

2023 Council Composition & Ward Boundary Review Municipality of North Perth

Discussion Paper C: The Component Parts of the North Perth Council

Some components of North Perth Council are outside the control of the municipality: there must be a “head of council” elected by general vote and two members of the municipal council are required to represent North Perth on Perth County Council, one of whom is designated in the Ministerial Restructuring Order as the Deputy Mayor. The position of Mayor and the way that person is elected are not open to modification in this review. However, the remainder of the Council can be reconstituted in a variety of ways, should the community and Council see some value in changing the status quo.

The 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 established through the Ministerial Restructuring Order for the County of Perth) and there are varying governance and electoral practices related to identifying the individual who fulfills the office of Deputy Mayor.

Given that someone is required to play this role on Perth County Council, a fundamental question for this review is “who should elect the Deputy Mayor?” There are two basic approaches. The position can be open to any qualified elector who files a nomination paper to run specifically for the office and the position is filled on the basis of the votes cast on a separate ballot in a “general vote” (at-large) system. This is a common method present across Ontario and is the practice in North Perth. In this format, the office of Deputy Mayor is the second component of the composition of North Perth Council (after the “head of council”) and is one of the ten designated seats on Council.

However, in some other cases across Ontario, the position is determined by a majority vote of the elected members of Council in a secret ballot and the candidate pool for the

¹ The term “mayor” does not appear in the *Act* either, having been replaced by the generic label “head of council,” although “mayor” used in the *City of Toronto Act*.



office is limited to the people who have already been elected to Council.² In this indirect format, the office of Deputy Mayor can be considered a subcategory of Council and is not counted separately in the composition of Council. It should be noted that the Consultant Team has worked with municipalities that have switched from one method to the other as part of a composition review, some moving from direct election to indirect and others vice versa.

Both of these alternatives are open to North Perth: that is, to continue with a separate position or to adopt the indirect model. At the present time, although the Deputy Mayor is chosen by direct election in a general vote (at-large) system, the Ministerial Restructuring Order for the County of Perth 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. After a single election, North Perth Council passed By-Law No. 93-AD-1999 (December 20, 1999) to alter its composition to elect the position of Deputy Mayor by general vote and to reduce the number of ward councillors from nine to eight.

As discussed earlier, the position of Deputy Mayor actually has no legislative status and was instituted in North Perth by means of a Ministerial Order as part of the governing structure for Perth County. Other than serving on Perth County Council, all other roles incumbents are expected to play are entirely subject to local arrangements and can include, for example, chairing certain committee meetings or performing various duties in the absence of, or on behalf of, the Mayor.

On our interviews with council, some members of council did not view the Deputy Mayor’s duties as onerous, an assessment that is reflected in part on the compensation attached to the role. In North Perth, the Deputy Mayor’s remuneration is marginally higher than the amount paid to the ward Councillors (approximately \$18,700 compared to \$16,200 in 2020) but significantly less than the amount paid to the Mayor (\$28,400) which may suggest the role is viewed as closer to the former than the latter.³

² Figure B indicates a different method to elect the Deputy Mayor in the Township of Perth South, albeit in a general vote system for all members of council. The Deputy Mayor is the elected Councillor who receives the most votes.

² At the County level, the gap is narrower but mayors are compensated at a higher rate than deputy mayors and other county councillors: mayors receive approximately \$18,300, deputy mayors \$13,900 and other county councillors \$13,800. See County of Perth, 2020 Council Statement of Remuneration & Expenses.



The key point for the Council Composition Review is whether the office should continue to be a separately elected position and it is insightful that Councillors have contrasting views on the question. 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 that role to the Municipality:

- The Deputy Mayor should be elected at-large to represent the whole municipality and to be interested in serving the whole municipality. It is more onerous to run at-large and requires a different mindset than being a ward Councillor.⁴
- The role of Deputy Mayor is getting important enough that the voters should have a say, not just the ten people on council. They are on County Council to represent the whole municipality. There is an additional workload, but people who run for that office have come to expect it.
- Interviews attested to the demands placed upon the Deputy Mayor to undertake much more County-related work than North Perth-related work, at roughly an 80:20 ratio.

Other Councillors saw the role differently:

- An appointed Deputy Mayor would be better; it is more ceremonial, there is no real role for the Deputy Mayor. It could be a kind of training ground for serving as Mayor but in my experience each one carves out their own role anyway.
- It is not necessary to have the Deputy Mayor elected at-large: the duties are not onerous – it is whatever is delegated by the Mayor and those are largely procedural roles, not running the business of the Municipality like the Mayor.
- We could each do the job ourselves.

Another perspective pertains to the distribution of population across North Perth, namely the potential significance of the largest settlement area in North Perth:

- I know it would be more expensive to run at-large, but the results would be influenced by whoever can get the Listowel vote.

⁴ It is curious that this viewpoint does not apply to the municipality's third representative on Perth County Council but the role played by that person and how the position is filled was not discussed in the interviews. The topic will be discussed again below.



- It took a number of years for a non-Listowel candidate to get elected.

As discussed above, there is no definitive or indisputable advantage from employing one method or the other to determine the Deputy Mayor. Our intention here is to stimulate some discussion in North Perth about whether to confirm the direct election method, thereby leaving eight further places to fill or to consider a modification that would make the Deputy Mayor position an auxiliary role played by one of “the nine”, comparable to the role played now by the County Councillor.

County Councillor: The third component of North Perth’s council (beyond the Mayor and Deputy Mayor) 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.” As opposed to the previous two components, the position is not counted as an identifiable part of the composition of Council but can be seen as a sub-set of the elected Councillors.

This position was earlier described as a secondary or supplementary role that is filled by one of the ward Councillors; in other words, this individual is elected to represent the municipality as a whole in one role but is elected to represent only one of the wards in the other. The County Councillor’s position is therefore a hybrid: it is in part like the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in terms of the County role but is associated with the responsibilities of an individual ward. At the same time, it corresponds to the role played by the other ward councillors with added County responsibilities. It is also unique in that the County Councillor is directly elected to serve in one capacity but indirectly to serve in the other.

Like other aspects of municipal representation in Ontario, though, there is an alternative method of identifying the County Councillor; that is, it can be treated as a separate component of the municipal council, 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 recognized at the outset that the Wellington County Councillors only sit on County Council and not on the lower-tier council.

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 Perth and Perth East 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. While it was not implemented then, it might be worth considering whether the third county position could be filled by a general vote and what the implications might be.

Four reasons can be considered:

Consistency

consistency: if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are 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 the present mixed system to elect people playing much the same role on County Council.

Eligibility

eligibility: 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 position can only be filled by someone who has been elected for one municipal office but is then selected to serve in a second one.

Accountability

accountability: the Mayor and Deputy Mayor can be held accountable at election time 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.

Expectation

expectations: a member of Council was quoted above in relation to the expectations surrounding running for and serving as Deputy Mayor: it “requires a different mindset than being a ward Councillor.” If this is the case, is the County Councillor also expected to bring that different perspective even though she or he is elected as a ward Councillor?



As we have observed at several points in this paper, there are no definitive solutions; we did not seek insights into this question in our initial interviews and it may be that the questions we have raised are not seen as requiring change. However, depending on the importance attached to County business today and in the foreseeable future, it might be worth considering making the third county position one filled directly by a general vote rather than as a supplementary role that can only to be filled 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.

Ward Councillors⁵: The fourth component of North Perth’s council is the Councillors themselves, presently eight in number. As noted in Discussion paper B, there is no standard or “appropriate” number of Councillors, which means that the number of Councillors can be changed in the light of decisions made to modify the method of election for the Deputy Mayor and/or the County Councillor.

Going back full circle to the beginning of this paper, should there be no support for changing the role and election of the Deputy Mayor and Council Councillor, the number of Councillors should be based on identifying a suitable number to play the roles expected of them (see Discussion paper B). Eight is the present number but is the result of a deliberate decision made in 1999 to reduce the number of ward councillors from nine to eight. A change to some other number is possible but should be seen as one part of the larger composition configuration.

⁵ The term “ward councillor” is used here since that is the present designation. Discussion Paper D discusses the possibility that Councillors in North Perth could, in future be elected through a general vote system.