



SUBJECT: Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review interim report

TO: Committee of the Whole

FROM: Legal and Legislative Services

Report Number: CL-27-24

Wards Affected: all

Date to Committee: December 2, 2024

Date to Council: December 10, 2024

Recommendation:

Provide direction to the Consultant Team regarding the following aspects of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review contained in legislative services department report CL-27-24:

1. Should all local councillors also be regional councillors; and if not,
2. Should regional councillors be elected by wards?

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Designing and delivering complete communities
- Providing the best services and experiences
- Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
- Driving organizational performance

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this cover report is to provide a summary of considerations laid out in the 2024 Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review Interim Report as submitted by the consultant, Watson & Associates Economists Ltd (Attached as Appendix A), and to seek direction from Council that will guide the development of viable options for consideration in Phase 2 of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary review.

Background and Discussion:

The City of Burlington retained Watson & Economists Ltd, Dr. Robert J. Williams, and Dr. Zachary Spicer, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review (CCWBR). The purpose of the project is to evaluate the current electoral structure and ward boundaries, and to prepare Council to decide whether to maintain current council composition and ward boundaries, or to make changes.

The detailed interim consultant report before Council, while providing summaries of work completed to date, evaluation of the current electoral structure, as well as information and feedback gathered through phase 1 public engagement, seeks direction on representation principles that will allow the Consultant Team to develop viable composition and ward boundary options for Council consideration in Phase 2 of the review.

Strategy/process/risk

The purpose of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review is to evaluate current electoral structure and provide Council with the necessary information to decide whether to retain the current council composition and ward boundaries or to implement change, with the overarching goal of ensuring effective representation for the next three electoral cycles. Guiding this review is a set of principles that taken together contribute to achieving the goal of effective representation:

- Representation by population principle which considers balancing current population distribution between wards;
- Future population trends principle which considers balancing future population distribution between wards based on growth projections;
- Communities of interest principle which considers respecting established communities and neighbourhoods; and
- Geographic representation principle which considers geographical features and natural and infrastructure boundaries.

To date, work completed for the review includes research and data compilation, interviews, presentations and meetings with council members and municipal staff, and public consultation on the existing council composition and ward structure. The interim consultant report provides details on Burlington's existing electoral structure, existing ward structure as well as population considerations. It provides an in-depth analysis how the current ward structure meets the guiding principles that contribute to the overarching goal of effective representation. The report also details the feedback received through the public consultation process in phase 1 of the project.

The current electoral structure in Burlington consists of seven members: the mayor as the head of council, elected at large, with six councillors, each representing one ward. In 1996, when Burlington's population was approximately 139,000, in response to a composition change in Halton Region Council, Burlington City Council adopted a resolution that included two principles regarding representation (See Appendix B Staff Report CL58/96 Regional Restructuring):

- 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 also provided "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". Since the adoption of this resolution, the composition of Burlington council has remained unchanged. During the last ward boundary review in 2005 for the 2006 election, council composition was not considered, and the representation principles were maintained. Burlington's population at the time of the last review was approximately 160,000 and has grown to approximately 186,948 in 2021 according to the Census data.

According to the Consultant team, the initial evaluation of the current system in Burlington indicates that exploring alternative options of the existing electoral structure is warranted. To ensure that alternative options brought forward for Council decision in Phase 2 of the review are viable and focused, staff and the Consultant team are seeking direction on representation principles that will frame the composition and ward boundary options. Two fundamental questions must be considered:

1. Should all local councillors also be regional councillors; and if not,
2. Should regional councillors need to be elected by wards.

Should Council decide that all local councillors should also be regional councillors, the consultant team will be able to provide two alternative options for consideration. The first option will explore maintaining current council composition of seven members while

redesigning the existing ward boundaries. The second option will explore an increase in council size by 1 and redesigning the six existing ward boundaries. These two options will be explored in detail and presented to the public for feedback and to Council for a final decision in phase 2 of the review.

Should Council decide that all local councillors *do not* also have to be regional councillors, the second question to consider is whether regional councillors need to be elected by wards. Depending on the answer to the second question, a number of options can be developed. Should Council decide that regional councillors do need to be elected by ward, the Consultant team will bring forward three options for consideration. The first option would maintain the six ward model, but each ward would elect both a local and a regional councillor, essentially doubling the size of council. The second option would incorporate the model as described above, with the addition of an elected deputy mayor, increasing the size of council by 7 members. The third option would maintain seven members who serve on regional council and add an undetermined number of local councillors. This option would allow Council to determine how many local wards should be designed, however, it would mean that local wards would not necessarily align with regional wards, adding a complexity to the electoral structure in Burlington.

Should council decide that all local councillors do not have to be regional councillors, and regional councillors do not have to be elected in wards, the Consultant team will be able to provide a number of possible ward configurations that would see regional councillors elected at large. A detailed decision tree of the potential options is provided as a table in the consultant interim report.

It is important to note that the option to maintain current council composition while redesigning existing ward boundaries is one of the viable options that will be brought forward to Council in Phase 2, regardless of the answer to the first fundamental question posed above. Considering these questions and determining the representation principles does not mean that Council endorses a change in composition at this time, but simply confirms a direction to explore alternative options.

Financial Matters:

Whereas the sought direction of Council with respect to representation principles does not have direct financial implications at this time, potential costs will be considered when the alternative electoral structure options are brought forward in phase 2 of the project. The considerations will include councillor remuneration, council staff support and salaries as well as office space impacts and renovations to Council chambers, should the size of council increase. Cost considerations will be explored in further detail when alternative options are presented to council in phase 2. This analysis will also include

potential options and costs for council staff support, should council composition remain status quo.

Total Financial Impact

Total financial impact of each option will be included when alternative electoral structures are brought forward for council consideration in phase 2 of the project.

Source of Funding

Not applicable.

Other Resource Impacts

Not applicable.

Climate Implications:

Not applicable.

Engagement Matters:

Engagement is a critical component of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review. Engagement for this project is divided into 2 phases. Engagement in phase 1 both informed residents of the key factors considered in the review as well as gathered feedback on the existing council composition and ward structure. Phase 1 Engagement for Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review Memo included in the [Council Information Package](#) dated November 1, 2024 provides significant detail on tactics used.

In September 2024, the Consultant Team along with City staff participated in the annual Food for Feedback community engagement event as the soft launch of the public consultation component of the review. The team interacted with over 100 residents to provide information about the review and to gather initial feedback on the guiding principles for the review. In October, the Consultant team lead six in-person information and engagement sessions and one virtual public information session. A presentation to Council was also conducted in October to provide information on the review. The Consultant team and City Staff also presented information to the Burlington Student Youth Council to encourage future voters to participate in the review process.

In addition to the in-person and virtual public engagement sessions, an online survey was used to gather feedback from the residents on existing council composition and ward structure and the guiding principles and their prioritization in the development of

alternative composition and ward boundary designs. 216 completed surveys were submitted by residents, giving high-level insight into the perspectives of Burlington's residents. The feedback gathered through the in-person and virtual sessions as well as the survey offered valuable information for the review process. The Consultant team has indicated that the engagement in Burlington for phase 1 was not unlike what they have experienced in other municipalities. In fact, thanks to events such as Food for Feedback, they have indicated that engagement for phase 1 in Burlington was actually more robust.

Engagement in phase 2 of the project will collect feedback on the proposed alternative options for the City's electoral structures. Broadly, phase 2 engagement will once again include in-person as well as virtual opportunities to provide feedback. In-person sessions will be held in each ward, and a number of promotional tactics will be used to encourage participation. The Consultant team will also consult the newly established Community Panel to ensure a broad spectrum of views are considered. Feedback gathered in phase 2 on the alternative options will be presented to Council in the spring to help inform the final decision making.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the consultant interim report before Council is to seek direction on two representation principles that will allow the Consultant team to develop viable options for Council consideration in phase 2 of the project. By providing this direction, council is providing direction to the consultant team to explore alternative options for council composition and ward designs.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

- A. 2024 Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review Interim Report by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

- B. Staff Report CL 58/96 Regional Restructuring, December 5, 1996 as referenced in consultant report.

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Commissioner Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.