



Phase One Report

Municipality of North Perth

Council Composition & Ward Boundary Review

July 10, 2023

Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.
905-272-3600
info@watsonecon.ca



Table of Contents

	Page
1. Background.....	1
1.1 Setting.....	1
1.2 Parameters for an Electoral Review	4
2. Phase 1 Options	6
2.1 Mayor.....	6
2.2 Deputy Mayor	6
2.3 County Councillor	8
2.4 Councillors.....	10
2.4.1 The Method of Election for Councillors:	10
2.4.2 The Number of Wards and Ward Magnitudes:.....	11
3. What We Heard	14
4. What should be the composition of North Perth Council?	17



1. Background

The Municipality of North Perth has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Robert J. Williams, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review (C.C.W.B.R.).

The primary purpose of the study is to prepare North Perth Council to make decisions on whether to maintain the existing council composition and ward structure or to adopt an alternative. This Report summarizes the questions under consideration in the initial phase of the review, provides background to them and seeks direction from Council on a second phase of the review.

This C.C.W.B.R. is premised on the legitimate democratic expectation that municipal representation in North Perth will be effective, equitable, and an accurate reflection of the contemporary¹ distribution of communities and people across the municipality.

Questions that are integral to a comprehensive review include the following:

- Is it appropriate to consider changing the composition of Council as part of the review (that is, the size and the way members of Council are elected)?
- In particular, is it appropriate to consider changing the way the Deputy Mayor and County Councillor are elected and, if so, whether either modification should lead to a change in the overall composition of Council?
- Is it appropriate to consider dissolving the wards to elect all Councillors at-large (in what the *Municipal Act, 2001* calls a “general vote” system)?
- If Councillors continue to be elected in wards, what is the optimal number of wards and how many Councillors will be elected in each one?
- If Councillors continue to be elected in wards, what parameters and guiding principles will be observed in the design of the wards?

1.1 Setting

The Municipality of North Perth came into existence on January 1, 1998 as a result of a Ministerial Restructuring Order for the County of Perth dated June 26, 1997. The new

¹ While the Review will occur in 2023, any changes adopted by Council will not take effect until the 2026 municipal election.



municipality, originally called the Town of North Perth, is an amalgamation of the former Townships of Wallace and Elma and the former Town of Listowel. The names of the three pre-amalgamation municipalities still feature on the Municipality's logo despite the fact that they ceased to exist in 1998.

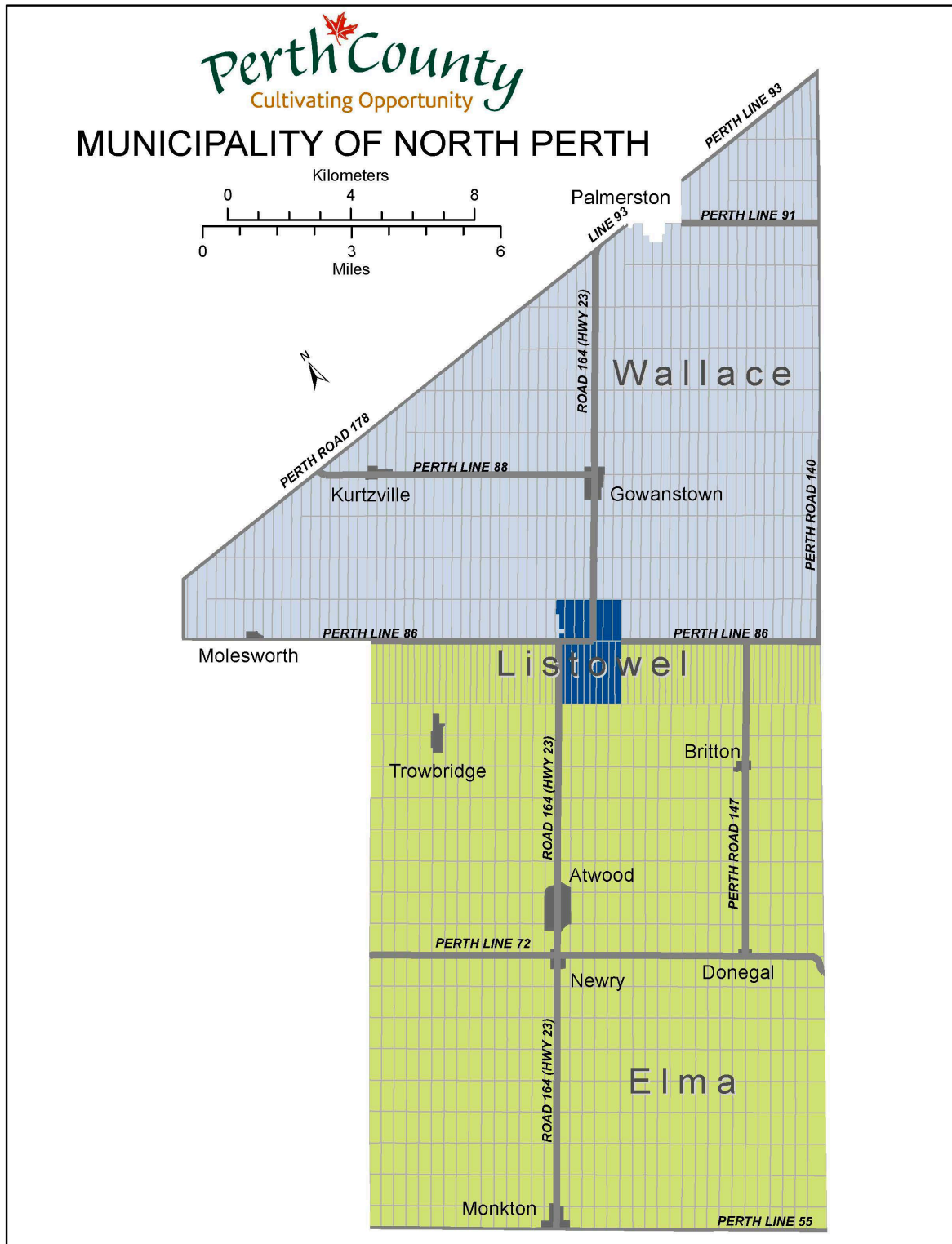
The impetus for amalgamation originated at Queen's Park but, despite some local resistance, Countywide negotiations led to the creation of the new municipality that would be governed by a council structure that reflected the three participating municipalities.

In 2023, the Municipal Council consists of ten members: a Mayor and Deputy Mayor, each elected at-large, and eight Councillors elected in three wards, two of which elect three Councillors each and one ward that elects two Councillors. The boundaries of the three wards basically follow the boundaries of the three pre-amalgamation municipalities and have only been adjusted slightly since North Perth was created (Figure 1).

The Municipality has three seats on Perth County Council: the individuals occupying the offices of Mayor and Deputy Mayor are members of Perth County Council by being elected to those two offices. The third representative is appointed by Council from among the eight ward Councillors. Each of the three representatives is entitled to cast two votes at County Council under its weighted vote formula.



Figure 1: Existing Ward Configuration





1.2 Parameters for an Electoral Review

Initial consultations on the C.C.W.B.R. started with Council and senior staff in late 2021 when the project was put on hold during the election year (2022). Activities have been accelerated in 2023 through the publication of background resources to provide information for residents to better understand the electoral system in North Perth and are available on the municipal website: www.northperth.ca/CCWBR. These documents review some of the implications of possible modifications, as well as to assist Council in making determinations about whether to change some of the existing electoral arrangements and the alternatives open to it. Live and virtual public consultations were held to seek comments and evaluations from residents of North Perth (section 3) and the insights gained from these activities will be included in this Report.

There are four basic and inter-connected components of an electoral system that lower-tier municipalities in Ontario such as North Perth can address under existing provincial legislation:

- a) the overall size of the council of a local municipality (referred to as “the composition of Council” in the *Municipal Act, 2001* s. 217 (1));
- b) the method of election for Councillors that may be “by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards” (*Municipal Act, 2001* s. 217 (1) 4);
- c) assuming that Council will be elected by wards, the actual ward configuration, including the number of wards and the number of Councillors to be elected in each ward (what may be termed the “ward magnitude”); and
- d) assuming that Council will be elected by wards, the boundaries of the wards (as implied in the *Municipal Act, 2001* s. 222 (1) that authorizes a municipality “to divide or redivide the municipality into wards or to dissolve the existing wards”).¹

Components a), b) and c) are addressed in Phase 1 of the C.C.W.B.R. while Phase 2 (Ward Boundary Alternatives) will consider component d). The development of boundaries for wards will be influenced by the directions of Council emanating from the council composition phase of the review but will be framed by a set of guiding principles

¹ Note that by-laws in relation to Council composition (s. 217) are not open to appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal, although by-laws amending ward boundaries are.



that serve to achieve effective representation in North Perth¹. It is also important to note that Council has the authority to decline to make changes to any or all of these features of its electoral structure and indeed is under no obligation to consider them, even in response to a petition submitted by electors related to wards (*Municipal Act, 2001 s. 223*).

Many of the questions to be addressed in Phase 1 will not be reviewed in detail in this Report since residents can still access the five Topical Discussion Papers that shape the matters to be placed before Council in Phase 1. See www.northperth.ca/CCWBR.

The sequence of questions for the council composition phase of the review will be adjusted in this report since the determination of an optimal size – discussed originally in the Topical Discussion Papers A and B to provide background for the review - is better seen as the outcome of other specific decisions; in other words, as will be explained, the actual size of Council should be considered to be a result of the council composition review rather than an arbitrary constraint or limitation imposed at the outset of the council composition review phase.

However, as illustrated in Topical Discussion Paper B, a ten-member municipal council in a municipality the size of North Perth is unusual but the composition of local councils in Ontario varies widely so there is no reliable “right answer”.² For some residents and members of Council it is judged to be too big. Nevertheless, other members of Council and the majority of residents who participated in the survey indicated that they believed the council is “the right size.”

Deliberately retaining the ten-member council is an option available to Council, just as much as would be a decision to elect a Council of a different size. To make the council composition review more manageable, the Consultant Team will start with what is familiar, “the way we have always done it” (a ten-member council) rather than offer Council initial choices based on alternate numbers. Consultations with members of Council indicate that a ten-member council has been generally successful in managing

¹ Topical Discussion Paper F will address the guiding principles and will be posted on the North Perth website following Council’s response to this report, scheduled for July 10, 2023.

² See Figure B in Topical Discussion Paper B to compare North Perth’s council composition to the other municipalities in Perth County and to other municipalities in Ontario.



the governmental and representative functions needed for North Perth over the last twenty-five years. However, it is possible that the size of council could be reduced but as suggested above, this outcome will be dependent on several other considerations set out in this Report.

2. Phase 1 Options

2.1 Mayor

One of the ten positions on the North Perth Council is not open to modification in the council composition review: the *Municipal Act, 2001* section 217 (1) specifies that in a local municipality “There shall be a minimum of five members, one of whom shall be the head of council” and that the “head of council shall be elected by general vote.” The 1997 Ministerial Restructuring Order adds two further limitations: in addition to the head of council, two other members of the Council are required to represent North Perth on Perth County Council, one of whom is designated Deputy Mayor and the other County Councillor. However, the way these offices are filled – and the remaining Council positions – can be modified under section 217 (‘The members, other than the head of council, shall be elected by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards’). This Report addresses what options are open to Council and some of their implications.

2.2 Deputy Mayor

It is interesting to note that there is actually no specific reference in the Ontario *Municipal Act, 2001* to the office of Deputy Mayor¹ although the position is formally included in many County arrangements (such as Perth).

There are two basic governance and electoral practices where the office exists. The position can be open to any qualified elector who files a nomination paper to run for the office (that is directly) and the office is filled on the basis of the votes cast on a separate

¹ The term “mayor” does not appear in the *Act* either, having been replaced by the generic label “head of council,” although “mayor” used in the *City of Toronto Act*.



ballot in a “general vote” (at-large) system. This appears to be the most common method at present across Ontario and is the practice in North Perth.

However, in some other cases, the position is determined indirectly by a majority vote of the elected members of Council in a secret ballot and the candidate pool for the office is limited to the people who have already been elected to Council. [OBJ]

In the course of recent discussions with another municipality, the Consultant Team was provided with the following table compiled from 82 responses to a request for information on the way Deputy Mayors were selected.

Figure 2: Deputy Mayor Selection Process within Ontario

The Office of Deputy Mayor is filled by . . .	Number of municipalities adopting this method
Election at-large by the electorate (by position or the elected member with the most votes in an at-large council election)	42
Elected/appointed by Mayor or Council	21
Rotation (a Councillor fills the position for a limited period of time)	19

The first two alternatives in Figure 2 are open to North Perth: that is, to continue with a separate position or to adopt the indirect model. In fact, the 1997 Ministerial Restructuring Order originally identified “a deputy head of council” as one of the members of the new North Perth council who would be appointed by a vote of council (that is, indirectly). After a single election, North Perth Council passed By-Law No. 93-AD-1999 (December 20, 1999) to alter its composition in two ways: to require the position of “deputy head of council” be filled directly by general vote and to reduce the number of ward councillors from nine to eight, thereby retaining a ten-member council.

All roles an incumbent Deputy Mayor is expected to play - beyond serving on the two councils - are entirely subject to local arrangements and can include, for example, chairing or participating in certain committees or performing various duties in the absence of, or on behalf of, the mayor.



The key point for the Council Composition Review is whether the office should continue to be a separately elected position. In our consultations, those who support the election of a Deputy Mayor by general vote frame their assessment around the Deputy Mayor's role on Perth County Council and the importance of representing the whole municipality there. As well, those who seek the office do so on the expectation of an additional workload. On the other hand, winning an at-large election across the whole municipality requires more resources and has tended, over the years, to favour candidates who "can get the Listowel vote."

There is no definitive or indisputable advantage from employing one method or the other to determine the Deputy Mayor, although familiarity and the municipality's own experiences with the direct election method (plus the arrangements in many other municipalities) suggest that a modification that would make the Deputy Mayor position an auxiliary role played by one of the ward Councillors is not widely supported.

2.3 County Councillor

Another component of North Perth's council is the Municipality's third representative on County Council, authorized through the Restructuring Order as "one elected member appointed by the members of the council." Like other aspects of municipal representation in Ontario, though, there is an alternative method of identifying the office-holder, namely treating it as a separate elected office, just as the position of Deputy Mayor is presently understood in North Perth. The closest parallel would be the elected County Councillor as found in Wellington County, although it must be noted at the outset that the Wellington County Councillors only sit on County Council and not on the lower-tier council. [\[6\]](#)

The County Councillor's position in North Perth is therefore a hybrid: it is in part like the Mayor and Deputy Mayor because of the County role but with individual ward responsibilities while it is like the other ward councillors with additional County responsibilities. It is also remarkable in that the County Councillor is directly elected to serve in one capacity but indirectly to serve in the other and represents the municipality as a whole in one role but only one of the wards in another.

These aspects prompt us to seek the rationale for the present arrangement rather than simply accepting it because it is familiar. Just as the position of Deputy Mayor could be



changed from a direct election model to an indirect model, could the election of County Councillor be changed from an indirect election model to a direct model?

Our research has discovered that this is actually not a new idea since in one of the models for reform in Perth County discussed in 1996 there was a proposal that “North and East Perth elect, at large, a mayor and two county councillors” along with local councillors elected by wards to sit with the mayor and county councillors on the lower tier council.¹ While it was not implemented at that time, it might be worth considering whether the third county position could be filled by a general vote. Four reasons can be considered:

- **Consistency:** if the Deputy Mayor is elected by general vote to represent North Perth on County Council, why should the third person playing that role be selected differently? We note that the *Municipal Act, 2001* permits a mix of wards and general vote systems, but it is important to understand the rationale for a mixed system to elect two people playing much the same role on County Council.
- **Eligibility:** while any eligible elector in North Perth can seek one of the two designated positions on Perth County Council (Mayor and Deputy Mayor) by winning office through a municipal-wide election, the County Councillor can only be someone who has been elected for one municipal office but is then selected to serve in a second one.
- **Accountability:** the Deputy Mayor can be held accountable by the whole municipality for his or her performance on County Council; the County Councillor is accountable at election time to a single ward where County issues may not be given much attention.
- **Expectations:** where a candidate for Deputy Mayor campaigns in the expectation of an additional workload from serving on two councils, a ward councillor would normally not do so. As well, the County Councillor brings two different mindsets to the role, one ward-based and the other municipal-wide. Neither of the other two County representatives must juggle these perspectives.

¹ Municipal Reform Framework Workshop, August 8, 1996, page 12. A copy of this document was provided to the Consultant Team by Ellen Thomas of the Stratford-Perth Archives.



While the method of election of the North Perth County Councillor could be changed from an indirect to a direct election format, there are few precedents and no definitive conclusions about which model is preferrable over the long run.

However, depending on the importance attached to County business today and in the foreseeable future, it might be worth considering making the third county representative another position filled by a general vote since it is explicitly treated in the current configuration as a supplementary role and can only to be filled on by someone already serving as an elected ward Councillor. In addition, the alternative of “extracting” the position of County Councillor from the pool of eight ward councillors could be considered as part of a strategy to adjust the overall size of Council, should there be an appetite for that outcome from the council composition review.

2.4 Councillors

The fourth component of North Perth’s council is the Councillors themselves, presently eight in number. There is no standard or “appropriate” number of Councillors, as long as the Council includes the minimum five members including the head of council. This means that the number of Councillors can be changed in the light of decisions made either to modify or retain the method of election for the Deputy Mayor and/or the County Councillor.

2.4.1 The Method of Election for Councillors:

The *Municipal Act, 2001* offers no guidance on the question of whether a municipality should elect its councillors “by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards.” In addition, there is no consistency across Ontario municipalities: see Figure B in Topical Discussion Paper B.

The distinction between the two systems is simple. In one system, referred to as a “general vote” system in the *Municipal Act, 2001* (or as an “at-large” system in popular terminology), the municipality is a single electoral district which elects all municipal Councillors. In other words, the entire municipality can be considered a “multi-member” electoral district. In the other system (a ward system), the municipality is divided into a number of electoral districts that elect representatives in separate contests. Within this arrangement, the “district magnitude” (that is the number of seats to be elected in each district) may vary from one (a “single-member” ward) to some larger number (a “multi-



member” ward), or in the case of North Perth the number of seats varies from ward to ward. This topic will be the subject of the next section of this Report.

The Municipality of North Perth was established in 1998 with a ward system to elect councillors but it presently also includes an at-large (general vote) feature, namely the method used to elect the Deputy Mayor. A ward system was integral to the transition from three separate component parts into the new municipality. Maintaining a ward system requires a rationale rather than simply being accepted because it is familiar.

The Consultant Team would not claim that there is a definitively “better” system. Rather, the method used to elect councillors should fit the contemporary municipality; the appropriateness and implications of the two systems in North Perth are examined in depth in Topical Discussion Paper D. Given the geographic size, the distribution of population and the significant differences between the rural and urban communities in North Perth, for many residents a ward system continues to be appropriate. Those who are critical of wards as such want Councillors who look at North Perth as a whole rather than being tied to the historic parts of the municipality. However, this is not a widely held perspective among survey respondents.

Just as important are the residents who believe that the present wards do not represent certain localities fairly; some argue that Listowel is under-represented and others that Listowel has too much influence. Addressing these shortcomings would be the goal of Phase 2 if there is agreement that a ward system should continue.

2.4.2 The Number of Wards and Ward Magnitudes:

The Municipality of North Perth and three other new municipalities were created in Perth County in 1998 out of fourteen existing municipalities. [OBJ] This arrangement was the result of directions issued by the provincial government of the day to decrease the number of municipalities and municipal elected officials across Ontario. The 1997 Ministerial Restructuring Order established that in all four cases the councils of the new municipalities in Perth County would be elected in wards that were defined by the pre-amalgamation municipal boundaries of their component parts.

In two cases - Perth East and Perth South - the wards would be symmetrical; that is, each ward would elect the same number of Councillors. In the other two municipalities – West Perth and North Perth - representation would be asymmetrical; that is, the number of seats allocated to the wards varied. This model of representation is a way to elect a



municipal council where the population is not distributed uniformly across the new municipality without having to draw or re-draw ward boundaries – a potentially more convenient and politically palatable configuration than designing an original and symmetrical representative system as part of the restructuring exercise. The arrangement may be referred to as “proportional equality”: for example, if an area has twice the population of another it would have twice as many seats or an area with a third more population than another might have three seats while the other has two.

This is the system in place in North Perth where today the Listowel and Elma Wards each elect three Councillors but Wallace Ward elects two. A council composed in this way was an integral part of the Ministerial Restructuring Order and can be considered a “founding compromise” that aimed at assigning a proportionate share of Council seats for each of the pre-amalgamation municipalities and guaranteed rural representation on council, presumably in order to make amalgamation more acceptable. In our professional assessment, proportional equality should not necessarily be considered a permanent principle in the face of ongoing changes in population numbers over the last twenty-five years and the increasingly urban population of North Perth, although the nature of the municipality unquestionably requires protecting a rural voice on council.

Population figures available to the Consultant Team demonstrate conclusively that while “proportional equality” was achieved under the 1997 Ministerial Restructuring Order, it was soon abandoned under By-Law No. 93-AD-1999 (see above) and no longer provides equitable representation to the residents of North Perth.

Figure 3: 1998 Electoral Structure

Pre-Amalgamation Municipality	Population 1996	Local Seats on North Perth Council	Population per Local Councillor	Variance/ Councillor
Elma	3,978	3	1,326	1.03
Listowel	5,262	4	1,754	1.02
Wallace	2,382	2	1,191	0.92
Total	11,622	9	1,453	



Figure 4: 1999 Electoral Structure

Pre-Amalgamation Municipality	Population 1996	Local Seats on North Perth Council	Population per Local Councillor	Variance/ Councillor
Elma	3,978	3	1,326	0.91
Listowel	5,262	3	1,754	1.21
Wallace	2,382	2	1,191	0.82
Total	11,622	8	1,453	

Figure 5: 2021 Electoral Structure

Pre-Amalgamation Municipality	Population 2021	Local Seats on North Perth Council	Population per Local Councillor	Variance/ Councillor
Elma	3,940	3	1,313	0.68
Listowel	9,460	3	3,153	1.62
Wallace	2,150	2	1,075	0.55
Total	15,550	8	1,944	

The basic question is whether “proportional equality” is still a defensible and achievable basis for wards in North Perth, given the constraints imposed in a three-ward system electing eight councillors that adheres to the historic boundaries of the three pre-amalgamation municipalities. Furthermore, the present arrangement is not equitable since some residents of North Perth have three votes to cast for ward councillors while others have only two.

In the professional judgement of the Consultant Team, North Perth’s existing ward system is no longer justifiable since there are other models of representation, primarily involving a symmetrical allocation of seats that could elect one or more councillors per ward that can achieve relative parity in the population of the wards, with some degree of variation acceptable in light of population densities and demographic factors across the



Municipality. Phase 2 of this review would aim to provide symmetrical options to address these present limitations.

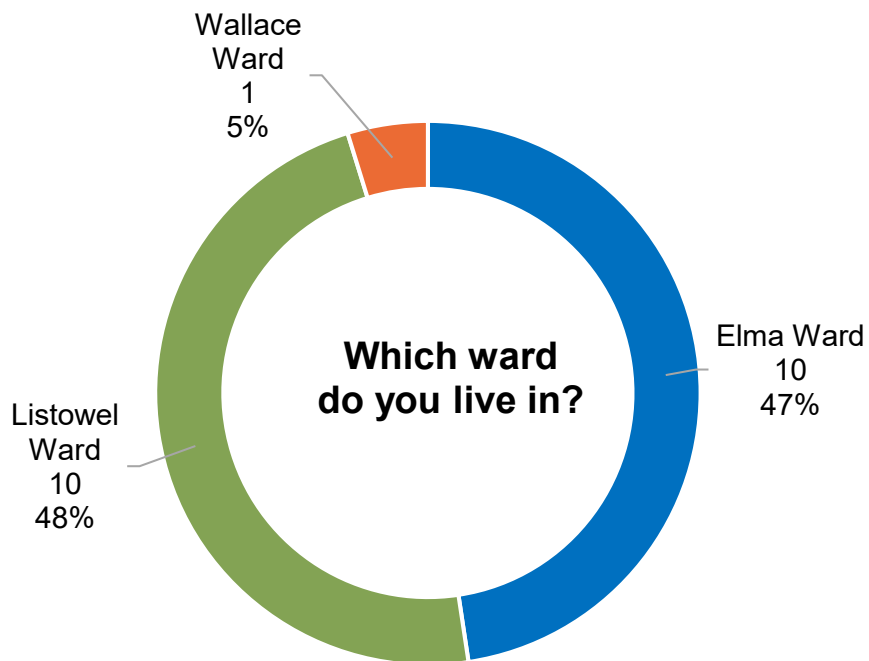
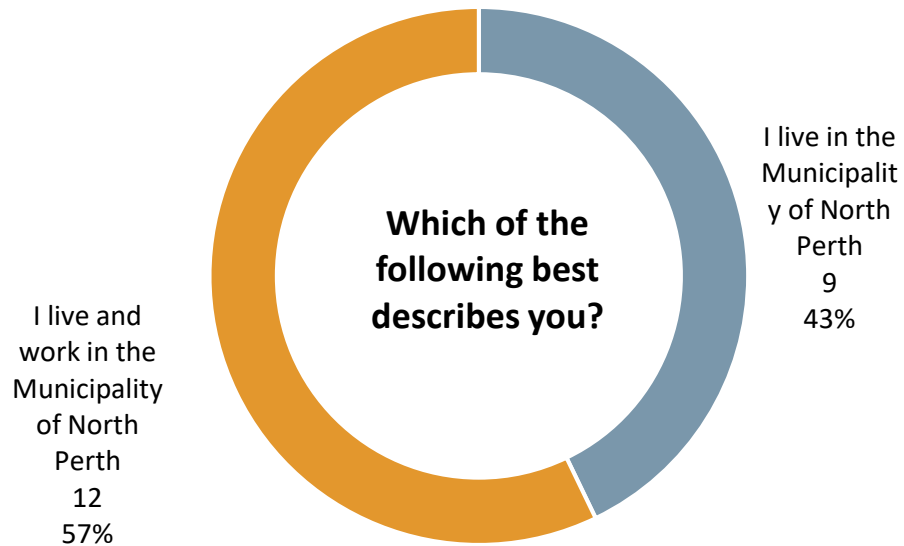
In addition, the composition of council should be based on single-member wards to eliminate the confusing and potentially unfair multi-member system established at amalgamation. The primary strength of a multi-member ward model is the perception that it is more likely that a constituent will be able to get the ear of a councillor even if one of the ward councillors is unavailable or unsympathetic to the constituent's concerns. For others, having two or three choices may assist in strategic voting; for example, an elector may choose to vote for both male and female candidates, or for incumbents and fresh candidates rather than having to vote for one or the other.

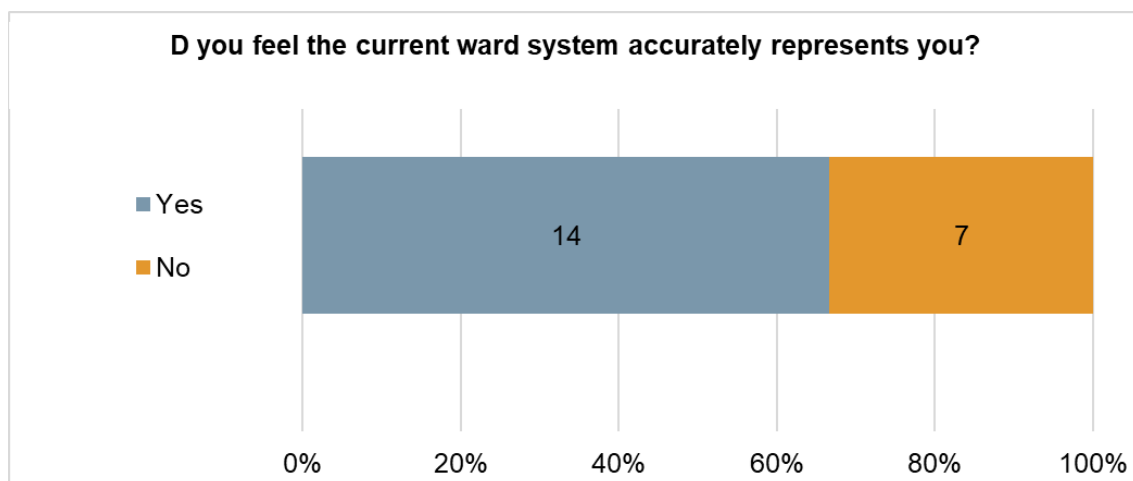
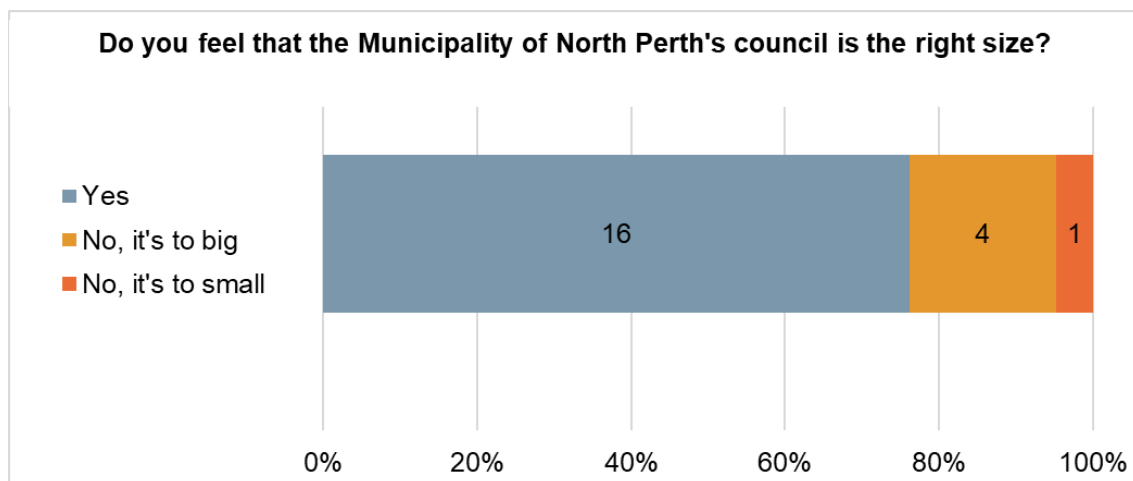
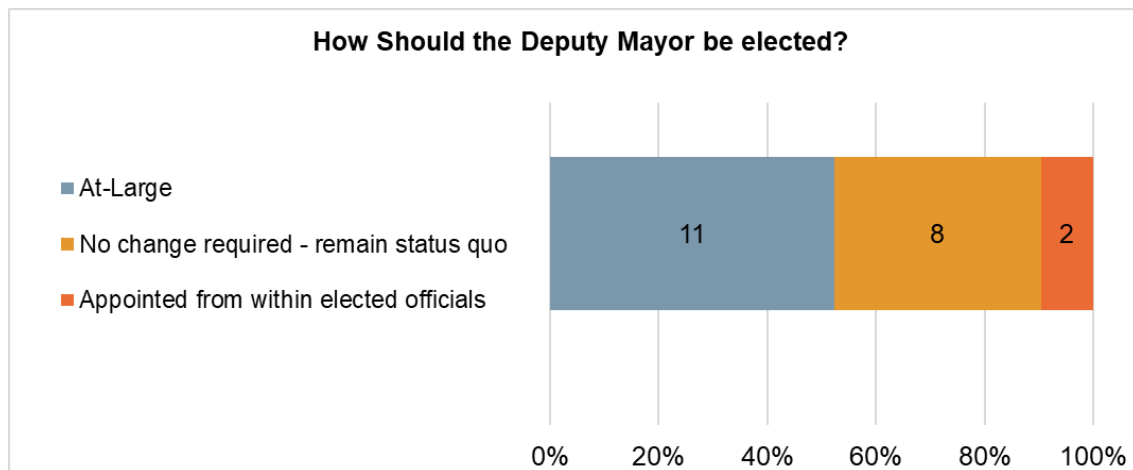
The shortcomings are more numerous: the multi-member ward system contributes to a larger Council which could complicate and prolong debate. It also increases the size of wards (since there are currently only three in North Perth) which makes it more difficult for Councillors to stay on top of issues across their entire ward. It can also lead to confusion when a constituent approaches more than one Councillor, each of whom then approaches staff for assistance.

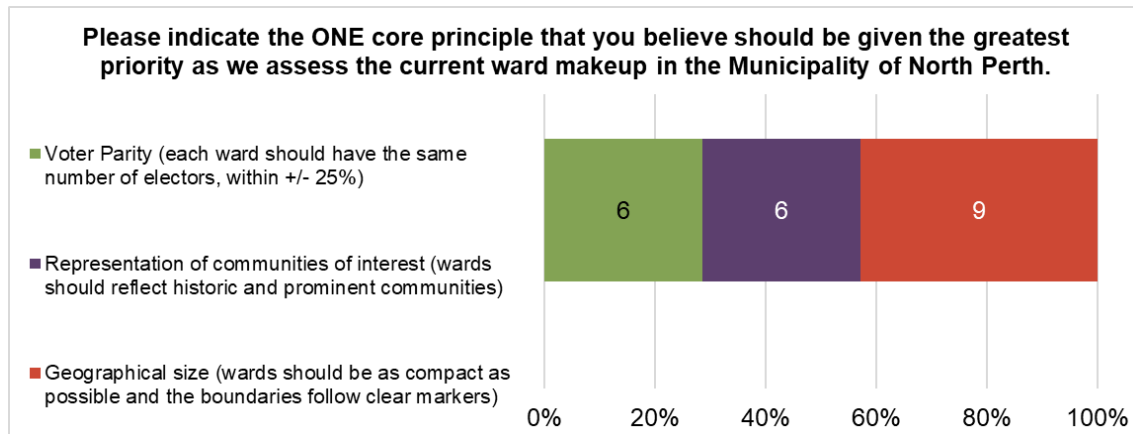
While many residents and councillors are familiar – and comfortable – with this multi-member system, and would be happy to see it continue, a larger number of smaller-sized single-member wards can allow for greater flexibility in designing wards that better reflect the present and future population distribution in North Perth.

3. What We Heard

The Consultant team engaged with members of the Municipality of North Perth over the months of May and June through two in-person public open houses (held on June 7), one virtual open house (held on May 31) and an online survey. A summary of the survey responses are presented below.







4. What should be the composition of North Perth Council?

The four components of the present council structure (Mayor, Deputy Mayor, County Councillor and ward Councillors) add up to a ten-member Council. The Consultant Team's working assumption is that ten (and no more) is the preferred number but that a case can be made for a reduction, primarily as a consequence of the way nine of the members of Council are to be elected in 2026 and beyond. As discussed, this could include changes to the way the Deputy Mayor and County Councillor are elected but also by reconfiguring the number of wards and the ward magnitudes.

With all of this in mind, the Consultant Team encourages Council to consider new ward scenarios for North Perth built around six, seven or eight single-member wards in Phase 2 of this review. Topical Discussion paper F will set out four guiding principles to evaluate the present ward system and to formulate alternative options that meet the overarching principle of effective representation.

As has been observed earlier in this Report, North Perth council has the legislative authority to make a number of changes to the Municipality's electoral system; after twenty-five years in operation, if nothing else, it is time for a "tune-up."