

Township of Springwater 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper A: The Springwater Electoral System

Background

The Township of Springwater has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Robert J. Williams, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Ward Boundary Review.

The primary purpose of the study is to prepare Township Council to make decisions on whether to maintain the existing ward configuration or to adopt an alternative. Matters that are integral to a comprehensive review include the following:

- Is it appropriate to consider dissolving the wards to elect all councillors at-large (in what the *Municipal Act* calls a “general vote” system)?
- Is it appropriate to consider changing the composition of council (its size and/or how council is elected) as part of the review?
- If councillors will continue to be elected in wards, what guiding principles will be observed in the design of the wards?

This Ward Boundary Review is premised on the legitimate democratic expectation that municipal representation in Springwater on election day and throughout the term of Council will be effective, equitable, and an accurate reflection of the contemporary distribution of communities and people across the municipality.

Setting

The Township of Springwater was incorporated on January 1, 1994, under the *County of Simcoe Act, 1993* as an amalgamated municipality consisting of “portions of the former municipalities of the Village of Elmvale, the Township of Flos, the Township of Medonte, the Township of Vespra, and the Town of Wasaga Beach” (section 2 (1) (i)). The Act established a Council composed of “a mayor, who shall be the head of council and a deputy mayor, both of whom shall be elected by general vote,” and, in the case of Springwater, “seven additional members who shall be elected...by wards.”

In 1997, an internal review led to a reduction in the number of councillors and wards from seven to five. Although modifications to ward boundaries were considered but not adopted in 2002, 2005, and 2009, a subsequent review in 2012 led to the boundaries



currently in place. Township Council consists today of a mayor and deputy mayor elected at-large, and five councillors elected in five wards.

The present review follows a council composition review undertaken by the County of Simcoe in 2020 that was in response to a study initiated by the Province of Ontario to examine regional governance models and services that included Simcoe County. The pertinent point is that options were considered to modify County Council by reducing each lower-tier municipality's representation from two (the mayor and deputy mayor) to one (the mayor), but no change was adopted ahead of the 2022 municipal election.

Ultimately, the Province took no action on its regional governance review but initiated another review in 2023 which has been assigned to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy that will "conduct a study on regional governance as overseen by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing."

At the time this report was prepared (May 2024), the Committee's study had not been completed. The provincial review does not pertain directly to this study but may have future implications.

Topical Discussion Papers B to E

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

- 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?