

Township of Springwater 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper C: The Component Parts of the Springwater Council

Some components of Springwater Council are outside the control of the municipality: there must be a “head of council” elected by general vote and an additional member of the municipal council (currently the deputy mayor) who represents Springwater on Simcoe County Council. 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, 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 mayor,^[1] although a position is formally included in many County arrangements (such as established through the *County of Simcoe Act, 1993*) 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 Simcoe 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 at present across Ontario and is the practice in Springwater. In this format, the office of deputy mayor is the second component of the composition of Springwater Council (after the head of council) and is one of the seven designated seats on Council.

In some other cases across Ontario, however, the position is determined 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.^[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

^[1] The term “mayor” does not appear in the *Municipal Act* either, having been replaced by the generic label “head of council,” although “mayor” is used in the *City of Toronto Act*.

^[2] In rare cases, such as the Township of Perth South, the elected councillor who receives the most votes in a general vote system for all members of council serves as deputy mayor.



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 Springwater, that is, to continue with a separate position or to adopt the indirect model. At present, although the deputy mayor is chosen by direct election in a general vote (at-large) system and holds a seat on Simcoe County Council, all other roles deputy mayors are expected to play are entirely subject to local arrangements. This can include, for example, chairing certain committee meetings or performing various duties in the absence of, or on behalf of, the mayor.

Our research suggests contrasting considerations about the role of deputy mayor. Those who support the election of a deputy mayor by general vote frame their assessment around the deputy mayor's role on a County council and the importance of that role to the municipality. The perspectives include "the deputy mayor should be elected at-large to represent the whole municipality and should be interested in serving the whole municipality" and the County role is important enough "that the voters should have a say, not just the people on council." Another perspective is that the deputy mayor's duties are not viewed as onerous and, therefore, changing to election by council would be appropriate: "It is more ceremonial and does not involve running the business of the municipality like the mayor" and "there is no real role for the deputy mayor so an appointed deputy mayor would be better."

As implied above, there is no definitive or indisputable advantage from employing one method or the other to select the deputy mayor. Our intention here is to stimulate some discussion in Springwater about whether to confirm the direct election method, thereby leaving five further places to fill, or to consider a modification that would make the deputy mayor position an auxiliary role played by one of the councillors.

The topic, however, comes into play as more than a theoretical option since Simcoe County Council "has reviewed the subject of modern County Council composition and governance model options on a number of occasions" most recently in 2018/2019 in response to a review of the regional government model that included the County.^[3] The stated objective of that review was "to ensure that regional governments are working efficiently and effectively" which, in turn, prompted the County to consider various options regarding council composition and governance. Other than adhering to the status quo, all other options considered excluded the deputy mayors as members of Simcoe County Council.

Although County Council declined to implement a new governance model and the Province did not act on the regional government review in 2019, a subsequent review was assigned to the Ontario Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Heritage,

^[3] See County of Simcoe report GOV-19-015 (February 5, 2019), "High Level History of Past County Council Composition and Governance Model Discussions and Options."



Infrastructure and Cultural Policy in late 2023. The Committee has already heard that some Simcoe municipalities would like to see a change in the way the County is governed, so during this review Springwater may need to consider whether to retain the office of deputy mayor and, if it is considered necessary to have a deputy mayor, how it is to be filled. Whether that outcome ever arises or not, the topic can still be considered as part of the present review of the seven-member Council.

Ward Councillors:^[4] The third component of Springwater's Council is the councillors themselves, currently five 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, possibly in light of decisions made to modify the method of election for, or to eliminate, the office of the deputy mayor.

The present number is the result of a deliberate decision made in 1997 to adjust the number of ward councillors from seven to five. A change to some other number is possible and could be considered as part of the composition configuration.

Topical Discussion Papers A to E

Discussion Papers will be available to residents, each addressing one of the topics to be considered in this review:

- Discussion Paper A – The Springwater Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of the Innisfil Council
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper E – Why a Ward Boundary Review?

^[4] The term "ward councillor" is used here since that is the present designation. Provincial legislation authorizes a council to "dissolve" the wards, but that possibility is not being considered in this review.