



TOWNSHIP OF EDWARDSBURGH CARDINAL INFORMATION ITEM

Committee: Committee of the Whole – Public Works, Environmental Services & Facilities

Date: May 17, 2021

Department: Administration

Topic: Ward and At-Large Elections

Purpose: To provide information pertaining to a possible change in the ward system to an at-large (general) system for the 2022 election, as a result of a Councillor Notice of Motion to dissolve the ward system.

Background: Council received notice that a motion to dissolve the ward system for the 2022 election cycle would be considered at the upcoming May 25 Council meeting. Council determines the method of selecting members of municipal council (i.e., at-large/general elections versus the ward system) and by establishing the ward from which municipal councillors are elected.

The Township currently utilizes the ward system to elect the 3 ward Councillors, with an at-large system to elect the Mayor and Deputy Mayor positions.

Over the course of the previous and current Council term, members of Council and staff have commented on the ward system and whether it should remain in place. The service delivery review, section 1.3, completed in 2020 indicated that the current ward system reflects historical pre-amalgamation boundary divisions, which can continue to divide and cause issues of integration and development of the Township as one single community. Surrounding municipalities have abolished the ward system in favour of at-large (general) election systems. In many cases the reasoning was to promote a more unified municipality and allow for better long-term planning. During the time of the service delivery review, 4 out of 5 members of council supported the move to an at-large election system.

Section 217 of the Municipal Act, 2001, provides that “other than the head of council, members shall be elected by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards”.

Section 222 of the Municipal Act, 2001, allows a municipality to pass a bylaw to dissolve the existing wards. Some municipalities hold one public meeting before a bylaw to dissolve the ward system is considered at Council to better provide information to the

public about possible changes. Additionally, the Township must provide public notice of 15 days after passing a bylaw to dissolve the ward system and then allow a 45 day appeal period. This process must be completed by the end of 2021 in order to provide administration with sufficient time to prepare any possible changes for the upcoming 2022 election cycle, as well as provide notice of any changes to MPAC for compiling the elector data. Despite the importance of determining if elections and public representation would be via ward or at-large system, the Municipal Act, 2001, contains no criteria or direction to municipalities respecting the process for a ward versus at-large review.

Also, Section 223 of the Municipal Act, 2001, allows electors to present a petition to Council asking them to pass a bylaw to dissolve the existing wards. A minimum of 50 signatures is required. If Council does not pass a bylaw in accordance with the petition within 90 days after receiving the petition, any of the electors who signed the petition may apply to LPAT to have the existing wards dissolved. At which, the Tribunal would hear the application and may, despite any Act, make an order dividing or dissolving the existing wards.

From the point of view of representation, the two systems offer alternative attributes which are outlined in the below table.

Attributes of an At-Large System

Advantages (Pros)	Drawbacks (Cons)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electors have greater choice and flexibility in elections (each voter has the opportunity to consider every candidate in the council election) • Simplifies the election process for electors and election staff (every station has the same ballots, and there would not be any chance of an elector submitting a ballot for the wrong ward) • Electors are able to select the candidates they think will do the best job, rather than being limited to make a choice among candidates who happen to run in their ward • Residents will have a larger number of councillors to approach with their concerns • The system promotes the concept of a municipal-wide focus, with councillors being elected by, and concerned for, the municipality as a whole, rather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates must campaign across the entire municipality; this may make the cost of a campaign prohibitive for some prospective candidates • There would be no designated voices for particular communities • At-Large elections can lead to communities of interest and points of view being under represented • Candidates who appeal to areas where voter turnout is higher may be elected disproportionately • Format can lead to confusion of responsibilities and possible duplication of effort on the part of Councillors (everyone on council represents everyone in the municipality)

<p>than placing a priority on more narrow (location based) interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The likelihood of acclamations is reduced • Councillors will represent the constituency as a whole, therefore they may be more likely to advocate for policies/decisions that will benefit the community as a whole rather than based on ward/community 	
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Attributes of a Ward System

Advantages (Pros)	Drawbacks (Cons)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors are more likely to be truly local representatives, easily accessible to residents and aware of local issues • Distinctive communities of interest are more likely to be represented • It is less likely that one particular point of view or interest will dominate the council • Provides more cost efficient government, primarily by eliminating duplication of administrative work communicating the same/very similar information to candidates • Candidates do not need as much campaign funding to compete in a ward system election as they may need in an at-large system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors may be elected on minor issue(s) and may lack a perspective of what benefits the municipality as a whole • Ward boundaries may divide communities of interest • There is a greater likelihood of acclamations • Voters may have a restricted choice of candidates in elections for individual wards • There may be problems if a councillor is not performing effectively or is clashing with some electors, as the electors in single member wards have no alternative ward representative • Population shifts can lead to unequal workloads based on number of electors for certain councillors • If a councillor resigns or passes away suddenly, there is a significant rush to hold a by-election to select a replacement in order for the ward to be represented • May discourage new candidates if an incumbent is generally popular in a specific ward is running



Clerk



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