



Municipality of Port Hope 2025 Ward Boundary & Council Composition Review

Backgrounder

Discussion Paper F:

Why a Ward Boundary Review?

The goal of the Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review (W.B.&C.C.R.) is to make sure Port Hope's system for electing councillors is fair, balanced, and works well for everyone.

As explained earlier, there are still big questions to answer:

- Will councillors continue to be elected by wards?
- Will the Deputy Mayor be chosen from the elected councillors or through a separate vote?

Even if Port Hope keeps using wards, the current electoral map (which shows how the town is divided into wards) needs to be reviewed (see Figure Fi). These wards are based on population at a certain time—in Port Hope's case, that was 2001. A lot has changed since then.

When Port Hope was first formed in 2001, the population was about 15,600. Today, it's around 17,300, and it could grow to over 21,000 in the next 10 years. As the community grows and changes, the way we elect councillors should change too—especially if the current wards no longer represent people equally.

Even if the town decides to keep the current setup (with one ward electing two councillors and the other electing four), it's still important to check if that system is fair today.



Preliminary Insights into the Port Hope Ward System

Before developing possible alternatives to the current system in the ward boundary review phase, it is appropriate to apply the same guiding principles to the current system to determine whether it is still viable and, if not, what shortcomings need to be considered in designing alternatives. As addressed in Discussion Paper E and earlier, however, Port Hope's wards are not directly comparable to one another for several reasons: they were created with different ward magnitudes, they appear not to have been adopted with regard to what was termed in Discussion Paper D "proportional equality" and each includes a diversity of communities of interest, albeit drawn from the historic separate rural and urban settlements at the western end of Northumberland County.

Representation by Population: One goal of this review is to design a system of representation that achieves (relative) parity in the population of the wards, with some degree of variation acceptable considering population densities and other demographic factors across the Municipality. The indicator of success in a ward design is the extent to which the individual wards approach an "optimal" size.

In a symmetrical ward system where each ward elects the same number of councillors (see Discussion Paper E), optimal size can be understood as a mid-point on a scale where the term "optimal" (O) describes a ward with a population within 5% on either side of the calculated optimal size which is identified by dividing the overall population of the municipality by the number of wards. The classification "below/above optimal" (O+ or O-) is applied to a ward with a population between 6% and 25% on either side of the optimal size. A ward that is labelled "outside the range" (OR+ or OR-) indicates that its population is greater than 25% above or below the optimal ward size. The adoption of a 25% maximum variation is based on federal redistribution legislation, but is widely used in municipalities like Port Hope, where there are urban concentrations of different sizes, as well as extensive rural territory and anticipated residential developments in the future.

The following two figures clearly indicate that neither ward is within the optimal range and suggest that the imbalance has always been present in the Port Hope ward system.

Figure Fii – Population of Wards 2011

Ward	Population 2011	Variance
Ward 1	12,230	1.51 (OR+)
Ward 2	3,984	0.49 (OR-)
Total/Optimal	16,214	8,107



Figure Fiii – Population of Wards 2021

Ward	Population 2021	Variance
Ward 1	13,194	1.53 (OR+)
Ward 2	4,100	0.47 (OR-)
Total/Optimal	17,294	8,647

The present ward boundaries were approved in the Ministerial Order in 2000 as part of “a locally developed restructuring proposal” negotiated under pressure to meet a deadline.¹ This information suggests that a ward system based on simply converting the two pre-amalgamation municipalities into wards and dividing the six council seats between them unevenly (with the weighted vote provision) in what we called the “founding compromise” was never directly intended to meet the representation by population principle since the population of the component parts at that time were significantly different. Instead, a form of “proportional equality” was adopted and remains in place. Although the terminology was not used at the time, the next consideration is to determine how well the distribution of council seats has provided “proportional equality” over time and its implications for the representation by population principle.

The following figures indicate that the wards in Port Hope do not reflect “proportional equality” since the seat distribution does not match the population distribution and the population per councillor varies significantly between the two wards.

Figure Fiv – Comparative Population by Ward 2011

Ward	Population 2011	Seats on Port Hope Council		Population per Councillor	Ratio
		Formula	Actual		
Ward 1	12,230	4.5	4	3,058	1.13
Ward 2	3,984	1.5	2	1,992	0.74
Total/Average	16,214	6	6	2,702	-

¹ See Municipality of Port Hope Staff Report CS-10-25 (*Weighted Voting*) presented to Council May 6, 2025.



Figure Fv – Comparative Population by Ward 2021

Ward	Population 2021	Seats on Port Hope Council		Population per Councillor	Ratio
		Formula	Actual		
Ward 1	13,194	4.6	4	3,299	1.14
Ward 2	4,100	1.4	2	2,050	0.71
Total/Average	17,294	6	6	2,882	-

It is also very important to recognize that the “population per councillor” figure and the ratio in the tables above were calculated to illustrate the point that the distribution of councillors is not consistent with the “proportional equality” formula. In the present Port Hope configuration, in fact, each Ward 1 councillor serves and represents 13,194 residents, not a quarter of the total, and each Ward 2 councillor serves and represents 4,100 residents, not half of the total.

The two existing wards in Port Hope provide neither population parity nor achieve the more complicated “proportional equality” and do not distribute the workload of all councillors equitably. Since the present wards in Port Hope do not meet the representation by population principle, this Review will address this shortcoming by developing wards that place a higher priority on population parity.

Consideration of Future Population and Electoral Trends: Ward boundary reviews consider anticipated population trends to ensure the ward structure provides effective representation for the 2026 municipal election and beyond. Future population growth in Port Hope is forecast be concentrated in the Urban Settlement Area and to a lesser extent in locations like Welcome and eventually in the Wesleyville area. Even modest population growth in the Urban Settlement Area would increase the imbalance between the two wards, while new developments in the present Ward 2 will not overcome the imbalance. If left unchanged, the wards will not likely meet population parity over time and will therefore fall short of this principle as well.

Communities of Interest: Electoral districts in Canada are not traditionally considered to be merely arithmetic divisions of the electorate designed to achieve parity of voting power. Rather, they are part of a system “which gives due weight to voter parity but admits other considerations where necessary”¹. One of the customary other considerations is “community of interest.” The rationale is that electoral districts should,

¹ *Reference re Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)* [1991], known as the Carter decision, page 35.



as far as possible, be cohesive units and areas with common interests related to representation.

As observed in this and other Discussion papers, the two wards in Port Hope are purely embodiments of the pre-amalgamation Hope Township and the Town of Port Hope. There appears to be a strong tendency to assume that simply residing in one of the pre-amalgamation municipalities brings shared “attachments” that must be reflected in the municipal representational process.

Despite the historical identities that may be attached to these former municipalities, each one was - and continues to be - a collection of identifiable neighbourhoods and settlements rather than homogenous and cohesive areas. Within Ward 1, there are distinctive social and residential clusters, some east of the Ganaraska River and others to the west. Within Ward 2, there are agricultural areas but also small, distinct settlements like Welcome, Canton, Osaca and Garden Hill.

Preserving the historical geographic entities as wards after twenty-five years as a single municipality largely because they are familiar hampers the goal of providing equitable and effective representation for all residents, as discussed in relation to achieving population parity.

While the present wards capture the former community of interest symbolized by the two pre-amalgamation municipalities that long-time residents may value, as the Port Hope population and its economy grow and change, a ward system based on other common interests may now be more appropriate.

Geographic and Topographic Boundaries: The boundaries for Port Hope’s two wards are drawn along two features: Highway 401 and the former municipal boundary parallel to Bauch Road from Lake Ontario, which is extended north to Highway 401. The boundary lines themselves are clean, largely recognizable, and long-standing markers. The present ward boundaries meet this principle.

Effective Representation: The specific principles listed above are all subject to the overarching principle of “effective representation,” as articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada. The concept of effective representation stems from the equality provision of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: the Court observed that relative parity of voting power is a key, but not the sole, condition for effective representation, since other factors—such as those summarized above—also contribute to its achievement.

Right now in Port Hope, the way councillors are elected creates some **unequal situations**:

- Some councillors represent **three times as many people** as others.
- Some voters get to choose **two councillors**, while others vote for **four**.
- In rare cases, a councillor might even get to vote **twice** on the same issue.



This setup makes it harder to achieve **effective representation**, which means making sure every resident's voice is heard equally in local government.

When councillors vote on decisions, each vote should represent roughly the same number of people. However, in Port Hope, that's not the case. Some councillors speak for a significantly larger group of residents than others, and some voters have more influence purely based on their location.

This creates a situation where:

- **Votes are not equal** across the municipality.
- **Some voices are louder** than others in council decisions.
- **Democracy feels weaker**, because not everyone is represented fairly.

Overview: No ward system is perfect. It's hard to meet **every principle** exactly. But the best systems follow the most important ones, especially:

- Making sure each councillor represents a **similar number of people**, and
- Ensuring **effective representation** for everyone in the community.

Sometimes, small differences from the rules can be okay, **if they help make the system fairer overall**. That idea comes from a major court decision in Canada (called the **Carter decision**) that says fairness isn't just about numbers, it's also about making sure people are truly represented.

After looking at everything so far, the Consultant Team believes it's time for Port Hope to **review its ward boundaries**. The current system was designed over **20 years ago**, and the town has changed a lot since then.

A fresh look will help make sure:

- Everyone's vote counts equally,
- Councillors represent their communities fairly,
- And Port Hope's local government continues to reflect the needs of its growing and changing population.



Figure Fvi: Existing Port Hope Ward Configuration Evaluation Summary

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle? ¹	Comment
Representation by Population	No	Both wards exceed the $\pm 25\%$ range of variation.
Consideration of Future Population and Electoral Trends	No	Population growth will not overcome the existing population imbalance.
Communities of Interest	Largely Successful	The wards essentially preserve the historic pre-amalgamation municipalities that were dissolved more than twenty-five years ago.
Geographic and Topographic Boundaries	Yes	Clear and recognizable boundaries.
Effective Representation	No	The relationships between constituents and Councillors hinder the achievement of effective representation

¹The degree to which each guiding principle is satisfied is ranked as “**Yes**” (fully satisfied), “**Largely Successful**,” “**Partially Successful**,” or “**No**” (not satisfied).



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.