EAST GWILLIMBURY ELECTORAL REVIEW
PRELIMINARY REPORT

Prepared by:

Dr. Andrew Sancton
Dr. Timothy Cobban

September 7, 2016
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2016, the Town of East Gwillimbury retained the consultant team of Drs. Andrew Sancton and Tim Cobban to conduct an independent review of the Town’s electoral system. The scope of this electoral review is much broader than those typically undertaken elsewhere in Ontario. For most municipalities, the main electoral issue to resolve is the appropriateness of ward boundaries. This electoral review, however, encompasses the entire electoral system, including the method for electing councillors, as well as the size and composition of council. The areas of focus include the implications of forecasted population growth, regional representation, East Gwillimbury’s distinct communities and physical features, and the guiding democratic principles of “representation by population” and “effective representation.”

This purpose of this Preliminary Report is to provide an initial assessment of the current electoral system, and to introduce and assess possible alternatives. We review the status quo and consider a number of modifications to the current at-large electoral model, including increasing council size, electing a deputy mayor, and adopting a single transferable vote (ranked ballot) system. Ranked ballots are a new option for Ontario municipalities, and proponents argue that the results better represent the interests of the voters. The main drawback is that such systems are unfamiliar to most Ontario voters, and although the basic idea is intuitive and easy to grasp, the method for counting voters is not. But we explain it in both simple and more complex terms, and describe how such a system could work in East Gwillimbury. We also discuss replacing the current at-large electoral system with one based on wards. Drawing ward boundaries is challenging under any circumstances, but the rapid population growth projected for the Town is particularly vexing, as we explain and detail. Nevertheless, we present a functional and intuitive model that uses six wards for the 2018 election, and then merges two of those wards to create a five-ward model for the 2022 and 2026 elections. We discuss how this model relates to the issues of council size and the desirability of having a deputy mayor elected at-large, with or without assigned regional representation responsibilities.

At this stage, we offer no recommendations. The list of options presented here is by no means exhaustive, and our assessments are not to be taken as definitive. This report is meant to inform and guide our engagement with residents and key stakeholders that will follow in September and October. It is also important to note that this report has been independently produced, with no direct input from staff or members of council. Our research relies on a number of sources, including a site visit to East Gwillimbury and a tour through its various communities. Our population figures use Statistics Canada data, as well as population growth projections supplied by York Region and the Town of East Gwillimbury. Our analysis is supported by a review of related academic research, legal decisions, and Ontario Municipal Board hearings.
1. INTRODUCTION

Since its inclusion in York Region in 1971, the Town of East Gwillimbury has been governed by a council comprising four councillors and a mayor. The councillors are elected through a multi-member general election, more commonly referred to as an “at-large” electoral system. The Mayor, like all Ontario mayors, is elected by general election. The Mayor also serves as the Town’s lone representative on York regional council. Physically, the Town itself is mostly rural lands interspersed with historic villages and hamlets. In recent years, East Gwillimbury has experienced intensified urban development. This growth is projected to continue at an accelerated rate, with the Town’s population expected to double its current level of about 25,000 persons by 2026. Nearly all of this growth will be located to the southwest, in and around the communities of Holland Landing-River Drive Park, Queensville, Sharon, and Harvest Hills, and in the new community forming along the Green Lane Corridor. Growth is tightly constrained in the easterly community of Mount Albert by municipal servicing, and in rural areas by protective land-use policies.

In recent years, there has been pressure to consider changing the Town’s electoral system, particularly in light of the expected dramatic population growth. In 2009, a citizen petition requested that council consider implementing a ward-based electoral system, which led to an appeal being filed with the Ontario Municipal Board [OMB] in 2010. In that same year, a question was included on the 2010 municipal election ballot, to which voters indicated strong support for the existing at-large electoral system. In early 2011, the OMB denied the petition on the grounds that there was no clear evidence that councillors were less accessible in the present at-large system than they would be through an electoral system based on wards. The Board also urged the Town to undertake a comprehensive review of its electoral system to address such concerns.¹

Any review of the electoral system in East Gwillimbury must begin with a description of the regulatory framework governing municipal electoral systems in Ontario. It is important to understand the provincial rules and regulations governing what municipalities can and cannot do with their electoral systems, and, just as importantly, how those rules and regulations have been interpreted by the OMB. It is also important to be fully informed about what is almost certainly the main issue in this review: the differences between ward-based and at-large electoral systems. Below, we address each topic in detail, before turning to our assessments of the current electoral system and the main alternatives.

2. THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Ontario municipalities have broad authority to determine their own electoral systems. Section 222 (1) of the Ontario Municipal Act authorizes municipalities to divide or redivide their municipality into wards or to dissolve existing wards. Similarly, Section 217 (1) authorizes municipalities to determine the composition of their own councils. There are some constraints, of which the most important is that councils must have a minimum of five members. And there are additional rules for upper-tier municipalities. But municipal councils can change both their electoral system and council compositions through normal

From a strictly legal perspective, only municipal by-laws that affect ward boundaries can be directly appealed to the OMB. A by-law changing the number of councillors elected at-large, for example, could not be appealed, nor could one that changed the number of councillors elected in each ward. In practical terms, however, all aspects of a municipal electoral system can become the subject of an OMB hearing. This is because Section 223 of the Municipal Act outlines a procedure whereby citizens can petition their municipalities to have ward boundaries drawn, redrawn, or dissolved altogether. If the municipality does not act upon the request, the petitioners can then appeal to the OMB. The OMB’s authority in such appeals is limited to the determination of ward boundaries. But, for obvious reasons, increasing or decreasing the number of wards can leave municipalities with little choice over the size of council.

Just as there are no provincial criteria or regulations that municipalities must follow when they making changes to their electoral systems, there are none to guide the OMB in hearing appeals of such decisions. In the absence any such criteria, the Board has come to rely heavily upon the 1991 decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Carter case. The case is important because in its decision the Court articulated a requirement for “effective representation” in the House of Commons and provincial legislatures. The Court recognized the importance of “relative parity of voting power,” but it also ruled that other considerations, including “community history, community interests and minority representation” are factors which “may need” to be weighed to ensure that elected bodies are effectively representative.

Even though the Supreme Court decision does not apply to Canadian municipalities, the OMB has adopted “effective representation” as its guiding principle with respect to electoral systems. It would be misleading, however, to claim that the OMB has developed a clear or coherent definition of “effective representation,” as it applies to municipalities. The OMB is a quasi-judicial body, and is not bound by the precedents set in previous cases, as Ontario municipalities know all too well. Board members are free to develop and apply their own criteria on a case-by-case basis. It should not be surprising, then, to find that there is considerable variation among OMB members in the firmness with which they have embraced the doctrine of effective representation.

For some OMB members, there is no ambiguity: “The issue before the Board is whether the By-law provides for effective representation within the context of Tay Township as prescribed in The Supreme Court of Canada in Reference re: Provincial Boundaries.” In McPherson v. Prince Edward (2005), a case involving a petition to reduce the number of wards, the Board instructed the appellant to “present evidence on how their proposal would achieve effective representation and in doing so, specifically address the criteria enunciated by the
Supreme Court of Canada.” On this view, the Carter decision and “effective representation” are to be straightforwardly applied, as most forcefully expressed by the Board in Teno v. Lakeshore (2005):

The Board agrees that this Board does prefer local solutions. However, the Board must assume that there is a reason the legislation provides for an application to this Board when a petition to redivide electoral boundaries is not acted on by the municipality. The legislation anticipates that the various positions of the interested parties can be presented to the Board and that the Board can make a decision that ensures that any decision on electoral boundaries that is made, is made in accordance with the principles set down by the Supreme Court, in interpreting the Charter of Rights. Anything else would be a derogation of the Board's duties in this regard.

In other cases, however, OMB members have articulated a more nuanced position, recognizing that the principle of effective representation must be adapted to the case of municipal electoral systems. In Savage, Murphy, and Ross v. Niagara Falls (2002), the Board heard the appeal of a by-law replacing an electoral system based on ten wards with one comprising eight members elected at-large. In denying the appeal, the Board sought to explain the relevance of the Carter decision to local choices about municipal electoral systems:

Adopting the Court’s reasoning, in the context of this appeal, the Board must be satisfied that the decisions of council to deviate from the ward system, will not deprive the citizens of Niagara Falls of fair and effective representation and will not dilute the current form of governance they already have.

In Lauer v. Oshawa (2005), the Board presented what is perhaps the clearest statement about the applicability of the Carter decision and the doctrine of “effective representation” to municipalities in Ontario:

It is important to understand that the Saskatchewan [Carter] decision is based upon provincial electoral districts, provincial legislation in Saskatchewan and Section 3 of the Charter – “Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein” – does not speak directly to municipal councils. Nonetheless the case is relevant in the absence of a regulation permitted under Section 222 (2b) of the Ontario Municipal Act to prescribe standards.

Finally, some OMB decisions about municipal electoral systems contain no reference to the Carter decision or to the principle of effective representation. In Diemart and Letteau v. South Bruce (2009), a case involving the appeal of a by-law replacing wards with an at-large system, the Board similarly noted the absence of any guiding criteria or standards of review. In allowing the appeal, the Board preferred its own standard: “I am not satisfied that the proposed By-law is in the interest of the Municipality, moves it forward or is an

---

7 Teno v. Lakeshore (Town) [2005], O.M.B.D. No. 1245.
improvement to the existing system.”

In cases where the Board has relied on effective representation as its guiding principle, it has been invoked to justify changes to nearly every conceivable electoral arrangement. In *Dingwall v. Kearney* (2005), the Board granted a petition to dissolve existing wards in favour of an at-large system, because the wards—still wedded to old municipal boundaries—unjustifiably violated voter parity. In *Osgoode v. Ottawa* (2003), the Board granted the appeal of a city by-law redrawing ward boundaries on the grounds that the redrawn boundaries placed too much emphasis on voter parity, and therefore deprived rural residents of effective representation. In *Tiverton v. Kincardine* (2005), the Board granted the appeal by-law dissolving a three-ward, seven-councillor electoral system in favour of an at-large council—but only in part. Although the Board conceded that “the council exercised its prerogative and made the choice it thought best” it nevertheless concluded “that the nuclear industry [via Bruce Power] exerts a powerful influence on governments at all levels” and “that without a guaranteed Ward 3 representative on Council there might be no spokesperson for other interests or dissent against the nuclear industry.” The solution, as ordered by the Board, was “to expand the current at-large representation on council and balance the representation by population and still retain the ward system to guarantee area representation.”

For the purposes of this report, there are three important conclusions to draw from this brief review of the regulatory framework governing municipal electoral systems in Ontario. First, there can be no disputing that East Gwillimbury, like all Ontario municipalities, has the authority to determine its own electoral system. Second, any decision to change the current electoral system—and, by extension, any decision *not* to change it—can be appealed in one way or another to the OMB. Third, in hearing such appeals, OMB members have largely adopted “effective representation” as the guiding principle, although to varying degrees and sometimes to seemingly contradictory ends. This principle has been applied most directly to issue of ward boundaries, where it has the clearest relevance. In some cases, however, it has also been applied to questions concerning which system should be used to elect members of council, where it has questionable relevance at best. Generally, though, the OMB has deferred to the decisions of municipal councils on such matters. The choice between using wards or an at-large system is a mostly municipal one in Ontario.

### 3. WARD VS. AT-LARGE ELECTIONS

The most important and fundamental decision that needs to be made for the East Gwillimbury electoral system is about whether to maintain the current at-large system, switch to a ward system, or possibly even adopt a blend of the two.

---

11 Dingwall and Sainsbury v. Parry Sound/Kearney (Municipality) 2009 MM080065.
12 Osgoode Rural Community Association, the Rideau Rural Community Association Inc., and the West Carleton Association Inc. v. Ottawa (City) 2003 O.M.B.D. 0605.
3.1 THE DEBATE ELSEWHERE

Arguments about wards vs. at-large municipal elections have reverberated in North America for more than a hundred years. In the late Nineteenth Century “progressive” urban reformers wanted to get rid of ward elections because often-corrupt “ward-heelers” were concerned only with delivering benefits to their local electors rather than paying attention to the overall well-being of their respective municipalities. Small councils elected at-large were supposed to be the solution. But in places where such systems were implemented they in turn frequently became the subject of criticism because territorially-concentrated minority groups often ended up with no representatives. In the United States, the Supreme Court has struck down at-large systems in racially divided cities precisely on these grounds.\(^{14}\) Recent research, however, shows that the representation of racial and ethnic minorities improves only slightly in ward-based elections, and that the representation of women actually declines.\(^{15}\)

Toronto’s former chief planner, Paul Bedford, has argued that Toronto would be better governed if its councillors were elected from territorial units larger than the current wards.\(^{16}\) Like the old progressive reformers, he contends that Toronto councillors focus too much on their wards and not enough on the interests of the city as a whole.\(^{17}\) The argument goes on, probably without end.

It has been particularly intense in the City of Vancouver, Canada’s most populous municipality whose council is elected at-large.\(^{18}\) In Vancouver, local politicians associated with the NDP and other left-wing parties have advocated for wards as a mechanism for enhancing representation from poorer areas of the city, while business interests have defended the system in which ten councilors and the mayor are all elected at-large. The at-large system has doubtless been an important factor reinforcing the existence of local political parties in Vancouver, in part because citizens are asked to cast votes for eleven municipal offices and the existence of parties facilitates choice. But at-large systems predominate everywhere in British Columbia, even where local parties (or “electoral slates” as they are officially known) are not so prominent.

In recent decades in Ontario, there has been a general trend towards ward-based elections, especially in more rural municipalities that amalgamated in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the


\(^{17}\) A recent study of nearly 600 municipal councillors across Canada found that those elected at-large do perceive themselves to be more focused on municipality-wide issues, while those elected through wards tend to prioritize neighbourhood concerns. These are self-assessments, however, measured through surveys and interviews. Linking such perceptions to actual differences in policy-making is far more difficult. Royce Koop and John Kraemer, “Wards, At-Large Systems and the Focus of Representation in Canadian Cities,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming. DOI: 10.1017/S0008423916000512.

choice between at-large and ward-based systems remains a local one. The OMB has not expressed a preference in any of its rulings on electoral systems. As the Board stated in a 2002 hearing, “There are very good reasons for both systems of representation. That is why both systems are available to municipalities in Ontario.” Many Ontario municipalities in addition to East Gwillimbury have maintained at-large systems, with Oshawa, Sarnia, Owen Sound, and Aurora being among the larger ones. Others have a mix of the two systems. For example, in Thunder Bay the mayor and five councillors are elected at-large and seven more are elected from each of seven wards.

There can be no empirical evidence that one system is superior to the other. The choice is likely to be dependent on local circumstances and on political preferences and objectives. Wards will be favoured by people who want to promote the representation of territorially-concentrated minority groups, build closer ties between local communities and individual councillors, and reduce campaign costs for council candidates. Those wanting to discourage territorial divisions and avoid the inevitable difficulties of creating wards with equal populations will favour at-large systems.

In recent decades, there has been a movement in municipal circles to try to make municipal governments more like other levels of government. One of the apparent successes of this movement has been the lengthening of municipal terms of office to four years. Moving to single-member ward systems is another such manifestation – a ward councillor becomes more directly analogous to an elected politician in the federal House of Commons or in provincial legislatures. Ironically, perhaps, there are now well-known initiatives in the federal and provincial politics to eliminate single-member “first-past-the-post” electoral systems and replace them with systems that are more like municipal at-large systems. The object of these proposed reforms is to attempt to ensure that election results better reflect voters’ party preferences. In municipal politics in Ontario, however, there is still no popular appetite for local political parties, perhaps for good reasons. Unless or until this changes, it is fruitless to pretend that municipal councils can be treated as though they are simply small-scale federal or provincial legislatures.

3.2 The Debate in East Gwillimbury

It is doubtful that discussions in East Gwillimbury about choices between at-large and ward-based electoral systems will unearth any new arguments. Unlike many cities, however, and unlike most suburban and rural municipalities in the United States, East Gwillimbury contains at least five distinct urban settlements and a rural hinterland. Some will no doubt claim that such a configuration makes wards a necessity. The problem with this line of argument, however, is that the distinct settlements are likely to be of varying population size, meaning that the principle of voter parity (rep-by-pop) will be grossly violated if each settlement automatically gets its own ward. But the existence of distinct urban settlements within the same municipality will cause others to argue that the only way to avoid having councillors focus only on their own wards is to have all of them elected at-large. To understand this argument, try to imagine whether a councillor elected from a hypothetical Mount Albert ward would ever be much interested in an issue in Harvest Hills, unless of

---

course the councillors from the two areas explicitly or implicitly agreed to support spending
proposals in each other’s wards on the grounds that most of the cost would be paid by
residents of Sharon, Queensville, and Holland Landing. This pattern of legislative behaviour
– frequently observed in the U.S Congress, where party discipline is weak – is commonly
known as “log-rolling”, and invariably leads to levels of spending on local projects (often
called “pork” in the United States) beyond what the average voter in the entire jurisdiction is
likely to support.\textsuperscript{20}

In the discussion that follows, we outline a set of different options that fall into two distinct
categories: options for electing councillors at-large; and options for electing councillors on
the basis of wards. As we have previously indicated, it is quite possible to blend these two
options. In the interests of simplicity and brevity, we shall not be presenting blended
options, but that is no reason why the possibility of such arrangements should not be raised
and considered during our consultations.

4. OPTIONS

We present our options under two main headings: at-large and wards. As will be seen in the
discussion that follows, there are various options within these two broad choices and each of
the distinct options listed below contain within them various choices that will eventually
have to be made when final decisions are taken. We have not attempted to address options
that blend at-large and ward-based systems except to note the possibility of electing a deputy
mayor on at-large basis within an otherwise ward-based system.

4.1 AT-LARGE OPTIONS

4.11 The Status Quo

Citizens who are generally satisfied with the way things have been done in East Gwillimbury,
and who believe that the possible benefits of creating wards are outweighed by the costs, will
likely support the option of maintaining the status quo: a mayor and four councilors, all
elected at-large. We believe that a well-reasoned decision by the current council to maintain
the status quo would survive any citizen challenge brought before the OMB, just as it did in
2011.

Advocates of the status quo must bear in mind, however, that East Gwillimbury is growing
very rapidly. Most new residents coming from other Ontario municipalities will be puzzled
by a municipal system in which there is no such thing as a ward councillor and by municipal
ballots which give them the opportunity to vote for four separate councillors.

Growth in East Gwillimbury also should cause us to think about the size of the council. If the
ratio of citizens to councillors is considered now to be ideal, then maintaining the current

\textsuperscript{20} For the most recent academic treatment of this line of argument in an Australian local government context,
see Joseph Drew and Brian Dollery, “The Price of Democracy? Political Representation Structure and Per
Capita Expenditure in Victorian Local Government” \textit{Urban Affairs Review} forthcoming, DOI:
10.1177/1078087416629806.
ratio will require increasing council size in accordance with population increases. In other words, maintaining the status quo in an environment of rapid growth means there will be increasing numbers of citizens to whom the same number of council members will be expected to be able to respond.

Another apparent problem with maintaining the current size of council is that any absences among council members, or any declarations of conflict of interest, means that decisions are taken by an exceptionally small group. In fact, if the number falls below three, the council cannot make any decision at all because the quorum is three. Any decision-making body that cannot make decisions when it is missing more than two members is arguably too small.

4.12 Maintain at-large elections but add members

We would be surprised if there would be much or any public support for adding more than two councillors to be elected at-large. Adding two would maintain an odd number of councillors, often thought to be desirable in a system in which the presiding officer (the mayor) has a vote on all issues coming before council. In such a system, any tie vote is deemed to have decided the matter in question in the negative. Obviously, tie votes are not unusual in East Gwillimbury or any other municipality with an odd number of councillors; they can occur whenever one member is absent or declares a conflict of interest. In any event there are lots of municipal councils with an even number of members. Examples are the cities of Ottawa, Mississauga, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Waterloo, Vaughan, and the Town of Newmarket.

Adding one additional councillor would obviously be less expensive than adding two. We do not believe, however, that cost should be a significant consideration, especially in a municipality that is growing as fast as East Gwillimbury. In any municipal government, the cost of elected members is always tiny in comparison to the costs of providing services. Democracy does cost money; our position is that we should search for the size of council that best meets the needs of the citizens of East Gwillimbury before we consider costs.

Unfortunately, there is no academic evidence to suggest that one size of council is better than another. The existence or not of political parties, the range of functions provided by the municipality, and the size of the population are all relevant factors. In East Gwillimbury’s case, each of these factors points to the likely desirability of a relatively small council, but a council with two more members would remain relatively small, even by Canadian standards where councils are generally small compared to most other democratic countries.

4.13 Deputy Mayor

Adding one or more councillors would facilitate the designation of one of the councillors as a deputy mayor, a common position in many Ontario municipalities and one which opens up a number of organizational options within the council, including the deputy mayor chairing

---

21 Between 2009 and 2011 the issue of council size was extensively debated within the single-tier Halifax Regional Municipality and at consequent hearings held by the Nova Scotia Utilities Review Board. For an account, see Sancton, Canadian Local Government, pp.183-4.
one or more council committees. Exactly how the council organizes itself goes beyond our terms of reference. In the absence of any other changes in the electoral system, there is little that needs to be said about a possible deputy mayor’s position. The councillor receiving the most votes in at-large elections could easily be automatically designated as the deputy mayor.

There is a possibility, however, that at some point in the future York regional council might allocate a second regional representative to East Gwillimbury, in addition to the mayor. If this happens, we consider it essential that any such additional regional representative be elected at-large and specifically for this position, so that the incumbent can clearly represent the entire municipality on regional issues. It would be important for voters to know who is running for a seat on regional council so that, in this case at least, they could focus their attention as much as possible on regional issues.

In the event that a ward system is adopted to replace at-large elections, a regional representative elected at-large would also be a logical person to be designated as the deputy mayor, precisely because he or she would be the only person on council other than the mayor with a mandate from the entire municipality. There is one additional circumstance—to be discussed below when we consider a ward system—in which, even in the absence of an additional representative on York regional council, the establishment of a deputy mayor’s position elected at-large within an otherwise ward-based system might be seen as highly desirable.

As we saw earlier, the main problem with any at-large system compared to a ward-based system is that any territorially concentrated minority is likely to be disadvantaged. Minority votes in support of “one of their own” will inevitably be swamped by majorities elsewhere. A sophisticated minority voter response in at-large system would be to “plump” for their preferred candidate. This means that they would vote only for their top choice, forgoing their right to vote for as many candidates as there are positions. By “plumping” in this way voters avoid the possibility that they might simultaneously be voting for candidates who will end up defeating their top choice. The disadvantage of plumping is that voters sacrifice their rights to influence the make-up of the council beyond their top choice. In effect, they partly disenfranchise themselves to serve what they consider to be a higher political objective.

Recent changes in the Ontario Municipal Elections Act now make it possible for municipalities to maintain (or adopt) at-large elections while at the same time allowing voters to demonstrate strong support for a particular candidate (or small group of candidates) without plumping. The option that is now available for at-large elections is the ranked ballot. At a minimum it deserves serious consideration.

4.14 Maintain at-large elections but change to ranked ballot voting

In 2018, Ontario municipalities will have the choice of conducting elections using either the traditional “first-past-the-post” plurality model or ranked ballots (sometimes referred to as the single transferable vote). As those familiar with at-large elections know, in the traditional “first-past-the-post” voting system, electors cast single votes for as many candidates as there are at-large positions, with the candidates receiving the most votes declared the winners. With ranked ballots, electors complete their ballot by ranking the candidates instead of
casting votes. Usually voters are allowed to provide more rankings than there are elected positions.

Under proposed provincial regulations, vote counting will occur through successive rounds. Each round involves eliminating candidates with the least support, and redistributing their votes to the remaining candidates in accordance with each voter’s second choice. At the same time, if any candidate receives more than enough votes needed to secure victory, their surplus votes are distributed to the other candidates in proportion to each voter’s next choice. For at-large elections in Ontario, the threshold for victory is determined by dividing the total number of votes cast by the number of candidates being elected plus one (known as a Droop quota). For example, in an at-large election for four councillors, the winning threshold is 20 percent of votes cast. The rounds continue until all elected offices are filled.22

Proponents of ranked ballots, like advocates of electoral reform generally, argue that the results better reflect voters’ preferences than those obtained through “first-past-the-post,” where candidates can win without majority support. Since winning a ranked ballot election requires a broad base of support, negative campaigning should be less effective and thus less prevalent. Finally, as discussed earlier, there is less need for minority voting groups to vote strategically. Those favouring “first-past-the-post” point out the complex and unfamiliar vote-counting procedures, and wonder about the added burden it places on voters and the extra costs entailed in hiring more staff or purchasing equipment to handle the task.

For East Gwillimbury, ranked ballots represents one way to modify the current at-large system in an attempt to better reflect the interests of minority voting groups—especially those concentrated in its various communities—while avoiding the sometimes divisive territorial politics that can result from using wards. There is no reason why the other possible changes to the current at-large system we have discussed cannot also be implemented at the same time. In fact, a strong argument can be made that ranked ballots would function better if council size were increased by one or two members. For some citizens, however, this may not go far enough to accommodate the interests of the East Gwillimbury’s distinct communities, and wards will be preferred. As we describe below, there is at least one way to draw ward boundaries that reflect these communities. But it is important for everyone interested in East Gwillimbury’s electoral system to understand that using ranked ballots with an at-large council does present a possible solution—a third way, so to speak—to those torn between ward-based and at-large electoral systems.

4.2 Ward Options

There can be little disagreement that the most important principle in ward design is equitable representation. Each ward should represent approximately the same number of people. Deviations from voter parity are always necessary—at least to some degree—but they are

---

22 For a more detailed description of how the single transferable voting system will work, see the proposed regulation for a description and various useful links: http://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=21906&language=en
most justifiable when the deviation is only a temporary result of shifting population levels or when the objective is to avoid dividing distinct communities of interest. For our purposes, we consider deviations of up to 10% from average ward size as generally acceptable, while deviations of 10% to 25% of as possibly acceptable but only under certain circumstances. We have also sought to develop ward options that can be in place for the 2018 municipal election and also used for the 2022 and 2026 elections. This is partly a pragmatic concern. Redrawing ward boundaries is a complicated undertaking that requires a significant investment of time and resources from council, staff, stakeholders, and citizens. But ward boundaries also take on greater significance as they gain some degree of permanence over time. It also allows council and citizens to focus on important policy issues, rather than on electoral system design. Finally, we assumed that there would be little interest in significantly expanding council size.

Developing realistic ward options requires accurate, finely detailed data on current and projected populations across the municipality. In developing potential ward boundaries, we have relied on the data provided in the 2011-2031 Traffic Zone population projections developed by York Region for East Gwillimbury. There are 33 such Traffic Zones in East Gwillimbury (the boundaries of these zones can be seen in Map A). The traffic zone estimates use 2011 Census population data as the base and then project growth using development activity and planning applications, which are regularly updated. We have also made minor adjustments to the projections where appropriate using the most recent residential development data available through East Gwillimbury’s planning department. The result is a grid of current population levels with carefully constructed growth forecasts that provide as much accuracy as can be expected from such calculations.

There has never been a ward system in East Gwillimbury. In the 2010 citizen petition for wards and subsequent OMB hearing, no ward design was formally proposed. We are effectively starting from scratch. Those favouring wards will almost certainly agree that a useful place to begin is with the Town’s five urban settlements—Holland Landing-River Drive Park, Mount Albert, Queensville, Sharon, and Harvest Hills—and the rural hinterland. For many, it is precisely this unusual settlement configuration that makes ward desirable in the first place.

| Table 1. East Gwillimbury Population Projections by Community, Selected Years |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----------------
| Holland Landing-River Drive Park | 2016 | 2018 | 2022 | 2026 | Avg. annual growth rate |
| Queensville                    | 1,839 | 5,501 | 8,242 | 11,607 | 53% |
| Sharon                         | 4,059 | 4,975 | 6,827 | 9,256 | 13% |
| Harvest Hills-Green Lone Corridor west | 1,940 | 2,101 | 3,107 | 6,165 | 22% |
| Mount Albert                   | 5,434 | 5,681 | 5,909 | 5,927 | 1% |
| Rural                          | 4,142 | 4,214 | 4,338 | 4,399 | 1% |
| **Total**                      | **26,902** | **33,762** | **42,349** | **53,274** | **10%** |

Table 1 presents the current and projected populations for these six communities. As the population figures illustrate, the current population levels vary. Presently, the estimated population of Holland Landing-River Drive Park is nearly 9,500 persons, which is more than four times greater than that of either Queensville or Harvest Hills. From the forecasted
populations, it is also very clear that the urban settlements in the west of East Gwillimbury are expected to grow very rapidly. Queensville, for example, has the smallest current population of the six communities; by 2026, it is projected to be the second largest. Over that same period, Mount Albert and the rural hinterland are expected to remain more or less the same population size.

4.21 Six wards in 2018, 5 wards in 2022 and 2026

In developing a ward-based option, we considered a number of different configurations, ranging from 3 large wards (electing two councillors each) to 6 wards. No matter which configuration we considered, the uneven population growth projected over the next ten years resulted in wards whose boundaries grossly violated the principle of voter parity in at least one election year or required significant revision at some point between the three elections.

The optimal solution using wards, in our view, is to adopt a system of six wards for the 2018 election that divides the westerly urban settlements into 4 wards and creates separate wards for both Mount Albert and the contiguous rural area. By 2022, the continued growth of the urban centres west of Highway 404 will require that either those centres be subdivided further into 6 wards (for a 8-ward system) or that Mount Albert and the rural areas be combined to form one ward (for a 5 ward system). We prefer the latter, not the least because a nine-member council (or ten, if a deputy mayor is to be elected) seems excessive, at least by contemporary standards, and additional wards would be thereafter required each time East Gwillimbury added an increment of population approximately equal to that of the rural area.

Below, Table 2 provides the projected populations of these wards, along with the average ward populations and variances for the election years of 2018, 2022, and 2026. Map 1 shows the boundaries of these potential wards. A physical description of the wards and their boundaries follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>6 Wards</th>
<th></th>
<th>5 Wards</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2026</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2026</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holland Landing West</td>
<td>6,206</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8,092</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>11,687</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Holland Landing East</td>
<td>6,911</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8,659</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10,111</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Queensville</td>
<td>5,501</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>8,242</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>11,607</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>4,975</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>6,827</td>
<td>-19%</td>
<td>9,256</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Mount Albert</td>
<td>5,681</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10,530</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10,613</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4,489</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average population</td>
<td>5627</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,470</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,655</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of its large population, Holland Landing-River Drive Park is divided into two wards, labeled here as *Holland Landing West* (Ward 1) and *Holland Landing East* (Ward 2). The two wards are separated by the natural boundary of East Holland River. The River Drive Park community, Harvest Hills, and the western portion of the Green Lane Corridor also form parts of Ward 1.

*Queensville* (Ward 3) and *Sharon* (Ward 4) each form their own wards, with *2nd Concession Road* as their western boundary, and *Highway 404* as their eastern boundary. The eastern boundary should be moved to Woodbine Avenue when development encroaches and leapfrogs Highway 404. The boundary separating the two wards is tentatively drawn so that Ward 4 includes the residential development just north of Farr Avenue and south of Mount Albert Road in Sharon, as well as the eastern portion of the Green Lane Corridor. The northern boundaries of Wards 1, 2, and 3 mostly follow Queensville Sideroad, though they can and should be extended further north as development warrants.

Ward 5a encompasses the community of *Mount Albert*. It is bounded by *Highway 48* to the west, *Doane Road* to the North, and the *East Townline* (and municipal boundary) to the East. The southern boundary is intended to include the residential developments, both current and planned, that are situated just south of Mount Albert Road. *Rural* lands are contiguous and covered by Ward 5b. In 2022, Wards 5a and 5b are to be combined to form Ward 5.
4.22 Council Size and Deputy Mayor

Under this proposed ward system, council size would increase by two members for the 2018 election. This would also have the advantage of leaving council with an odd number of members. If a deputy mayor were seen as desirable for organizational purposes, the most common method of selection would be for council to elect one of themselves to the position, often for only a portion (usually one-half) of the term.

In 2022, the size of council would shrink by one as the wards for Mount Albert and the rural area are merged together. It is certainly possible that, by this point in time, East Gwillimbury may be allocated an additional regional representative. It is even more likely that a second regional representative would be allocated by 2026. If and when East Gwillimbury does get a second regional representative, we consider it essential that this position be elected at-large for the reasons discussed earlier. Again, it seems logical that any person elected at-large to serve as a regional representative could also be designated as the deputy mayor. This would also have the benefit of restoring council size to 7 members. For this last reason in particular, it may be desirable to add a deputy mayor elected at large in 2022, regardless of whether or not a second regional representative has yet been allocated.

4.23 Implement wards and use ranked ballots

There is nothing to prevent East Gwillimbury from adopting ranked ballots when implementing a ward system. Ranked ballots would function in basically the same way as described earlier, except the threshold for victory is 50% of votes cast plus one vote, and there are no surplus votes to distribute. Voters would also likely be allowed to provide fewer rankings, though under provincial regulations they must be allowed to provide at least three. Some, however, may consider it more practical to stagger the implementation of such significant changes to the electoral system, if only so that their effects can be separately evaluated.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

We have presented several different options for East Gwillimbury’s electoral system. Using an at-large system, the options include staying with the status quo, increasing council size, electing a deputy mayor, and implementing ranked ballots. With a ward-based electoral system, all of these options remain in consideration, though we have focused on how they might work with a 6 (and then 5) ward model, as that configuration appears most suitable for East Gwillimbury’s current and projected population levels. With these options, a number of different permeations are possible, including those that blend at-large and ward systems, which we have not discussed here in great detail.

Our list of options and discussions of the various combinations may not be exhaustive. Others may have different ideas about how best to design East Gwillimbury’s electoral system. One important objective of our consultations will be to hear about such ideas. The
other objectives are to solicit feedback and opinions on the options presented here, and to clarify any confusion or misunderstanding about how they might work in East Gwillimbury.

To these ends, we will be holding four public consultations throughout East Gwillimbury in late September and early October. During this period, we will also be meeting with key stakeholders, including members of council, senior staff, and community representatives. There will be a survey administered both online and in our public meetings. The success of this electoral review depends greatly on the active and thoughtful participation of the residents of East Gwillimbury. We encourage all residents to participate in this process.

The results of our consultations will be analysed and incorporated into our Final Report, which will be submitted to council in November. That report will also include our recommendations for East Gwillimbury’s electoral system.