



Council Policy

Ward Boundary Design

Program Impacted	Civic Services <i>Edmontonians contribute to civic society and are engaged in promoting the quality of the community</i>
Number	C469B
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Statement

Ward boundaries are an essential component of the municipal electoral system and a principal means to ensure effective representation. The structure of municipal Ward composition requires regular reviews to ensure that the conditions necessary to preserve effective representation are maintained.

The purpose of this policy is to establish the guiding principles to be applied to the design of municipal Ward boundaries and to determine the extent and frequency of municipal Ward boundary reviews.

Guiding Principles

1. Ward Boundary Design maintains effective representation.

Ward Boundary Design will be guided through the application of criteria to create the conditions conducive to Effective Representation.

2. Ward Boundaries maintain their integrity through regular reviews

The integrity of Ward boundaries will be assessed and protected through reviews of Ward boundary design according to an established schedule.

A review of municipal Ward boundaries will be conducted:

- by the Returning Officer, following every municipal general election, when only minor adjustments are

required;

- by a Commission of Council-appointed residents following every third municipal election cycle;
- by a Commission of Council-appointed residents when Council deems necessary because major adjustments are required.

Process

1. During Quarter 4 of the year following each municipal general election, the Returning Officer will report to Council outlining a recommendation regarding the design of municipal Ward boundaries. The report will indicate whether major or minor adjustments to boundary design are required based on a preliminary assessment that examines the following criteria:

- Population of each Ward
- Projected population of each Ward
- Estimated number of electors who reside in each Ward

Should the Returning Officer recommend that only minor adjustments to Ward boundaries are necessary, proposed amendments will be presented to Council as part of this initial report.

2. Council will provide direction regarding the scope of the Ward boundary review:

- If Council determines that only **minor adjustments** are required, the Returning Officer's recommended adjustments will be accepted or refined at Council's discretion, as described in Point 4 of these Requirements.
- If Council determines that **major adjustments** are required, Council will establish a Ward Boundary Commission of residents, via bylaw, to conduct a review of the current design of municipal Ward boundaries and the criteria and considerations identified in this procedure. The Ward Boundary Commission bylaw will encompass, at Council's discretion, mandate, membership, engagement scope, remuneration, repeal and other stipulations deemed necessary. To allow sufficient time for a review conducted by a Commission, that Commission must be struck at least two years prior to the scheduled delivery of the required report to Council.
- Every **third election cycle** after the report of the last Ward Boundary Commission, Council will establish a Ward Boundary Commission to conduct a review of the current design of municipal Ward boundaries and the criteria and considerations identified in this procedure. The Ward Boundary Commission bylaw will encompass, at Council's discretion, mandate, membership, engagement scope, remuneration, repeal and other stipulations deemed necessary. To allow sufficient time for a review conducted by a Commission, that Commission must be struck at least two years prior to the scheduled delivery of the required report to Council.

3. All reviews of Ward boundary design will include public engagement:

- The City's Public Engagement Framework will guide public and stakeholder engagement based on whether the review is expected to assess major or minor adjustments.
- Stakeholders include, but are not limited to: the General Public (through a public hearing), Edmonton School Division, Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, all individual Community Leagues, and Communities of Interest.

- Where a Commission is appointed, the Commission will direct the development and deployment of public engagement efforts.
4. Following the delivery of the report by the Returning Officer or Ward Boundary Commission, Council will determine the required changes to the design of municipal Ward boundaries and pass the required bylaw. According to Section 151(1) of the *Municipal Government Act*, bylaw amendments must be made by December 31 of the year before the general election at which it is to take effect. To enable the required operational processes, bylaw amendments should occur by October of the year preceding a municipal general election.

Criteria and Considerations

Criteria are the foundational elements of a review of the design of municipal Ward boundaries and are applied when both major and minor adjustments are anticipated. Considerations are used as a mechanism to refine proposed major adjustments following the application of the criteria.

Criteria

Criteria are required elements of the Ward Boundary Review to be assessed:

- **Population of each Ward** - *To ensure effective representation, the population of each Ward is the primary Ward boundary design criterion. The population of each Ward should be substantially equal, reflecting the optimal Ward population as closely as possible within allowable variance thresholds.*
- **Projected population of each Ward** - *To preserve effective representation, Ward boundaries should be designed with the goal of lasting at least three municipal general election cycles before a Major Adjustment is necessary. The number of residents in each Ward will be assessed to ensure that the projected population remains within allowable variance thresholds*
- **Estimated number of electors who reside in each Ward** - *To ensure voter parity, the estimated number of electors in each Ward should be substantially equal, reflecting the optimal estimated number of electors in a Ward as closely as possible within allowable variance thresholds*
- **Communities of Interest** - *a review that encompasses major adjustments should contemplate the effective representation of groups as well as that of individual residents. As such, Ward design should reflect the following attributes, where possible:*
 - *Neighbourhoods should not be divided between Wards.*
 - *Each Ward should be composed of a variety of Communities of Interest.*
 - *A Community League should not be split between Wards.*

Considerations

Considerations are secondary factors that can be taken into account during the review.

- **Readily Identifiable Boundaries** - *Wherever possible, Ward boundaries should be readily identifiable to the public. Consideration should be given to utilizing major transportation infrastructure and other significant artificial barriers and natural boundaries (e.g., river, ravines, parks) for aligning the Ward boundaries.*
- **Mix of zones** - *Consideration should also be given to the distribution of residential, commercial, and industrial zones, and green space areas between Wards. A Ward should not be dominated by any of these features and such features should be distributed among several Wards.*

Definitions

Community League Boundary

The boundary of a community league as established by the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Communities of Interest

Typically considered as those groups of people within a geographic area that share a common set of attributes, goals, or pursuits. Geographically localized community within the larger city, social communities with considerable in-person interaction among residents which provide the personal settings and situations where residents seek to realise common values.

Of relevance are common interests that may be identified through tangible measures such as proximity/ geographic location. The attributes of Communities of Interest may be historical or dynamic. Attributes can be defined according to:

- location, as with a neighbourhood or a set of boundaries, including Community Leagues, and Business Revitalization Zones;
- the product of a common pursuit, such as neighbourhoods with longstanding mutual engagement through identifiable organizations and groups;
- the presence of a common trait, such as shared neighbourhood maturity and design, or common socio-economic characteristics (e.g., social, cultural, historical, or demographic composition), or economic ties;
- other factors that a Ward Boundary Commission deems is demonstrative of the existence of a community.

Effective Representation

For the purposes of this policy, effective representation refers to the balance of individual (voter parity) and group concerns. This is best outlined as per the Supreme Court of Canada:

“The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s. 3 of the Charter is not equality of voting power per se but the right to ‘effective representation’. The right to vote therefore comprises many factors, of which equity is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voting power. Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. Deviations from absolute voter parity, however, may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation. Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic. Beyond this, dilution of one citizen’s vote as compared with another’s should not be countenanced.” Supreme Court of Canada. 1991. Reference re Prov. Electoral Boundaries (Sask.), [1991]

Estimated number of Electors

The estimated number of residents in a Ward who are eligible to vote in municipal elections, as defined by section 47 of the *Local Authorities Election Act*.

Neighbourhood

The Neighbourhood is the basic constituent unit of Ward boundaries. The City of Edmonton defines distinct technical boundaries that determine a neighbourhood. These may differ from residents' conception of their social neighbourhoods, which are typically residential in nature, as a neighbourhood may encompass entirely industrial, commercial or other zoned land.

Major adjustments

A boundary adjustment with a geographic scope that encompasses multiple Wards or the citywide composition of Wards, or that affects a large number of residents.

Minor adjustments

A boundary adjustment that is limited in geographical scale or affects a small number of residents, if any.

Optimal Ward Population

The optimal Ward population is a measure for the substantially equal distribution of population and provides the benchmark through which variance thresholds are calculated. The optimal Ward population is determined by dividing the total residential population of the city by the number of Wards.

Population/City Population

The total number of people residing within the municipal boundary of the City of Edmonton and, at a Ward level, within the boundaries of the Ward.

Projected population

The projected population of a Ward in the final year of a four year election cycle, as determined by the Neighbourhood Population Projection maintained by Administration.

Variance

The maximum acceptable divergence of the Ward Population (or the Projected Population of the Ward) from the Optimal Ward Population (or Optimal Projected Population) is +/- 25% of that optimal.

Voter Parity

Every vote carries the same weight. Relative voter parity can be achieved by designing Wards that that contain roughly the same number of voters.