

Township of Springwater 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper E: Why a Ward Boundary Review?

The objective of a Ward Boundary Review is to conduct a comprehensive review of Springwater's electoral arrangements to develop an effective and equitable system of representation. Although there is widespread support for reviewing the wards in Springwater, the present electoral map must still be evaluated as a way to help identify which features need to change to achieve effective representation (see topical Discussion Paper D) and which features might remain in place.

Springwater's present ward design dates from 2012 when the municipality's population was approximately 18,700. Today the population is more than 23,000 and projected growth is anticipated to take that number to over 36,600 by 2031 (2023 Development Charges Background Study). As a community changes, so should its electoral arrangements, more than ever when there are perceptible and inequitable discrepancies in the population of existing wards, as will be discussed below.

A necessary step in a ward boundary review is to assess the extent to which the existing wards meet the guiding principles for a ward system that achieves the goal of effective representation (see topical Discussion Paper D). In this Discussion Paper, the status quo will therefore be subject to the same "tests" as any alternative designs (that is, representation by population (population parity), population and electoral trends, means of communication and accessibility, geographic and topographical features, and community or diversity of interests) to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

Preliminary Insights into the Springwater Ward System

Before developing 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 actually still viable and, if not, what shortcomings need to be considered in designing alternatives. If the current system successfully meets the guiding principles, no ward boundary review would be needed at this time.

Representation by Population (Population Parity): 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 Township. 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, optimal size^[1] 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 itself 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 Springwater where there are population clusters of different sizes, as well as rural territory, and anticipated residential developments in the future. Indeed, this range of variation was explicitly listed as a criterion when changes to the wards were considered in Springwater in 2005. ^[2]

When the present ward configuration was implemented, the overall population of the Township was 18,223 (2011 Census), meaning that the optimal population size for a ward would be 3,645 with an acceptable range of variation between 2,733 and 4,556. Population data for 2011 (see Figure Gi) indicates that the population of two of the wards was “optimal” while the remaining three within the optimal 25% range. A ward system composed of these wards appears to generally meet the representation by population principle as we have defined it, since only all wards fall within the optimal range of variation ($\pm 25\%$). By 2021, the overall population increased from 18,223 (2011) to 21,701 (2021), with 70% of that growth occurring within Ward 4. As of 2021, Ward 4 now falls outside the optimal range with a population over 6,000 (a variance of 1.40). Over the history of this ward configuration, the population of Ward 1 has been consistently below the optimal range and the Ward 4 population has risen above the optimal range as outlined in Figure Gi and Figure Gii.

[1] This calculation can also be considered the “average” ward population.

[2] Township of Springwater, Report to Mayor and Council, “Ward Boundary Review for 2006 Municipal Elections,” September 12, 2005, page 2.



Figure Gi – Comparative Population by Ward: 2011 Census

Ward	Area (SqKm)	2011		
		Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range
Ward 1	95.0	3,274	0.90	O-
Ward 2	132.3	3,547	0.97	O
Ward 3	183.5	3,828	1.05	O+
Ward 4	97.9	3,671	1.01	O
Ward 5	34.8	3,904	1.07	O+
Total/Average	543.6	18,223	3,645	

Source: Statistics Canada 2011 Census – DB Level Data compiled by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Figure Gii – Comparative Population by Ward: 2021 Census

Ward	Area (sq. km)	2021		
		Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range
Ward 1	95.0	3,646	0.84	O-
Ward 2	132.3	3,810	0.88	O-
Ward 3	183.5	4,225	0.97	O
Ward 4	97.9	6,088	1.40	OR+
Ward 5	34.8	3,932	0.91	O-
Total/Average	543.6	21,701	4,340	

Source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census – DB Level Data compiled by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Since the population of only one of the current five wards in Springwater is at the optimal size and one exceeds it by a wide margin, the present ward configuration is problematic. Given the importance of working within the generous range of population variation, the Consultant Team would define any ward configuration that includes even a single ward outside that range as failing to meet the parity principle.

Population and Electoral Trends: Ward boundary reviews consider anticipated population trends to ensure that the ward structure initially provides effective representation beyond the 2026 municipal election. Future population growth in Springwater over the next decade will be concentrated in the southern area adjacent to the Township’s boundary with the City of Barrie; one important growth area is located in the present Ward 4 where the population was already well in excess of the optimal



figure in 2021. As a result, there is every expectation that the wards will become even more unbalanced by 2026 and, if left unchanged, the existing ward configuration will not likely achieve population parity over time and will fall short of meeting this principle as well. In other words, the current ward configuration will not grow into parity but further away from it.

Means of Communication and Accessibility: This principle is one of two that endorses wards that group existing neighbourhoods in a plausible way, in this case to reflect social and tangible connections among those residents.

Ward 1 is centred on Elmvale with 80% of its population estimated to live within 5kms of the settlement area. Given its importance in terms of commercial, educational, recreational, and other activities, the nearby rural population is closely connected to it, meaning that the ward fulfills this principle. The same cannot be said about Ward 2 where Phelpston lies near the geographic centre, but two other distinctive settlement areas (Orr Lake and Hillsdale) are included within the ward boundaries. The latter two communities have few obvious connections to the rest of Ward 2 and are (along with Phelpston) more closely connected to Elmvale. Ward 2 does not fulfill this principle.

The present Ward 3 is the largest by area and includes several small settlements (primarily Anten Mills and Minesing). A small community centre is located in Anten Mills but that settlement cannot be considered a significant focal point for the ward. Ward 3 is primarily rural and although it lies closer to Midhurst and Barrie than Wards 1 and 2, it is still less than 25kms to Elmvale where recreation, schools, retail, and other amenities routinely draw residents. It is possible to conclude that the present ward fulfills this principle in 2024 but future growth forecast for the southeast corner of the ward will divert the future dynamics within the ward towards Midhurst (and Barrie).

The present Ward 4 is a collection of separate neighbourhoods in relatively close proximity to one another while the present Ward 5 is largely populated by residents of Midhurst. Internal communications are successfully addressed in these wards and they can be judged to have met the principle.

Overall, the wards are largely successful in meeting this principle.

Geographical and Topographical Features: This principle seeks to include wards that use geographical and topographical features to mark boundaries while keeping the wards compact and easy to understand.

There are some natural barriers in Springwater that perhaps could be incorporated into drawing boundary lines (such as the perimeter of the Minesing wetlands, the Simcoe County Forest lands, and the utility corridor running southwest to northeast, (for example, between Midhurst Station and Minesing). However, most of the lines implemented in the 2012 configuration rely on a confusing mix of Township roads and



private property lot lines. For example, the present Ward 1/Ward 2 boundary moves between Flos Roads 6 and 7 while the present Ward 2/Ward 3 boundary moves between Flos Roads 3 and 4, both at apparently random intervals. In addition, the present boundary between Wards 3 and 4 crosses Highway 26 to include the area around the civic administration precinct (with no resident population) in Ward 4 but leaves a small triangular-shaped area between Highways 26 and 27 in Ward 3.

The net effect is that only one part of a single ward boundary line (between Wards 4 and 5) in the Township is clean and clear-cut (along Highway 26/Bayfield Street). While there is no population in the area, it should also be noted that a significant portion of the Ward 3/Ward 4 boundary is in fact an imaginary line west of Grenfel, crossing the Minesing wetlands.

It is interesting that the boundary lines used before 2014 – with one exception (the southern boundary of Ward 3) – were drawn along identifiable Township roads. So far in this review, information on the reasons behind drawing the present boundaries in a different fashion has not been discovered. We can speculate that the Ward 1/Ward 2 boundaries were drawn to place certain individual properties in one ward or the other, but it is difficult to understand how the arrangement could be consistent with the guiding principles used in that review, especially when the population of the two wards was also at that time significantly unbalanced.

The present ward boundary lines in Springwater do not meet this principle.

Community or Diversity of Interests: 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.”^[3] One of the customary other considerations is “community of interest.” The rationale is that electoral districts should, as far as possible, be cohesive units and areas with common interests related to³. As phrased in the guiding principles, wards should be drawn “around recognized settlement areas, traditional neighbourhoods and community groupings – not through them.”

Without question, contemporary Springwater includes several distinctive communities of interest and that is one of the reasons why a ward system continues to make sense. The previous sections demonstrate that the existing wards fall short of meeting the population principles, but do they constitute an acceptable system of representation if the community of interest is used as the primary measure of success?

The initial generalization is that, in terms of community of interest in Springwater, there are two wards that unequivocally meet this principle. Ward 1 is based on the former separate municipality of Elmvale and the closely connected rural population surrounding

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



it. Ward 5 largely consists of the well-defined Midhurst settlement area. In each case, there are other plausible communities that could be included in those wards but are not included in the present configuration. Ward 2 is clearly not a coherent group of neighbourhoods, while the communities in the present Ward 3 share common interests related to representation. However, the prospect of an important new perspective arriving once the Midhurst Secondary Plan moves forward will bring a significant change to the social profile of the present Ward 3.

As noted earlier, the present Ward 4 is a collection of separate neighbourhoods in relatively close proximity to one another, making it a more complex and affluent socio-economic set of community groupings that differentiates it from the adjoining wards.

On the whole, the present configuration of wards, aligned on an east-west axis, are only partially successful at meeting this principle. The most glaring weakness in the Springwater ward map lies in the Ward 1/Ward 2 geography (which is compounded by a confusing boundary line) where well-defined and growing population centres like Orr Lake and Hillsdale are not located in the same ward as Elmvale but with Phelpston. It may be that a future ward configuration that includes a north-south ward alignment, at least in the north, could be a possible way to better address this principle.

Effective Representation: The specific principles listed above are all subject to the overriding principle of “effective representation” as enunciated by the Supreme Court of Canada.^[4] The concept of effective representation was derived from the equality provision of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: the “voting power” of citizens should be as close to parity as possible so that the voice of each one in the deliberations of government will be represented evenly and fairly. The Court noted that relative parity of voting power was a prime, but not an exclusive, condition of effective representation since other factors – such as those summarized above – contribute to the achievement of effective representation.

In Springwater, there are significantly different relationships between constituents and councillors in terms of present and, in particular, future population distributions and community groupings that hinder the achievement of effective representation. Specifically, one councillor has nearly 2,500 more constituents to serve (and represent) as another. The present configuration embeds a dilution of the votes cast by certain electors compared to others and weakens the democratic expectation that when the five councillors decide on a matter before them, should each vote is cast on behalf of a relatively equal number of residents.

^[4] Reference re *Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)* [1991], known as the Carter decision, page 35.



The present boundaries fall short of meeting this over-arching principle and the imbalance will become even greater as forecast population growth is realized. The present wards do not, in our assessment, ensure effective voter representation.

Overview: No ward design is likely to meet all the principles in their entirety; however, the best designs maximize adherence to the principles, especially in relation to representation by population and effective representation. It is our understanding of existing case law that deviations from the specific principles can be justified by other criteria drawn from the Carter decision in a manner that is more supportive of effective representation. **Our preliminary assessment points to the conclusion that a ward boundary review in Springwater is necessary.**

Figure Giv: Existing Springwater Ward Configuration Evaluation Summary

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle? ^[1]	Comment
Representation by Population	No	Only one ward is at the optimal point and one ward exceeds the $\pm 25\%$ range of variation.
Population and Electoral Trends	No	Population growth will not overcome the existing population imbalance.
Means of Communication and Accessibility	Largely Successful	Four wards are generally plausible groupings of communities; one is not
Geographical and Topographical features	No	Most boundaries are irregular and/or invisible lines.
Community or Diversity of Interests	Largely Successful	One ward includes questionable groupings of communities.
Effective Representation	No	Population imbalances hinder the achievement of effective voter representation

^[1] The 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 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 – Is a Ward Boundary Review Necessary?