



Municipality of Port Hope 2025 Ward Boundary & Council Composition Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper E: Guiding Principles to Design Wards

If Port Hope decides to keep using wards to elect councillors, the Consultant Team will take a close look at how the current system works. They'll study what's working well and what could be improved. Then, they'll suggest new ideas to make things better.

Right now, the province does not have official rules about how municipalities should set up or change their ward systems. That means Port Hope can make decisions based on what works best for its own people and places.

Some precedents may be applicable from a review of best practices and successful electoral reviews in other Ontario municipalities and cases previously heard by the Ontario Municipal Board (O.M.B.) (now known as the Ontario Land Tribunal or O.L.T.), but a review of electoral arrangements in Port Hope should be based primarily on principles that respect Port Hope's own circumstances and objectives.

Port Hope hasn't changed its ward boundaries or council setup since the towns were combined in 2001. But recently, more people have started asking questions about whether the current system is fair. Council agreed to start this review to make sure:

- Everyone is represented fairly,
- The system supports strong democracy, and
- The council reflects what the community needs today.

Based on its experiences in conducting ward boundary reviews across Ontario, the Consultant Team will use **four guiding principles** to help evaluate the current ward system and suggest improvements:

1. **Representation by Population**

Wards should have about the same number of people so that everyone's vote counts equally. A small difference is okay—up to 25% more or less than the “ideal” number—but big differences can be unfair. This also helps make sure councillors have similar workloads.

2. **Consideration of Future Population and Electoral Trends**

Port Hope is growing, so the ward system needs to work not just for the next



election in 2026, but for the next **12 years**. The team will use data like Census numbers, building permits, and development plans to predict future growth and make sure wards stay balanced over time.

3. **Communities of Interest**

Wards shouldn't split up neighbourhoods or groups that share common interests. These might be based on geography, history, culture, or economics. Since Port Hope's current wards are based on the old towns before amalgamation, the team will look at whether those old boundaries still make sense today.

4. **Geographic and Topographic Boundaries**

Natural features (like rivers or hills) and man-made ones (like roads or railways) can help create clear and fair ward boundaries. In rural areas, the size and shape of the ward matter too. Good boundaries should be easy to understand and follow straight lines when possible.

Taken together, these principles will contribute to achieving the overarching principle of "effective representation," which will be discussed below. We will also discuss how these principles apply to Port Hope.

Two points should be noted at the outset, however. First, guiding principles are just that: they are characteristics applied to evaluate a successful ward system. They are not iron-clad rules or obligatory measurements and may be combined differently in various reviews since, as will be seen in Discussion Paper F, they must be applied to the "real world" of Port Hope's geography, history, demographics and values.

Secondly, the previous and following descriptions are "generic" and intended to explain the meaning of the principle as applied in ward boundary reviews conducted by the Consultant Team to evaluate symmetrical ward configurations. Their application to Port Hope's asymmetrical multi-member wards (especially in relation to the principles related to short- and long-term population parity) is the purpose of Discussion Paper F.

Effective Representation: The specific principles listed above are all subject to the overriding principle of "effective representation" as enunciated by the Supreme Court of Canada.¹ The concept of effective representation was derived from the equality provision of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: the Court noted that relative parity of voting power was a prime, but not an exclusive, condition of effective representation since other factors – such as those summarized above – contribute to the achievement of effective representation. The purpose of voting, noted the Court, is to be represented in the deliberations of government in a fair and effective manner and to do so it may be necessary to place a higher priority on principles other than population parity (such as

¹ *Reference re Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.) [1991]*, known as the Carter decision.



representing a community of interest) to create plausible and coherent electoral districts that better contribute to “effective representation” than electoral areas that are equal in population.

Overview: No ward design is likely to meet all the principles in their entirety; however, the best designs maximize adherence to the principles, especially in relation to representation by population and effective representation. It is our understanding of existing case law that deviations from the specific principles can be justified by other criteria drawn from the Carter decision in a manner that is more supportive of effective representation.

Topical Discussion Papers A to F

Port Hope will release several Discussion Papers on its website to help residents understand the different topics being considered in this review:

- **Discussion Paper A:** Understanding The Current System
- **Discussion Paper B:** How Big Should Council Be?
- **Discussion Paper C:** The Component Parts of the Port Hope Council
- **Discussion Paper D:** The Method of Election for Councillors
- ***Discussion Paper E: Guiding Principles to Design Wards***
- **Discussion Paper F:** Why a Ward Boundary Review?

Your input is essential. These papers are here to inform and invite your feedback. Help shape the future of Port Hope’s local government.