

To	General Committee
Subject	Ward Boundary Review Recommendation
Date	June 11, 2025
Ward	All
From	W. Cooke, City Clerk/Director of Legislative and Court Services
Executive Member Approval	J. Schmidt, General Manager of Community and Corporate Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer
Staff Report #	LCS006-25

Recommendation(s):

1. That the City of Barrie Ward Boundary Review Report prepared by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer, dated June 11, 2025, and attached as Appendix A to Staff Report LCS006-25, be received.
 2. That as recommended by Watson & Associates Economic Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer, a by-law be presented to adopt the Ward Structure identified in Appendix "B" to Staff Report LCS006-25 (Final Option 1 ward structure with revised ward numbering) as the City of Barrie's Ward Boundaries, effective December 31, 2025.
 3. That the suitability of the 2026 ward boundaries be considered following the 2030 Municipal Election, to determine their continued effectiveness in the context of actual population growth.
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Executive Summary:

This Staff Report is to present the recommended changes to the City of Barrie's ward boundaries prepared by Watson & Associates Economic Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer. These changes support the evolution of an effective and equitable system of representation and an accurate reflection of the contemporary distribution of communities and residents across the City. The revised ward structure is to be in place for the 2026 Municipal Election. These changes require that a by-law to adopt the revised boundaries prior to December 31, 2025.

Key Findings:

The recommended ward structure is to be in effect for at least the 2026 and 2030 Municipal Elections. The recommended option was developed by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer (“Consultant Team”) following a comprehensive analytical and public consultation process. It is suggested by the Consultant that the boundaries be reviewed after 2030 to determine whether or not they provide for optimal representation for the 2034 elections. The Consultant Team had three main goals throughout the project:

- Correct population disparities between certain wards now and into the future, while making minimal changes to those that are providing for parity and strong representation;
- Rationalize boundary lines where needed, ensuring that they follow natural and identifiable infrastructure; and
- Explore options to provide better representation for all communities of interest within the City, while not disrupting current communities of interest that are now comfortably housed within the same wards.

The ward structure evaluation undertaken by the Consultant was based on four principles. By using the following four principles the consultant was able to determine an appropriate system of representation for the 2026 and 2030 Municipal Elections and future elections in Barrie:

- Representation by population and consideration of current and future population and electoral trends;
- Consideration of natural and physical boundaries;
- Communities of interest; and
- Effective representation.

The Consultant Team’s evaluation using the guiding principles suggested that the existing ward system is identifiable but does not have insurmountable shortcomings for the review. As detailed in the Final Report attached as Appendix A to Staff Report LCS006-25, the Consultant Team identified two main challenges related to the current and future City population. Although the population is currently within an acceptable range, there is a significant difference between the smallest and largest wards, exceeding 7,000 residents. As the City’s population grows, the population parity will dissolve, and there will be a significant population imbalance. If the current ward structure is maintained, by 2036, the parity will worsen in five wards and will fall outside the acceptable range.

The Consultant Team concluded that after analysing current and future population trends, feedback received during the public consultation, and other factors, that the present wards fall short of achieving complete and effective representation across the City and that Council could consider adopting an alternative ward configuration.

The Consultant Team presented a Preliminary Options Report to the Finance and Responsible Governance Committee on April 30th, 2025, introducing five preliminary options. The Committee introduced the following motion 25-G-118 approved by City Council on May 7th, 2025, directing the Consultant Team to present two of the five options which were Preliminary Options 1 and 2B to the public to focus the second round of the public engagement:

The Final ward structure option for General Committee's consideration. As detailed in the Final Report attached as Appendix A to Staff Report LCS006-25, the Consultant Team provides two final options for the ward structure. Final Option 1, attached as Appendix B to Staff Report LCS006-25, preserves much of the existing ward map, targeting the challenges related to current and future population disparities raised in the evaluation. Final Option 2, attached as Appendix C to Staff Report LCS006-25, presents a much different configuration than Final Option 1. Both options focus on population parity, growth, and what Barrie is expected to look like over the next decade. Responses from residents who participated in the second round of public engagement showed that Final Option 2 received less support than Final Option 1. However, positive comments were received regarding the design in Final Option 2, which better defined the downtown area.

The Consultant Team recommends that Final Option 1 be approved due to its minimal changes and, in their opinion, provides the best system for Barrie over the next three election cycles. The Consultant Team based their recommendation on several considerations, including the familiarity of the current system with residents, only deviates from the existing map in ways that strengthen the population parity, it has good representation of community interest, it addresses the disparities and provides a good population distribution moving towards 2036, protects communities of interests in ways the current system does, and boundary markers are easily identifiable.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications for The Corporation resulting from the proposed recommendation.

Alternatives:

The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1: General Committee could recommend the Final Option 2 or one of the other preliminary options, effective for the 2026 and 2030 Municipal Elections.

Although this alternative is available, Final Option 1 is more successful in protecting communities of interest and provides better population parity through the southern portion of the City. While Final Option 2 provides for very good population parity, Ward 4 falls substantially below the average population using 2025 population figures. Although it arrives in the optimal zone by 2036, the current disparity holds it back from becoming a final, recommended option by the Consultant Team.

Alternative #2: General Committee could maintain the existing ward boundaries for the 2026 Municipal Election and review the ward boundaries in preparation for the 2030 Municipal Election.

Although this alternative is available, it is not recommended, given the current system of both smaller and larger wards, the expected population growth by 2036, which will result in a significant population imbalance, with five wards falling outside the acceptable range and ineffective representation across the City.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

This Staff Report is related to the following goal(s) identified in the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan:

Affordable Place to Live		
Community Safety		
Thriving Community		
Infrastructure Investments		
Responsible Governance	√	A more equitable allocation of Councillors across the City may result in improved communications and interactions with residents.

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

The 2013 City of Barrie Ward Boundary Review. The City of Barrie’s ward boundaries were last reviewed in 2013 and the resulting adjustments to the ward boundaries were made effective for the 2014 Municipal Election. The 2013 ward boundary review process recognized and incorporated anticipated growth for planned populations over a further five to seven year window (generally anticipated to be “build out” of the City of Barrie under the existing municipal boundaries), in the development of the ward structure.

The guiding principles for the Request for Proposals Ward Boundary Review. In late 2024, a Request for Proposals was issued for consulting services for the 2025 Ward Boundary Review Project. The Request for Proposals included the principles for the 2025 Ward Boundary Review that were established based on generally accepted principles that are regularly considered when defining or refining political boundaries, and in consideration of Ontario Municipal Board decisions on other municipalities’ ward boundary reviews as well as a Supreme Court of Canada decision.

The principles are as follows:

- Such principles as may be established by all applicable law at the time of the ward boundary review to achieve effective representation for the residents and electors of the City;

- Representation by Population and Consideration of Current and Future Population and Electoral Trends: Accommodating for and balancing future increases or decreases in population growth or decline to maintain a general equilibrium in the representation by population until the next ward boundary review is anticipated to be conducted;
- Effective Representation: To the extent possible, each resident should have comparable access to their elected representative and each elected representative residents;
- Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries: Utilizing geographical and transit routes and servicing districts as natural ward boundaries and to help foster and identify neighbourhood groupings;
- Communities of Interest: Recognizing settlement patterns, traditional neighbourhoods, school districts and community groupings (social, historical, economic, religious and political diversities) while at the same time, not fragmenting the City;
- Consideration of City Policies and Official Plan: Key City policies such as the Official Plan, Secondary Plans, and Master Plans; and
- Recognition of the role of Councillors: Recognizing the role of at large regional elected officials and their role in representing and serving local constituents

The project key objectives: The Watson & Associates Economist Ltd. key objectives for the project included:

- A clear understanding of the present electoral system, including its origins and operations as a system of representation;
- To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the present electoral system based on the guiding principles adopted for the study;
- To develop and conduct an appropriate consultation process in accordance with Barrie's public engagement practices to ensure community support for the review and its outcome;
- To prepare population projections for the development and evaluation of alternative electoral structures for the 2026 and 2030 municipal elections; and
- To deliver a report that will set out recommended alternative council ward boundaries to ensure effective and equitable electoral arrangements for Barrie, based on the principles identified.

Consultation and Engagement:

Watson and Associates Economics Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer conducted one-on-one interviews with all members of Council, City staff and direct community outreach. The information from the research component of the project, in conjunction with the results of the interviews, was used to develop preliminary ward boundary options for public consultation and to gather feedback, as shown in Appendix A to Staff Report LCS006-25.

During the first phase of the project, three in-person public consultation sessions were held on March 18 and 20, 2025, to engage and inform Barrie residents about the reasons for a ward boundary review, including the key factors considered in the review. For the second phase of the project, three in-person consultation sessions were also held on May 13 and 14, 2025, to engage and inform Barrie residents about the preliminary ward boundary options for consideration. The public consultation sessions were communicated through advertisements, City media releases and social media platforms. A dedicated web page at www.buildingbarrie.ca/WardsReview provided background information concerning the Ward Boundary Review Project, surveys during the two phases of the project, preliminary options prepared by the Consultant Team, a detailed preliminary report, and the details of the public consultation opportunities.

The feedback and comments collected through the public consultation process, the online engagement (engagement page and surveys), the social media engagement and interviews and direct community outreach are reflected in the analysis presented in the Watson & Associates Economics Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer Final Report dated June 11, 2025, as shown in Appendix A to Staff Report LCS006-25.

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

There are no environmental and/or climate change impact matters related to the recommendation.

Appendix:

Appendix A – City of Barrie Ward Boundary Review Report prepared by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer

Appendix B - Final Option 1 Ward Structure

Appendix C – Final Option 2 Ward Structure

Report Author: Tara McArthur, Coordinator of Elections and Special Projects

File #: C07 - WBR

Pending #: Not applicable

Appendix A - City of Barrie Ward Boundary Review Report prepared by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., in association with Dr. Zachary Spicer



