



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review Final Report

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: June 2, 2026

Report Author:

Shrishma Davé, Clerk/Manager of Legislative Services

Department responsible:

Legal & Legislative Services

Report Number: LLS-21-26

Recommended Motion:

1. That Report LLS-21-26 be received; and
2. That Council endorses Option ____ related to the Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review for the Municipality of Port Hope; and
3. That staff be directed to bring forward a by-law reflecting the approved ward boundary option selected by Council at a future Council meeting.

Highlights:

- This report presents the final outcomes of the Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review for the Municipality of Port Hope, including two recommended ward boundary options and the Consultant Team's preferred model.
- Informed by legislative requirements, updated population and growth projections, and two rounds of extensive public consultation, including surveys and community open houses.
- Any change to ward structure is at Council's discretion, with implementation timing, appeal risk, and related governance updates (including procedural by-law and taxation considerations) identified for future action if Council proceeds.

Background:

The Municipality of Port Hope was established in 2001 through the amalgamation of the former Town of Port Hope and the Township of Hope. At the time of amalgamation, it was determined that Council would be composed of a Mayor and six Councillors elected

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to represent two wards: Ward 1 (urban) and Ward 2 (rural). It was further established that Ward 1 would be represented by four Councillors and Ward 2 by two Councillors.

Sections 217 and 222 of the Municipal Act, 2001 provide municipalities with the authority to review and amend their governance structures, including council composition and ward boundaries. Subsection 222(1) of the Act authorizes a municipality to “divide or re-divide the municipality into wards or to dissolve the existing wards.” Section 217 of the Act further authorizes a local municipality to change the composition of its council, subject to prescribed requirements, including that council consist of a minimum of five members, one of whom shall be the head of council, and that members be elected in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996. The legislation also provides that members of council, other than the head of council, may be elected by general vote, by wards, or by a combination of both methods.

In May 2025, Council directed staff, through a Notice of Motion (Resolution 108-2025), to engage Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. (“the Consultant Team”) to undertake a Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review (WBCCR), including a review of the Deputy Mayor role, with the objective of ensuring that the Municipality’s governance structure remains representative and effective. Council further directed that the Consultant Team’s methodology and process be upheld, with final recommendations to be presented to Council no later than September 30, 2026.

In late 2025, the Consultant Team presented interim updates and reports to Council outlining preliminary research findings and initial observations regarding potential ward boundary and council composition options. During this time, various issues were discussed, including study methodology, research and data sources, principles guiding the development of alternative ward boundary options, community engagement processes, and population trends within the Municipality. A significant area of discussion related to the potential impacts associated with the proposed Wesleyville nuclear project, including how future growth pressures could influence population distribution and ward boundary considerations.

Following consideration of the interim reports, Council resolved to receive the reports for information and directed that the review process continue. Accordingly, staff also engaged with County of Northumberland regarding anticipated growth projections related to the potential expansion associated with the project.

On February 16, 2026, Council considered Report LLS-06-26, which provided additional information regarding County growth projections and their potential implications for the WBCCR process. At that meeting, Council directed staff to continue with the Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review and further directed that, should Council approve changes to the ward system arising from the review, staff bring forward a future budget item for Council’s consideration to undertake a population review within 24 months of the 2026-2030 Council term, once updated growth forecasts become available.

Since receiving Council’s direction in February 2026, staff have continued to work closely with the Consultant Team to advance the next phase of the Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review. This work included the implementation of a second phase of community engagement, consisting of an additional public survey and four public

open houses focused on the ward boundary and council composition options under consideration. The Consultant Team have also undertaken a comprehensive review and analysis of all information collected throughout the review process, including public feedback, population and growth projections, legislative considerations, and governance best practices. The final report, including the Consultant Team's recommendations respecting ward boundaries and council composition, is now being presented for Council's consideration.

Discussion:

The purpose of the WBCCR is to support Council for the Municipality of Port Hope in evaluating whether to maintain the current electoral structure, including the size and composition of Council and the method of electing the Deputy Mayor, or to consider alternative governance models. The Consultant Team's final report presents options for the future election of Council that have been informed by comprehensive research, population and growth analysis, legislative considerations, and two phases of public consultation with residents and stakeholders across the Municipality.

The review has been grounded in the principle that municipal representation within Port Hope should be effective, equitable, and reflective of the Municipality's current and projected population distribution, geographic characteristics, and communities of interest. Throughout the review process, the Consultant Team has undertaken extensive analysis of existing ward structures, representation models, demographic trends, and anticipated future growth scenarios, including consideration of potential growth pressures associated with the proposed Wesleyville nuclear project.

Consistent with Council's direction through the original Notice of Motion, municipal staff have remained at arm's length from the substantive analysis and development of recommendations throughout the review process. Staff's role has been limited to supporting the process in accordance with legislative and administrative obligations, including coordination, communications, facilitation of public engagement logistics, and providing information and data to the Consultant Team where required.

The purpose of the Consultant Team's Final Report (Attachment 1) is to provide:

- a summary of the work completed to date;
- a summary of the information received through public engagement activities and tools, including surveys, public open houses, and the project website; and
- two final ward boundary options for Council's consideration.

Through Phase Two of the review process, the Consultant Team refined and evaluated a number of preliminary ward boundary models based on feedback received from Council, the public, and stakeholders. Following this analysis, two final ward boundary options were advanced for Council's consideration:

Final Option 1 – 3 Ward Urban Example 1 + Rural Combined; and

Final Option 2 – 3 Ward Population Parity Example.

The Consultant Team has identified **Final Option 2** (3 Ward Population Parity Example) as its preferred recommended option. Final Option 2 was originally introduced during the consultation process as the "3 Ward Population Parity Example" and consists of two

exclusively urban wards and a third ward that combines the rural area with a portion of the existing urban population. This blended configuration is intended to address the population shortfall within the rural area by incorporating additional residents from within the urban boundary.

The Consultant Team's report notes that, similar to Final Option 1 (3 Ward Urban Example 1 + Rural Combined), a three-ward configuration with two councillors elected per ward represents a positive evolution of the Municipality's current governance structure. According to the Consultant Team, this approach supports greater equity in representation, improves transparency and fairness for electors, and better aligns with the Municipality's geographic, demographic, and community-of-interest characteristics. The report further notes that an evenly represented three-ward system provides a more balanced accommodation of both urban and rural interests while establishing a consistent and adaptable governance framework as the municipality continues to evolve.

Deputy Mayor Role

The Consultant Team also reviewed the current role and structure of the Deputy Mayor position within the Municipality of Port Hope. Under the Municipality's current Procedural By-law, the Deputy Mayor's responsibilities are primarily procedural and ceremonial in nature and include presiding over Special Council meetings related to the municipal budget and statutory public meetings under the Planning Act, representing the Mayor at public events or meetings, and exercising the Mayor's authority during Council meetings in the Mayor's absence. The Consultant Team noted that these duties do not extend beyond those procedural functions and do not include any of the legislative authorities assigned to the Mayor under provincial legislation.

As part of the review, the Consultant Team considered both public feedback and governance practices across Ontario respecting the role of Deputy Mayor and the method of selection. While consultation feedback demonstrated varying opinions on the necessity of the position, the Consultant Team ultimately concluded that there was insufficient rationale to establish a separately elected Deputy Mayor position in Port Hope and that doing so would not materially improve representation or governance outcomes within the Municipality.

Staff accept the Consultant Team's assessment respecting the limited statutory and governance role currently associated with the Deputy Mayor position. Staff also note that the responsibilities presently assigned to the Deputy Mayor can continue to be effectively administered through Council's internal appointment process, as established through the Municipality's Procedural By-law. This approach provides Council with flexibility to appoint a member of Council to fulfill the role as needed, while also allowing future Councils the opportunity to amend or expand the position's responsibilities over time should operational or governance needs evolve.

Determination of a Final Option

Based on the Consultant Team's analysis and recommendations, **staff accept Final Option 2 (3 Ward Population Parity Example) as the preferred recommended ward boundary model.** As the Consultant outlines, the proposed configuration provides a more balanced approach to representation by population while also recognizing the

importance of maintaining effective representation for both urban and rural residents. However, the ultimate authority respecting ward boundaries and council composition rests with Council.

Should Council endorse one of the final options identified within the Consultant Team's report, or endorse another option of their own liking, staff would subsequently bring forward the required implementing by-law for Council's consideration at a future meeting. Pursuant to subsection 222(8) of the Municipal Act, 2001, where a ward boundary by-law is appealed, the Ontario Land Tribunal must dispose of the appeal prior to January 1 of an election year in order for the revised ward structure to apply to that election.

It is important to note that the Municipality is now in an election year, and the legislated deadline to pass a ward boundary by-law for implementation in the 2026 Municipal Election has already passed. Accordingly, if Council chooses to adopt changes to the ward structure or council composition arising from this review, those changes would not take effect until the **2030 Municipal Election**.

Further, consistent with Council's direction provided through Report LLS-06-26, staff bring forward a budget item to undertake a population review within 24 months of the commencement of the 2026-2030 Council term once updated growth forecasts become available and should Council decide to make a change to the current ward system. The purpose of that review will be to assess whether additional analysis or amendments to the ward structure may be warranted considering updated population and growth information. Staff will report back to the newly elected Council within that timeframe, in accordance with Council's direction.

Should Council elect to proceed with changes to the current ward structure, there will also be a number of related governance and administrative matters requiring further review over the course of the next Council term. This may include amendments to the Municipality's Procedural By-law to remove the current weighted voting provisions, which would no longer apply under a revised ward structure based on equal representation. Staff will also undertake additional analysis respecting any related implications for taxation and service considerations between the urban and rural areas, as appropriate, and will bring forward further reports and recommendations to Council as required.

Financial Considerations:

The Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review project was funded through the Growth Readiness Fund, as originally directed by Council through the Notice of Motion 108-2025 authorizing the review. As such, there are no additional financial impacts associated with completion of the study itself.

The two final ward boundary options presented through the Consultant Team's report do not result in any additional ongoing financial impacts to the Municipality, as neither option proposes a change to the overall size or composition of Council. Both options maintain the current council structure consisting of a Mayor and six Councillors.

However, consistent with Council's direction through Report LLS-06-26, staff will bring forward a budget item related to a future population review within 24 months of the

commencement of the 2026-2030 Council term once updated growth forecasts become available, should Council change the ward boundaries. It is anticipated that this future review will result in costs in the approximate range of \$15,000 to \$20,000. In accordance with Council's direction, any required funding associated with that work will be brought forward for consideration through a future municipal budget process.

In addition, should Council choose to proceed with changes to the existing ward structure or council composition through the adoption of a ward boundary by-law, there is the potential for additional costs associated with any appeals filed with the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT). In the event of an appeal, the Municipality may incur legal and consulting costs related to responding to and defending the by-law before the OLT. At this time, it is difficult to estimate potential costs, as they would be dependent on the nature, scope, and complexity of any appeal filed, should an appeal occur.

Communication and Public Engagement:

The Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review has included significant public engagement throughout the duration of the project, including public open houses, surveys, project webpages, and opportunities for residents to provide feedback directly to the Consultant Team and Council. Following Council's consideration of the final report and any associated decisions, the Municipality of Port Hope will communicate Council's direction through its regular communication channels, including the municipal website, social media platforms, media releases, and other public notice mechanisms as appropriate. Should Council approve changes to the ward structure, staff will also develop and implement a robust public education and communications strategy in advance of the 2030 Municipal Election to ensure residents are aware of any new ward boundaries, understand how the changes may affect them, and are informed regarding where and how they will vote.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Strategic Plan Pillar: Multiple pillars apply

Strategic Plan Objective: Multiple objectives achieved

The WBCCR aligns with the Municipality of Port Hope Strategic Plan by supporting transparent and accountable local governance while ensuring that Council representation continues to reflect the Municipality's evolving population, geographic distribution, and communities of interest.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations:

The WBCCR for the Municipality of Port Hope has been undertaken with consideration for equity, diversity, and inclusion principles to support fair and meaningful representation across the Municipality's diverse communities. The review has sought to ensure that ward boundary options promote equitable representation by population while also recognizing differing geographic contexts, including both urban and rural areas, and the unique needs and perspectives of residents within those communities.

Extensive public engagement activities were designed to provide accessible opportunities for participation from a broad cross-section of residents, including surveys

and in-person open houses. Feedback received through these processes was considered alongside demographic and population data to help ensure that the proposed governance options reflect community interests in a balanced and inclusive manner. The resulting recommendations aim to support a governance structure that is transparent, representative, and responsive to the diversity of residents across the Municipality.

Conclusion:

The WBCCR provides Council with a comprehensive assessment of the Municipality's current and potential future governance structure, informed by legislative requirements, demographic and growth analysis, and extensive public consultation. The Consultant Team has presented two final ward boundary options, along with its recommended approach, for Council's consideration. The decision to amend the Municipality's ward structure or council composition rests solely with Council. Should Council choose to proceed with a preferred option, staff should also be directed to bring forward the necessary by-law for Council's formal consideration and adoption. Alternatively, Council may choose to receive this report for information purposes only, in which case no changes would be made and the Municipality's existing ward structure would remain in place.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Final Report