



Municipality of Trent Hills Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review

INTERIM REPORT
March 17, 2020

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A Council Composition Review



The primary purpose of the study is to prepare Trent Hills Council to make decisions on:

- Whether to change or retain the way the Deputy Mayor is selected;
- Whether to change or retain the present composition of Council; and
- Whether to retain the existing ward structure or to adopt an alternative arrangement.

The Phase 1 of the Review has addressed the two initial decisions and the second phase will examine the third one.

Legislative Framework



- Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001* is silent on essential features of the municipal system of representation. The *Act* merely authorizes a lower-tier municipality to determine:
 - the “composition of council” (that is, the size of council)
 - how Council (other than the Mayor) will be elected (“by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards”); and,
 - “to divide or re-divide the municipality into wards or to dissolve the existing wards” through a by-law of Council.

Review Process (Phase 1)



Research & Data
Compilation

Interviews With
Council/Mayor &
Senior Staff

Public
Consultation
Based on the
Discussion Paper

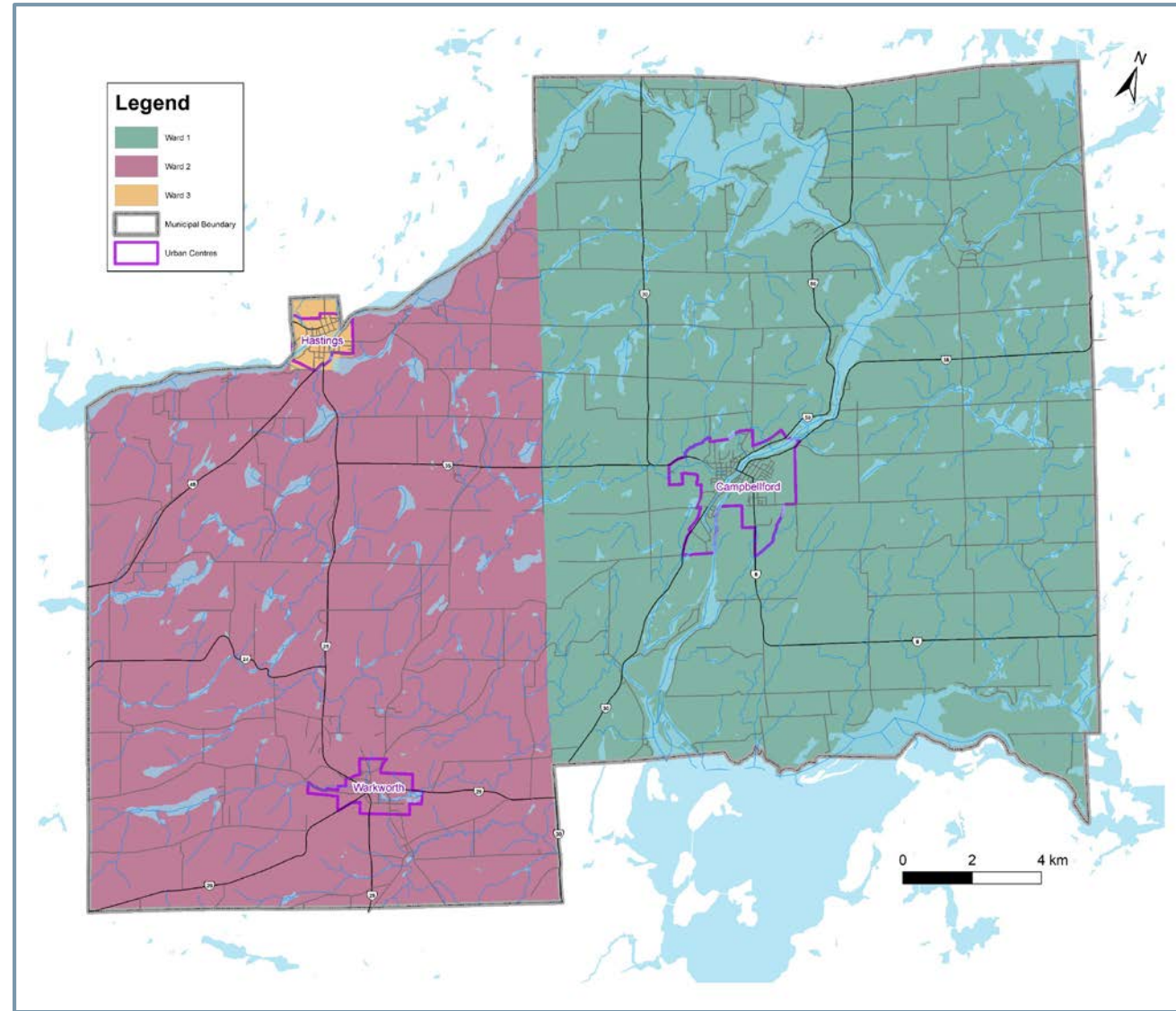
Develop
Recommendations
to Council for the
Interim Report

Context



- Trent Hills was created by a Ministerial Restructuring Order (March 2000): an amalgamation of the former Village of Hastings, the former Township of Percy and the former Municipality of Campbellford/Seymour (itself the result of an earlier amalgamation in 1998.)
- Council is comprised of a Mayor (elected at-large) and six Councillors (elected in three wards), one of whom is selected by Council to serve as Deputy Mayor.
- The ward structure deliberately retained the boundaries of the three pre-amalgamation municipalities; the boundaries have not been adjusted since.

Existing Ward Map



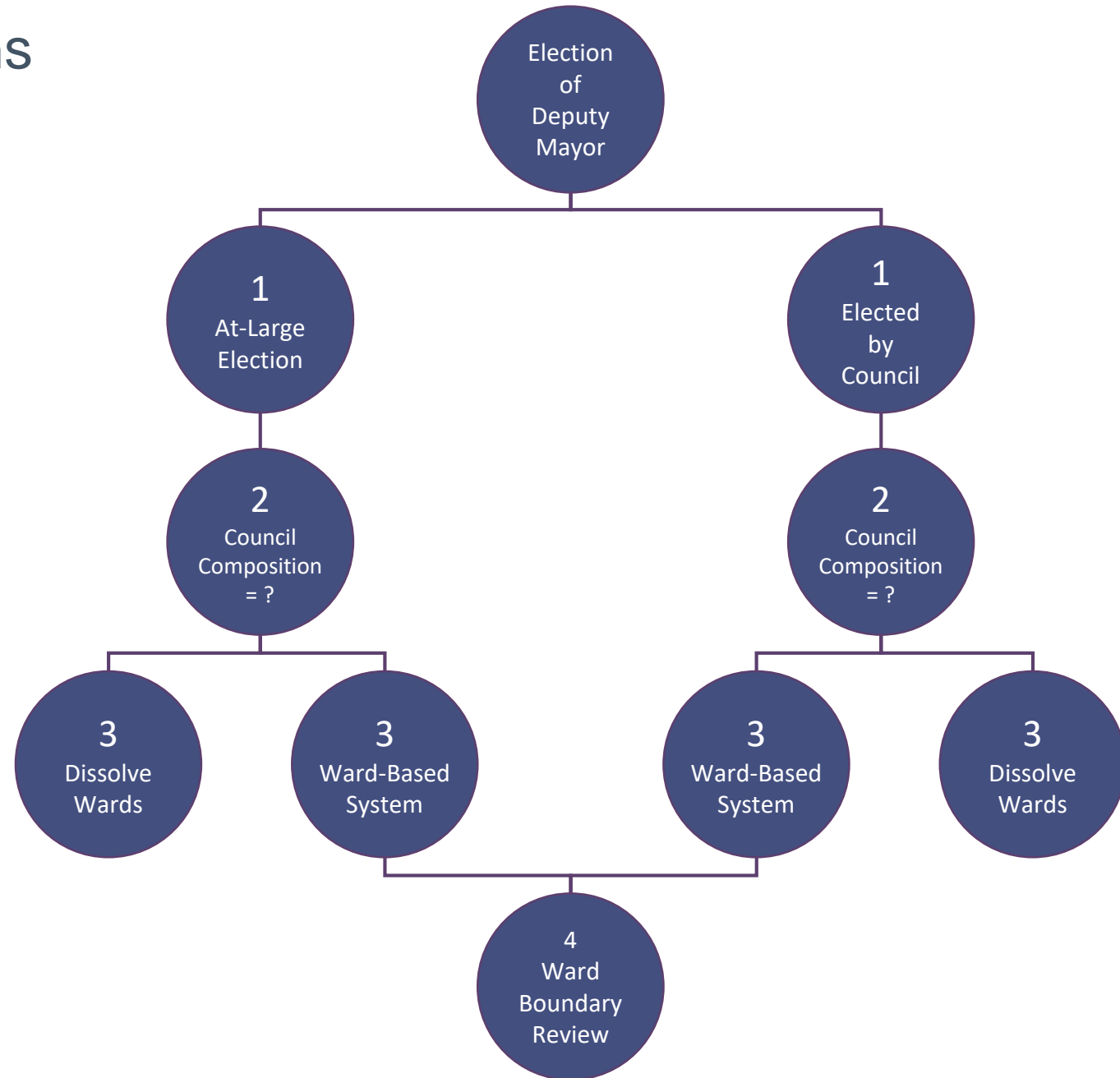
Phase 1 Decisions



Essentially up to four “layers” of inter-related decisions for Council to make:

1. Confirm the method of selection for the position of Deputy Mayor;
2. Agree on the size of Council beginning in 2022 (the “composition” of Council);
3. Decide whether to retain a ward system or to dissolve the wards in favour of an at-large system;
4. If wards are to be continued, confirm the number.
 - If wards are to be dissolved, the Review is concluded.

Four “Layers” of Decisions



Discussion Paper January 2020



- A Discussion Paper provided a detailed explanation of the separate decisions to be addressed in Phase 1, some of the implications associated with each one and comparative information from other municipalities in Northumberland County.
- The Discussion Paper served as the basis for a presentation at a public information session held at the Hastings Civic Centre on January 27 and remains available on the Municipality's website.

Phase 1 Decisions



- Council has the legislative authority to make decisions on the matters addressed during Phase 1 of this Review.
- Such decisions should be guided by the research, professional expertise and experience presented by the Consultant Team in the Discussion Paper and Interim Report, as well as best practices across Ontario.

Phase 1 Decisions



- The Interim Report presents feedback received from the first round of consultation but neither the Consultant Team nor Council should rely on it exclusively. It illustrates the opinions of self-selected residents rather than being a definitive survey.
- It should also be noted that approximately half of all responses came from Ward 3.

Decisions: Selection of a Deputy Mayor



- Comments from those who endorsed the selection of the Deputy Mayor by Council (the present method) said:
 - a) Why change now?
 - b) The present system favours those with experience.
 - c) The role played by the Deputy Mayor is limited.
- Respondents who supported moving to an at-large election refer to:
 - a) Consistency (same as the Mayor.)
 - b) Democracy.
 - c) Perspective (serves the Municipality as a whole.)

Decisions: Selection of a Deputy Mayor



- There appears to be a preference by respondents for retaining the selection of the Deputy Mayor by Council, although there are legitimate contrary views and precedents across Northumberland County supporting an at-large election.

Decisions: The 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.”
- Trent Hills council is composed of seven members, two above the minimum.
- There are no clear principles at play, no “standards” and no formulas to apply” in determining the appropriate size of Council.

Decisions: The Composition of Council



- Depending on Council's decision in relation to the Deputy Mayor, it also has the authority to modify the overall size of Council.
- Should Council continue to be composed of seven members, be reduced or be increased?
- Although the composition of local councils in Ontario varies widely, within Northumberland County there are four seven-member Councils and three five-member Councils.

Decisions: The Composition of Council



- Survey respondents who preferred to keep Council at seven members saw that number as suitable for decision-making in a municipality the size of Trent Hills and valued familiarity (“it is something that we know works well currently”).
- Respondents who supported reducing the size of Council almost uniformly referred to cost.
- Those who indicated support for more Councillors usually tied the idea into enhancing representation (“More council members can/will better represent a diverse population.”).

Ward System or an At-Large System?



- Six members of Trent Hills Council have been elected in wards since amalgamation; Council has the authority to retain a ward system or to dissolve it.
- Five municipalities in Northumberland County elect Councillors at-large.
- Public feedback received through the public consultation strongly supported retaining a ward system in Trent Hills by a ratio of 3:1.

Ward System or an At-Large System?



- Those in favour of election in wards place high value on Councillors' local knowledge and think that election by ward will allow Councillors to better represent local interests. Many are of the opinion that at-large elections would allow larger population centres to dominate governance.
- Those supporting at-large see ward distinctions as divisive, adding an adversarial nature to local issues.
- It is the professional opinion of the Consultant Team that that wards should be retained in Trent Hills.

The Number of Wards



- The present ward system in Trent Hills is not symmetrical: each ward elects a different number of Councillors.
- The arrangement perpetuated the idea that the three pre-amalgamation component parts of Trent Hills should continue to be the foundation on which Council representation is based: add representatives rather than draw new wards in 2000 based on population parity.
- Best practice: when population changes, electoral boundaries should follow suit.

The Allocation of Councillors by Ward



- An important consequence of the present system: inequality - some residents entitled to three votes for Council, others 2 and others 1.
- An alternative: a system in which each ward elects an equal number of representatives (that is, every elector gets to vote for the Mayor (and perhaps the Deputy Mayor) and the same number of Councillors.)
- By a ratio of approximately 3:2, respondents to the survey supported a change to wards that each elect an equal number of Councillors.

The Allocation of Councillors by Ward



- If Council endorses wards that each elect an equal number of Councillors, this outcome cannot be achieved by simply reallocating the seats assigned to the present wards because the population of the wards is not balanced.

Ward #	Permanent Population ¹	Seasonal Population	Total Population
Ward 1	8,720	2,728	11,448
Ward 2	3,763	644	4,407
Ward 3	1,497	90	1,587
Total	13,980	3,462	17,442

¹ Includes Census Undercount of approximately 3.5%.

If A Ward System Is Retained (Phase 2)



A set of Guiding Principles are “to be considered” by the Consultant Team in a Ward Boundary Review:

- Do the wards provide “effective representation” based on an evaluation through established “guiding principles?”
 - Representation by population;
 - Protection of communities of interest;
 - Recognition of natural or man-made barriers or dividers as boundaries;
 - Recognition of density;
 - Recognition of areas of growth/decline;
 - Ward boundaries that accommodate growth/shifts in population for at least 3 municipal elections.

Do the Wards Need to be Changed?



- Possible alternatives to “redivide” the municipality will be developed taking into account quantitative and qualitative data and subjected to the guiding principles.
- No ward system design can uniformly meet all the guiding principles: some designs may be judged more desirable because they more successfully achieve certain principles.
- Which principles have the highest priority in Trent Hills?

Do the Wards Need to be Changed?



- A question in the survey reveals that “relative population parity” and “protection of communities of interest” are highly valued but these are often correlated to the present ward where the respondent lives.
- In Phase 2, alternative ward designs will be filtered through the set of guiding principles or criteria, case law and successful models adopted in other municipalities, but taking into account the divergent preferences revealed in the survey.

Review Process (Phase 2, If Required)



Population
Forecasting/Data
Modelling

Development of
Preliminary Ward
Boundary Options

Public
Consultation

Develop Final
Ward Boundary
Options &
Recommendations
To Council