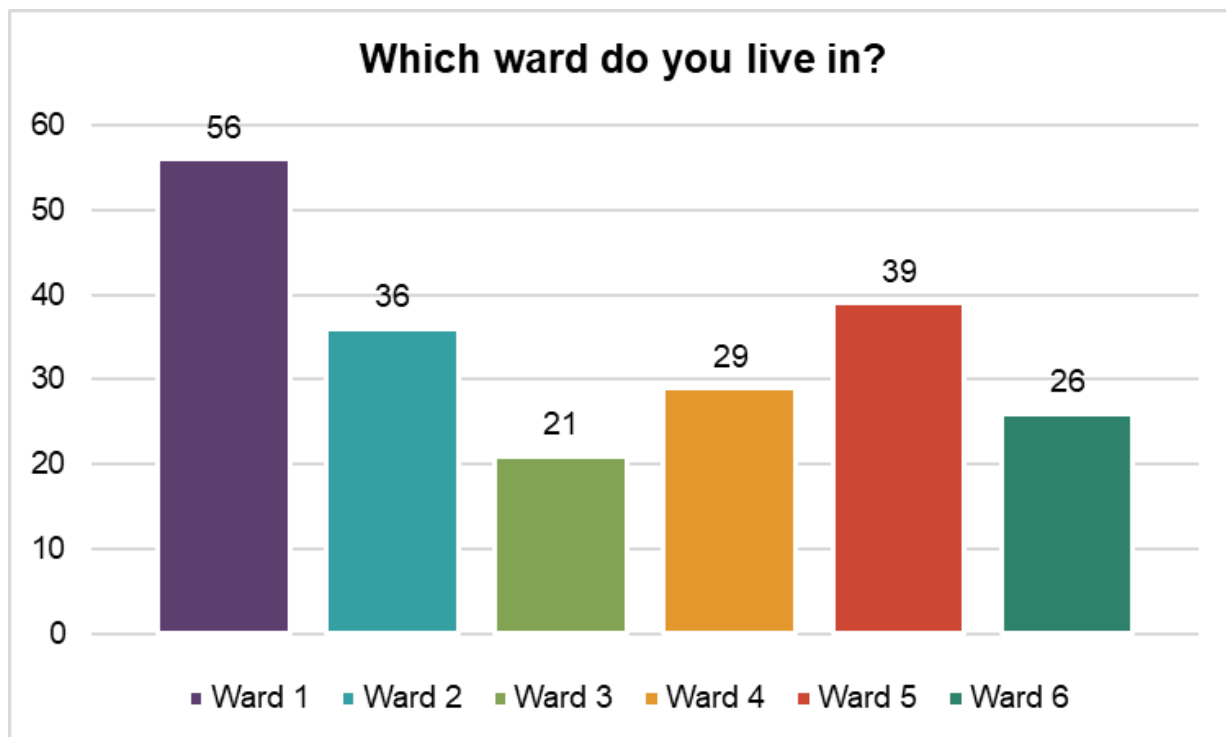
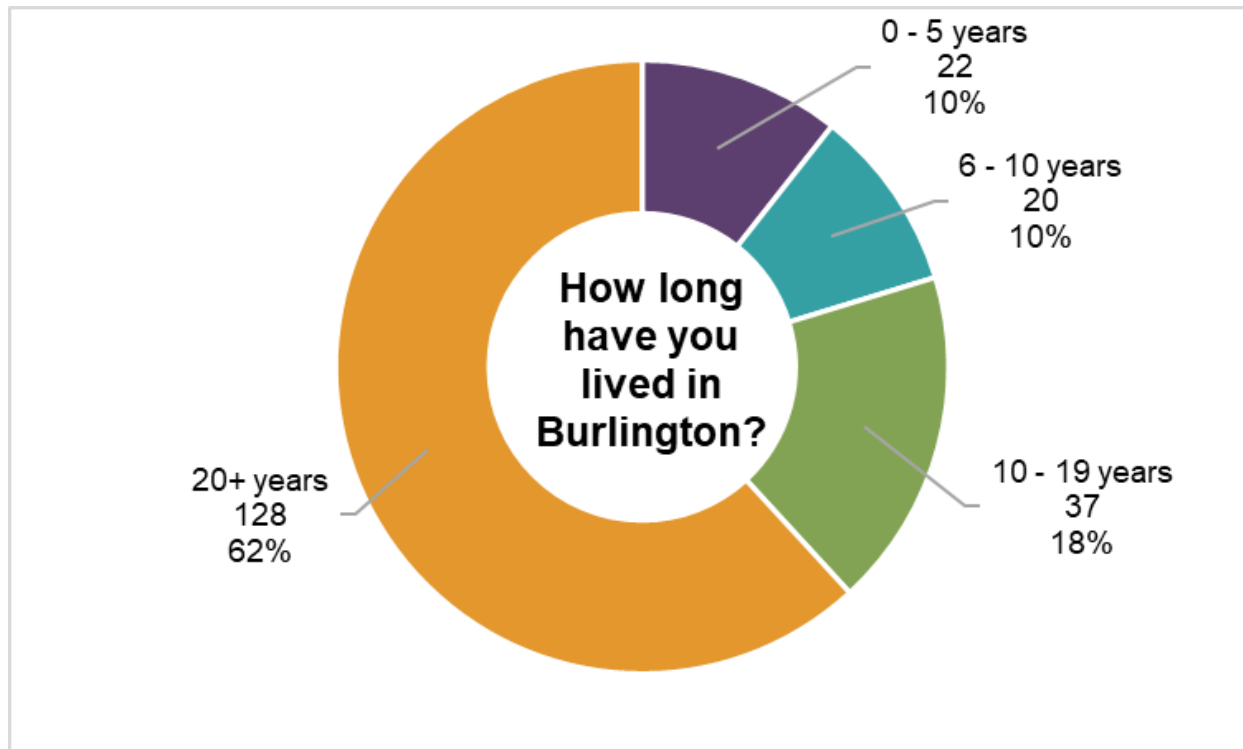
Furthermore, it is acknowledged that a change in the composition of council will require a series of considerations that are beyond the scope of this review and that can be addressed on completion of this review. Included in these considerations are compensation arrangements for additional councillors, staffing in support of councillors, and changes to office space at City Hall and even the council chamber itself. Contextualized within the City of Burlington's overall yearly budget, these costs may not represent a major expense and could be considered by some to be a justifiable price to pay for an enhanced system of representation in Burlington. However, careful consideration of costs associated with implications of decisions made from the review is prudent. Cost considerations will be further explored by city staff when final options are presented to Council for consideration in phase 2.



Appendix A

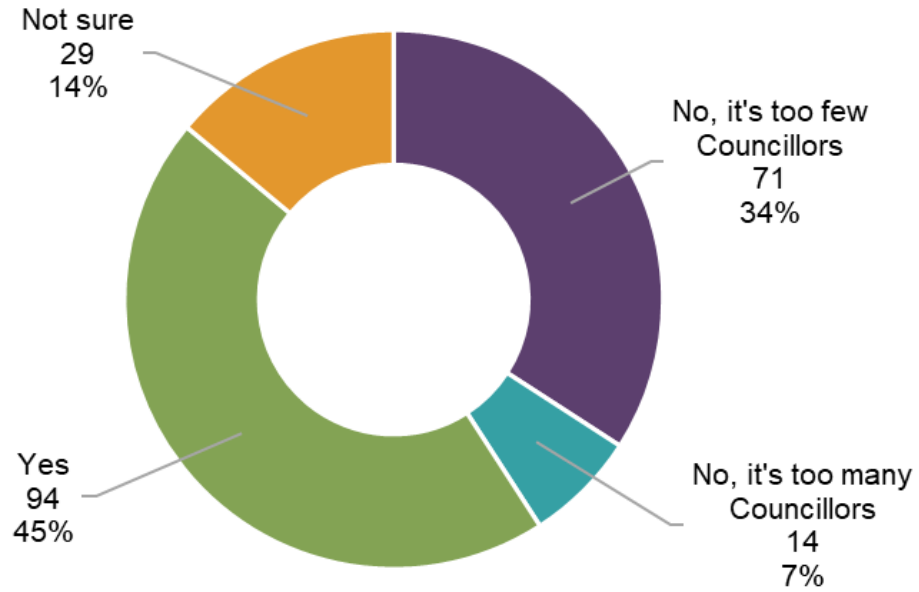
Survey Results (Phase 1)





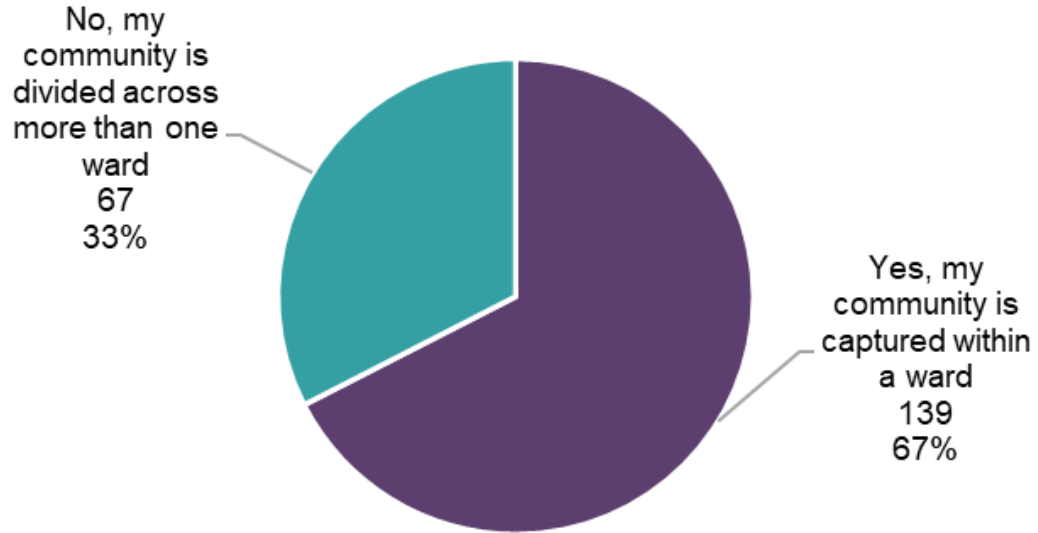


With Councillors representing approximately 31,000 constituents per ward, do you feel a six-ward system with six Councillors and one Mayor is the appropriate number?

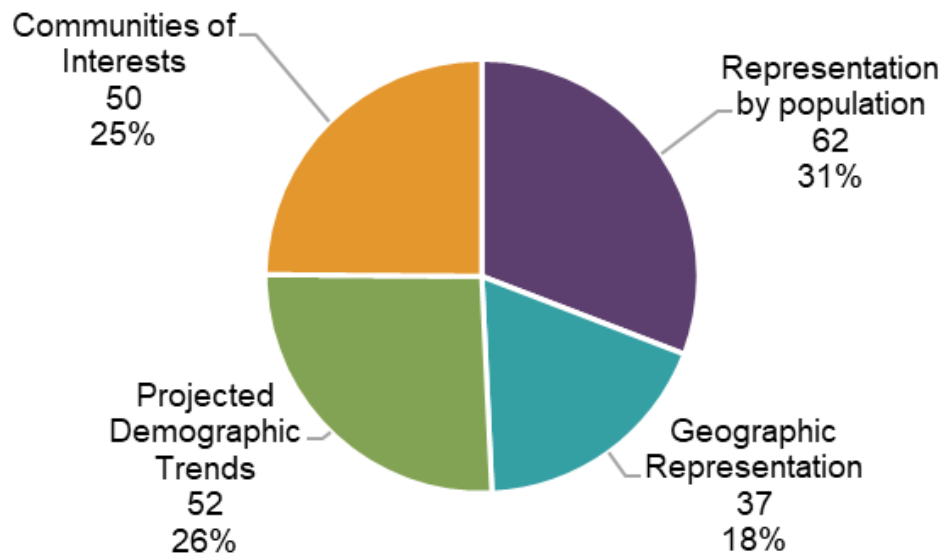




Do the boundaries of the ward you live in capture all of your community?



Please indicate the ONE guiding principle you believe should be given the greatest priority to ensure effective voter representation.





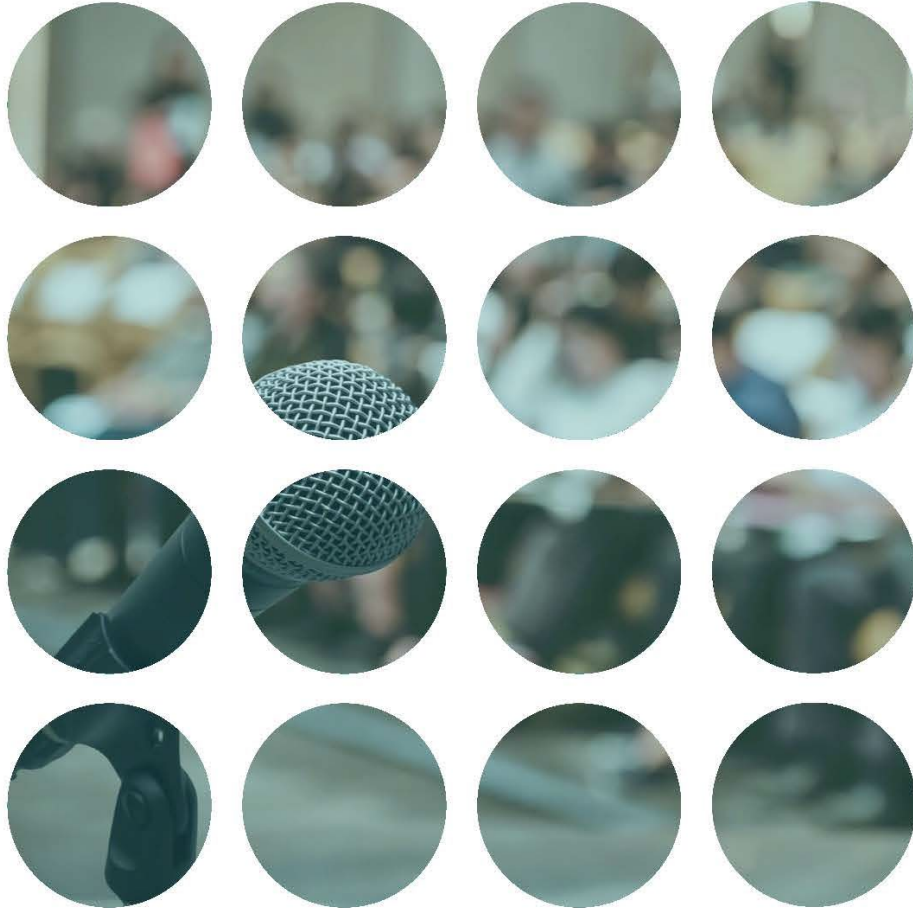
Appendix B

Public Consultation



City of Burlington
Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review
Public Engagement Sessions Round 1

October 2024



Dr. Robert Williams

Public Affairs Consultant
Municipal Electoral Systems Expert

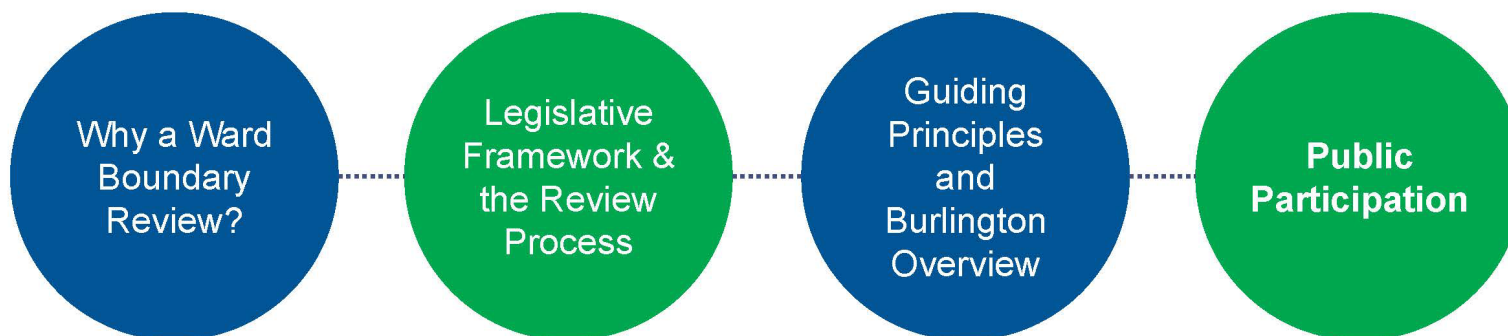
Dr. Zac Spicer

Public Affairs Consultant
Municipal Electoral Systems Expert

Introduction



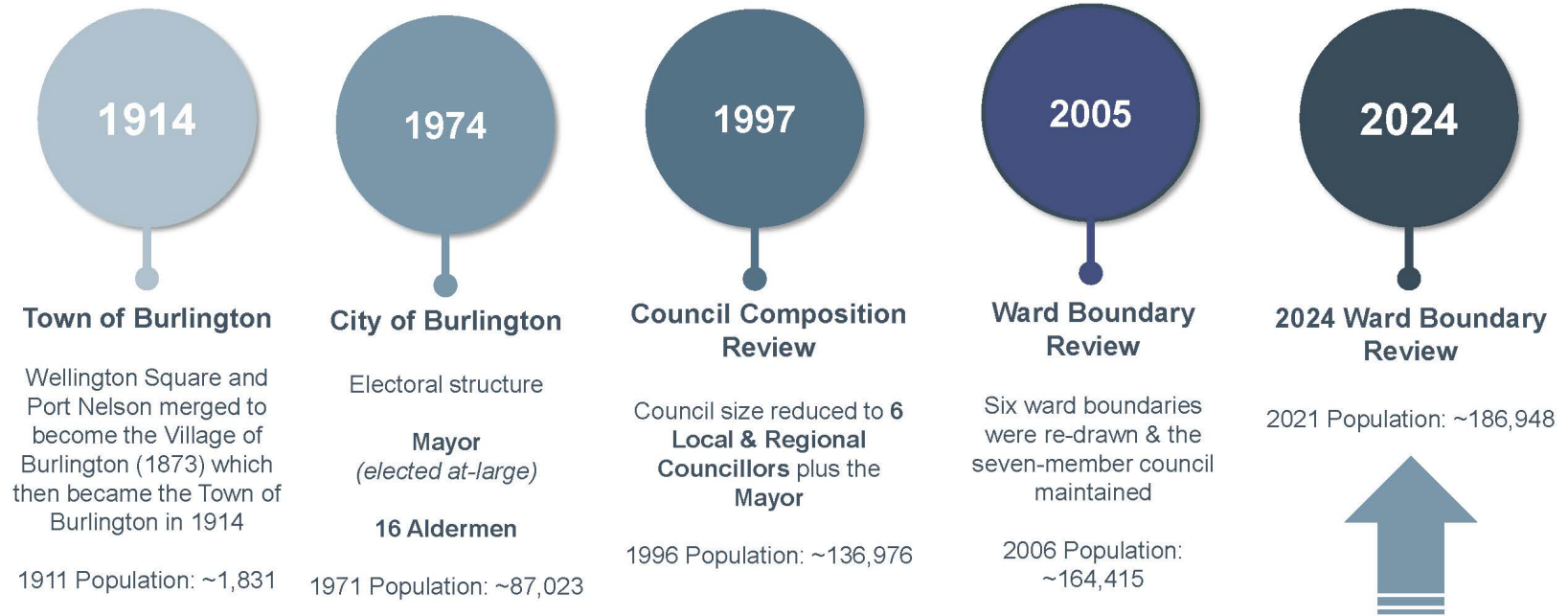
What Will Be Covered At This Open House?



<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>

2

History



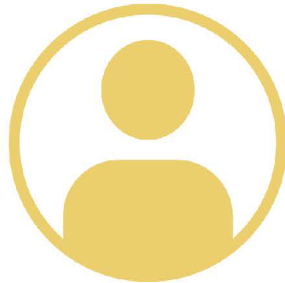
<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>

Composition of Council

7-Member Council



Mayor



1 Councillor for Each Ward (x6)



The Mayor is elected at-large.

6 Councillors are elected, each in a separate ward. All Councillors serve on Burlington City Council and Halton Regional Council.

<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>

Legislative Framework



Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001* authorizes a local municipality to:

- determine the size of the Council
- determine how Council (other than the Mayor) will be elected
- “divide or re-divide the municipality into wards or dissolve the existing wards”

No stipulated schedule, standardized process or established criteria exist for electoral reviews in Ontario

- Each municipality must set its own terms, parameters, guiding principles, etc.
- A review is typically framed by established procedures and principles applied in several Ontario municipalities (and by the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT)) and judicial rulings on representation

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Summary

Composition of Council



- The minimum size for the council of a local municipality in Ontario is five, “one of whom shall be the head of council”
- No clear principles at play, no “standards” and no formulas to apply in determining the appropriate size of Council
- City of Burlington council is composed of 7 members, 2 above the minimum
- The composition of local councils in Ontario varies widely.

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Context

Council Size across Halton Region



Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq.km)	Council Members	Avg. Population per Member	By Ward or At-Large
Burlington	186,948	187.71	7 Total Members Mayor 6 Local & Regional Councillors	26,707	By Ward
Halton Hills	62,951	276.81	11 Total Members Mayor 8 Local Councillors 2 Regional Councillors	4,905	By Ward
Milton	132,979	363.83	9 Total Members Mayor 4 Local Councillors 4 Regional Councillors	14,775	By Ward
Oakville	213,759	138.94	15 Total Members Mayor 7 Local Councillors 7 Regional Councillors	14,251	By Ward
Average	149,159	241.82	11	15,159	-

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7

Focus On Burlington

Composition of Council



- Burlington's City Council is unique in Ontario:
 - the six councillors (plus the Mayor) constitute the entire governing body for the City;
 - the six councillors (plus the Mayor) are all members of the governing body of a second municipality (the Region of Halton); and
 - the Mayor has assigned responsibilities to all six councillors to serve as a Deputy Mayor for particular "portfolios"
 - Council members also serve on a number of local and regional agencies, boards and commissions.






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8

Guiding Principles to Design Wards

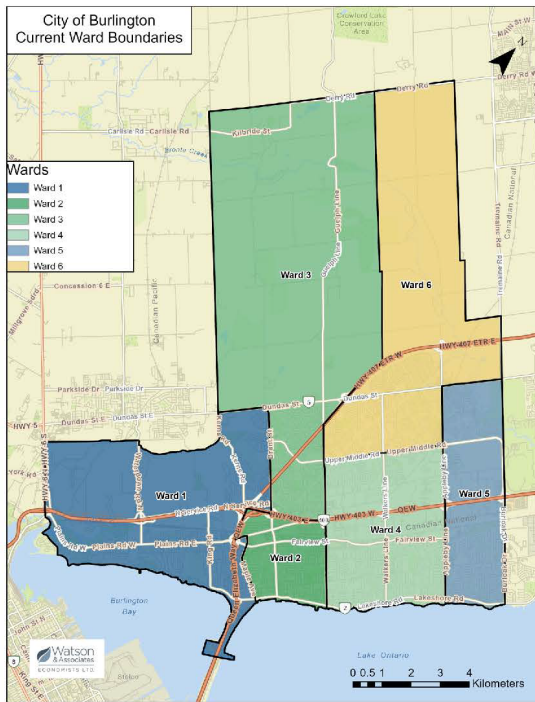


A **ward-based** electoral system should address these core principles/guidelines:

-  **REPRESENTATION BY POPULATION**
Efforts should be made to ensure that wards have reasonably equal populations. Ward population sizes need to be balanced to achieve effective representation. Population variance should strive to be no greater than 15%, but an accepted variance can be as high as 25%.
 -  **PROJECTED DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**
Revised ward boundaries should accommodate projected growth patterns for the next 3-4 election cycles.
 -  **GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION**
Revised ward boundaries should follow Burlington's natural boundaries, road allowances and physical features where feasible.
 -  **COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST**
Efforts should be made to avoid splitting neighbourhoods or communities of interest into different wards, considering community history, minority representation, and geography when generating ward boundary options.
-  **ENSURING EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION**
The four articulated principles contribute to achieving the over-arching principle of effective representation.

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Existing Ward System



2021 Population by Ward






Ward	Area (SqKm)	2021		
		Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range
Ward 1	35.4	28,542	0.92	O-
Ward 2	8.2	26,785	0.86	O-
Ward 3	65.9	23,692	0.76	OR-
Ward 4	21.7	36,441	1.17	OR+
Ward 5	15.8	36,049	1.16	OR+
Ward 6	40.7	35,439	1.14	O+
Total/Average	187.7	186,948	31,158	

○	±5% of the Optimal (Average) Population
○-	±5%-15% of the Optimal (Average) Population
OR-	>±15% of the Optimal (Average) Population

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Objectives of the Review



-  Develop a clear understanding of the present ward system, including its origins and operations as a system of representation;
-  Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the present ward system on the basis of identified guiding principles;
-  Conduct an appropriate consultation process to ensure community support for the review and its outcome;
-  Identify plausible modifications to the present council and ward structure; and
-  Deliver a report that will set out recommendations to ensure effective and equitable electoral arrangements for the City of Burlington, based on the principles identified.

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11

A Public Consultation Process



A municipal electoral system should be subject to a public consultation process to ensure the legitimacy of the recommendations placed before Council

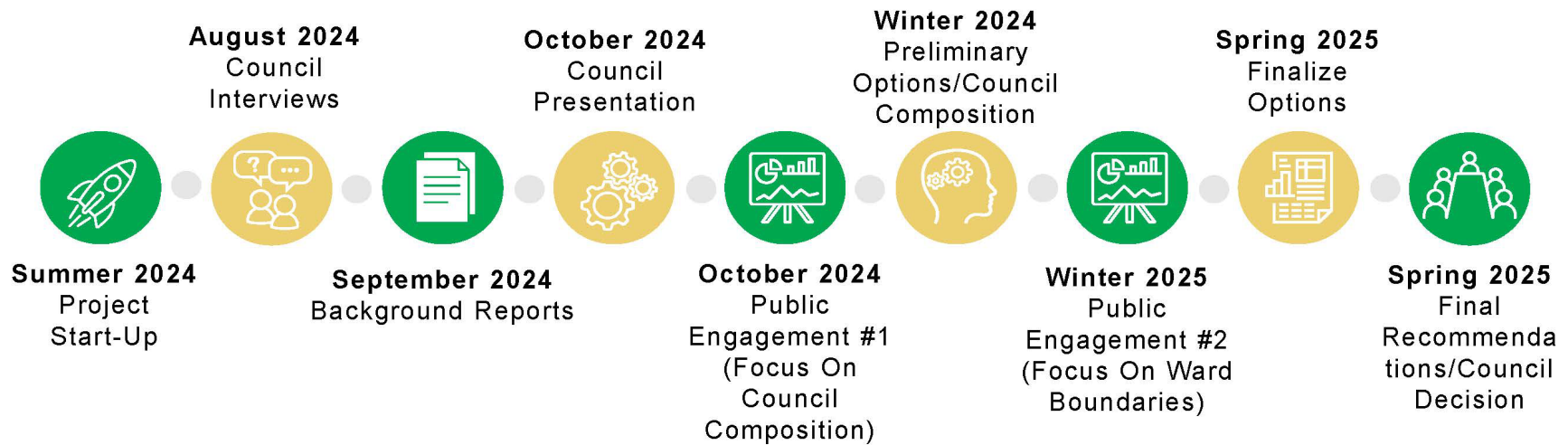
Public engagement activities will be conducted aimed at both informing residents about the review and gathering informed evaluations about the existing system and (later) alternative designs. Several outlets have been designed for residents to participate in the review process

- ✓ Online & Print Engagement (website, social media, etc.)
- ✓ Survey
- ✓ In-Person & Virtual Open House Sessions
- ✓ Public Feedback Analysis
- ✓ Reporting

<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>

12

Review Process



<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>

Your Contribution to This Review

- Read the materials on the City of Burlington's Get Involved project page to better understand the issues under consideration
- Be willing to ask questions at the Open Houses and through the City's website
- Complete the survey on the website:

<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview/surveys/council-composition-and-ward-boundary-review-survey1>

<https://www.getinvolvedburlington.ca/boundaryreview>



