

Loyalist Township Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review 2024-25 Backgrounder

Discussion Paper B: What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?

Context

Despite the long history of municipal institutions in Ontario, the premises and practices used for determining the overall composition of councils has never been satisfactorily or definitively addressed, either in legislation or regulation. There are no clear principles at play, no “standards,” and no formulas to apply. Each municipality has its own history, its own traditions, and its own attributes. Furthermore, there is no established timetable to require that municipal councils review the continuing validity of the number of places at the council table.

The *Municipal Act, 2001* establishes the minimum size for the council of a local municipality in Ontario as five, “one of whom shall be the head of council” who must be elected by general vote (subsections 217 (1) 1 and (1) 3). There are no references to a maximum or to an “appropriate” size associated with, for example, the population of the municipality. This absence contrasts with the provisions of regulations issued under the *Education Act* (Ontario Regulation 412/00) which include a detailed formula to determine both the number of trustees and their distribution across each school board’s area of jurisdiction before each regular municipal election.

As a result, the composition of local councils in Ontario varies widely. Loyalist Township’s Council is composed of seven members, two above the minimum size. When compared to other municipalities in Ontario, the Council is the same size as those elected in a number of bigger municipalities like Aurora, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Orangeville, and Burlington but is smaller than councils elected in some rural or smaller population municipalities like Gravenhurst, North Perth, and Muskoka Lakes. See Figure Bi to compare Loyalist Township’s council composition to the other municipalities in Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, and Hastings Counties and to selected municipalities in Ontario in the same population range.



Figure Bi
Population and Council Members, Lennox and Addington, and Frontenac and Hastings Counties

Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq. km)	Council Members*	Persons per Member	Wards/ At-Large
Lennox and Addington					
Township of Addington Highlands	2,534	1,294	5	507	2 Wards
Loyalist Township	17,943	342.7	7	2,563	3 Wards (1+1+3)
Town of Greater Napanee	16,879	462.3	7	2,411	5 Wards
Township of Stone Mills	7,826	693.7	7	1,118	At-Large
Hastings					
Town of Bancroft	4,065	227.5	7	581	3 Wards
Township of Carlow/Mayo	953	385.3	5	191	2 Wards
Municipality of Centre Hastings	4,801	222.8	5	960	At-Large
Town of Deseronto	1,612	2,519	5	322	At-Large
Township of Faraday	1,747	217.4	5	349	At-Large
Municipality of Hastings Highlands	4,385	966.6	5	877	At-Large
Township of Limerick	436	201.0	5	87	At-Large
Township of Madoc	2,233	274.6	5	447	At-Large
Municipality of Marmora and Lake	4,267	538.2	5	853	At-Large
Township of Stirling-Rawdon	5,015	282.5	5	1,003	2 Wards
Township of Tudor and Cashel	740	433.3	5	148	At-Large
Municipality of Tweed	6,067	918.6	5	1,213	At-Large



Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq. km)	Council Members*	Persons per Member	Wards/ At-Large
Township of Tyendinaga	4,538	312.4	5	908	At-Large
Township of Wollaston	721	215.9	5	144	At-Large
Frontenac					
Township of Central Frontenac	4,892	991.4	9	544	4 Wards
Township of Frontenac Islands	1,930	176.8	5	386	2 Wards
Township of North Frontenac	2,285	1,158	7	326	3 Wards
Township of South Frontenac	20,188	948.1	9	2,243	4 Wards (called districts)
Average	5,275	512	6	826	-

* Includes the head of council.

Figure Bii
Ontario Municipalities (2021 Population 14,000 to 25,000)

Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq. km)	Council Members*	Persons per Member	Wards/ At-Large
Municipality of Thames Centre	13,980	434.0	5	2,796	3 Wards
City of Pembroke	14,364	14.3	7	2,052	At-Large (most votes = DM)
Township of Severn	14,576	523.1	7	2,082	5 Wards
Municipality of West Nipissing	14,583	1,956.0	9	1,620	8 Wards
Township of St. Clair	14,659	618.6	7	2,094	2 Wards (3+2)
Town of Mississippi Mills	14,740	511.2	7	2,106	3 Wards (2+2+1)
Township of Clearview	14,814	556.4	7	2,116	5 Wards



Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq. km)	Council Members*	Persons per Member	Wards/ At-Large
City of Kenora**	14,967	211.7	7	2,138	At-Large
Township of West Lincoln	15,454	387.0	7	2,208	3 Wards
Municipality of North Perth	15,538	493.1	10	1,554	3 Wards (3+3+2)
Town of Saugeen Shores****	15,908	170.2	9	1,768	6 Wards but DM & VDM At-large
Town of Bracebridge	17,305	615.2	9	1,923	5 Wards + 3 At-large
Town of Midland	17,817	35.3	9	1,980	7 At-large
Municipality of North Grenville	17,964	351.9	5	3,593	At-large (most votes= DM)
Town of Petawawa	18,160	164.7	7	2,594	At-large (most votes= DM)
Town of Pelham	18,192	126.3	7	2,599	3 Wards
Town of Tillsonburg	18,615	22.2	7	2,659	At-large
Township of Selwyn	18,653	316.1	5	3,731	3 Wards
Municipality of Middlesex Centre	18,928	588.2	7	2,704	5 Wards
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake	19,088	131.3	9	2,121	At-large (most votes= DM)
Township of Russell	19,598	198.8	5	3,920	At-Large
City of Port Colborne	20,033	122.0	9	2,226	4 Wards
Town of Cobourg	20,519	22.4	7	2,931	5 At-Large
Town of Huntsville***	21,147	705.2	9	2,350	Both
Town of Essex	21,216	277.5	8	2,652	Wards
Township of Wilmot	21,429	263.8	6	3,572	Wards



Municipality	2021 Population	Area (sq. km)	Council Members*	Persons per Member	Wards/ At-Large
Township of Uxbridge	21,556	420.5	7	3,079	5 Wards/1 RC At-large
Township of Scugog	21,581	474.7	7	3,083	Wards
City of Owen Sound	21,612	24.21	9	2,401	At-Large
Township of Springwater	21,701	535.9	7	3,100	Wards
City of Brockville**	22,116	20.91	9	2,457	At-Large
Town of Kingsville	22,119	246.1	7	3,160	At-Large
Township of Oro - Medonte	23,017	585.4	7	3,288	Wards
Average	18,362	367	7	2,565	-

* Includes the head of council and some deputy mayors or upper-tier councillors elected at-large (e.g., Middlesex Centre, Uxbridge).

** Single tier; all others lower tier.

*** Three town and district councillors elected at-large and five councillors elected in wards.

**** Includes a regional councillor who does not sit on City Council.

Note: DM = deputy mayor; VDM = vice deputy mayor; RC = regional councillor.

The present seven-member Loyalist Council is what might be called the default format; that is, it is the composition that has been in place since 1998. It is the status quo. Endorsing the continuation of a seven-member council, however, should be seen as an option available to the Township, just as much as would be a decision to elect a council of a different size.

The legislative authority to determine the number of councillors (*Municipal Act, 2001* section 217) rests with the municipal council and is distinct from the determination of the method by which they are to be elected (section 222). A fundamental question for an electoral review in Loyalist Township must be whether a council of seven members is appropriate to govern a municipality with a population of 14,590 when it was created but is now home to about 18,000 people – an increase of 23%.

The optimal size of a municipal council depends on the purpose and role council is expected to play as a decision-making and representative body. Three interconnected factors could be considered: the capacity of council to provide effective political management, responsiveness, and accountability.



Effective Political Management: A certain number of elected representatives are required to carry out the essential governmental functions of a municipality, but the workload undertaken by representatives varies with each individual councillor. In part, it will be driven by the personal preferences and commitment of individual councillors, with a large element the result of the range of responsibilities that the municipality undertakes and the way it conducts its business. The amount of time spent on council business is not easily quantified, but serving on council is not a “9-to-5” job. How much material must councillors review and understand before participating effectively in council decision-making? How much constituency casework is directed to councillors? What committees, agencies, or other bodies do councillors participate in or chair? The size of the council has an impact on the amount of time individual councillors can allocate to such formal duties and to casework, as well as to their personal, family, and non-political obligations.

Responsiveness: The heart of “effective representation” (to be discussed more fully in relation to the guiding principles for a ward system – see Discussion Paper E) is the conviction that councillors must be able to maintain contact with constituents, primarily thought of as those who reside in the electoral district where the councillor is elected. The basic question in this context is whether the present council composition has an impact on the capacity of councillors to act as an intermediary between residents and the municipality.^[1]

Logically, the larger the council, the more likely such connections can be maintained since residents have more councillors to contact and there are more councillors to gather information across the relatively large geographic area of Loyalist Township. Conversely, the smaller the council, the greater the challenge to deliver such representation successfully. Although councillors are elected to serve the entire municipality – as reflected in the oath of office they take – at election time councillors are associated with only a part of the municipality and their electoral success may hinge on how well they are thought to have been “responsive” to that part of the municipality.

Accountability: Municipal councillors are not only “political managers” of the municipal corporation but are accountable for their decisions through an election. A democratic electoral system should provide voters with an adequate range of opportunities to select municipal legislators: if, as the adage has it, municipal government is “closest to the people,” the number of representatives subject to public accountability for their actions is a key indicator of how close or remote the council is to the community.

Considering these three perspectives will provide insights for considering the optimal size of the municipal Council in Loyalist Township.

[1] **Note:** this is not a comment on the performance of incumbent councillors, but rather a question about the reasonable expectations associated with being an elected (part-time) representative in the present configuration.



Preliminary Insights into the Composition of Loyalist Township's Council

In Discussion Paper C, three components of the present council structure are described: the mayor, the deputy mayor, and the ward councillors, adding up to a seven-member Council. The most basic question to ask at the outset is, “is seven the right number?”

The Consultant Team’s working assumption is that seven members is the preferred size of Loyalist Township’s municipal Council. Through the various evaluative exercises that will be undertaken as part of the Ward Boundary Review, the Consultant Team may identify how alternative council compositions would align with the objectives of the Review. An example of where composition may become a consideration is when the Consultant Team develops options for alternative ward boundaries.

A decision to change the size of council would need to be followed by an assessment of the way Council operates as a decision-making body. This topic, however, is not within the scope of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review.

Topical Discussion Papers A to F

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

- Discussion Paper A – The Loyalist Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of the Loyalist Township Council
- Discussion Paper D – The Method of Election for Councillors
- Discussion Paper E – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper F – Is a Ward Boundary Review Necessary?