



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT – Electoral System

SUBJECT: Electoral System: Ward vs At-Large

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Susan Moore, Treasurer/Deputy Clerk

FROM: Paul Greenwood, CAO/Deputy Clerk

MEETING Date: July 15, 2020

Recommendation:

THAT Council moves forward with collecting input from the community on their support for electing Councillors in wards or electing Councillors through an at-large vote.

Background:

Council passed Resolution 1897-18 on November 6, 2018 directing the Clerk to proceed with the process of dissolving the Ward Electoral System in Shuniah and further directed staff on February 11, 2020 to Administration to bring forward a report reviewing the Ward system and include comparable communities.

Our current 2 ward system establishes representation of our elected officials into 3 Councillors from MacGregor Ward and 1 Councillor from McTavish Ward and a Mayor who runs at large. An eligible elector in Shuniah is entitled to vote for the Mayor and only for the Councillor/s dependent on the ward in which the voter resides. This is not the same for an eligible candidate who may run in either ward regardless of which ward they reside or own property.

Discussion:

There is no standard model of representation in Ontario municipalities. The *Municipal Act, 2001*, at s. 222 (1) authorizes a municipality “to divide or redivide the municipality into wards or to dissolve the existing wards” through a by-law, and at s. 217 (1) (4) 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.” Beyond those points, though, there are no conditions or constraints imposed by the Province to help formulate a local decision to adopt one electoral system or another.

Every Ontario municipality has the authority (*Municipal Act, 2001*, s. 217) to consider dissolving a ward system in favour of a system in which Councillors are elected in an at-large (general vote) system. While there are clearly differences in the impact of each system, there are no “standard” sets of conditions that favour one method rather than the other. Some municipalities approximately the same size as Trent Hills use wards and others do not.

To many people, an at-large system is the most appropriate election method in municipalities where the population is small. On that count, a Municipality like the Shuniah with a population of approximately 2,900 could be considered “small” but, as noted already, there is no definition or conventional benchmark to apply. A more important determining factor in Ontario has been amalgamation; that is, when a new municipality has been created out of several municipalities, representation is often built around the pre-existing units that serve as wards for the new municipality.

Council's Composition vs Ward Population:

Based on the total number of electors from the 2018 Election, the ratio of electors to Councillors is almost the same in each Ward. The MacGregor Ward had a total of 3,015 eligible electors and McTavish has 833 making the total number of electors 3,848. Based on 3 Council seats representing the MacGregor Ward there are 1,005 electors per representative. McTavish with one seat, represents 859 electors.

Council should fully review the reasons for dissolving the wards and what if any issues have risen from the current system or if residents have voiced concerns of the current system which would warrant ward changes.

If Council wishes to proceed with the dissolving of the wards or to change the composition of Council then a By-law to be effective for the next election, should be considered early in 2021 to avoid delays from appeals past the December 2021 deadline. If an appeal is received the OMB's decision will prevail.

Attachments

Appendix A - Alternative attributes of ward and at-large systems

Appendix B – Area One Municipality Council Composition and Electoral System

Resolution 1897-18