



WARD BOUNDARY POLICY REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

That Council Policy C469B - Ward Boundary Design, as set out in Attachment 1 of the October 12, 2022, Office of the City Clerk report CR_8350, be approved.

Report Purpose

Council decision required

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 25-27, 2020, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration consider the policy recommendations in Attachment 1 of the May 25, 2020, Ward Boundary Commission report CR_8263 and any learnings from the 2021 General Election and return to Executive Committee with recommended next steps.

REPORT

Council Policy C469A - Ward Boundary Design Policy establishes the principles to be applied to the design of municipal Ward boundaries, and guides the scope, frequency and process for Ward boundary reviews. Executive Committee is asked to recommend to City Council that Council Policy C469B - Ward Boundary Design (Attachment 1), which updates Council Policy C469A - Ward Boundary Design (Attachment 2), be approved.

Background

At the June 18, 2019, City Council meeting, Council established a Ward Boundary Commission (the Commission) as a temporary Committee of Council. As described in Bylaw 18893 - Ward Boundary Commission, the Commission, made up of seven Council-appointed members of the public, was tasked with a review of Edmonton's municipal Ward boundary composition and Policy C469A with a view to providing Council with recommended amendments.

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On May 25, 2020, the Commission delivered its Final Report to Council, leading to substantive changes to municipal Ward boundaries via Bylaw 19366 City of Edmonton Ward Boundaries and Council Composition Bylaw, which received third reading on December 7, 2020, and that came into effect October 2021.

Ward Boundary Commission Recommendations | Summary

The Commission's Final Report included numerous proposed revisions to Policy C469A, ranging from changes to the structure and format of the policy to a reframing of the core principles and criteria that guide Ward boundary design.

According to the Commission's report, the recommendations were derived from their consensus understanding of the purpose and intended application of the current policy, the experience of conducting a Ward boundary review within the parameters of the policy, and the feedback gathered during engagement and consultation activities with the public and other stakeholders.

Key recommendations from the Commission's report include:

- Centre the policy on effective representation as the core principle;
- Restructure the elements that guide Ward boundary design from a single set of criteria to a prioritized set of criteria and considerations;
- Expand and refine the definition of key terms within the policy to allow for quantifiable measurement and standardization;
- Establish tiered variance thresholds from the optimum population of a Ward to account for varying degrees of growth across the city;
- Standardize the frequency of Commission-led Ward boundary reviews to every third election cycle or when major adjustments are anticipated;
- Add individual Community Leagues to the list of stakeholders to be consulted during the engagement phase of a Ward boundary review.

Recommended Policy C469B | Overview

Administration's recommended Policy C469B remains close to the Commission's recommendations. A comparison table that illustrates the content of Policy C469A, the Commission's recommendations and Administration's proposed Policy C469B is provided as Attachment 4. The table is offered in place of a redline Policy, as a means to better illustrate the various iterations of the Policy from the current version, to the Commission's proposed amendments to Administration's final recommendation.

Policy Statement

Effective representation is positioned within the Policy Statement as the core guiding principle of Policy C469B. The statement articulates the policy's purpose: to establish the guiding principles that are applied to the design of municipal Ward boundaries and to determine the extent and frequency of municipal Ward boundary reviews.

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Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles of Ward boundary design prioritize the creation of the conditions conducive to effective representation through the application of standardized criteria. According to the proposed definition, which reflects that offered by the Commission, effective representation relies upon the relatively equal distribution of population and electors between wards and how common history and interests are considered within the design of Ward boundaries. As such, the Guiding Principles inform the process steps and criteria found further in the policy.

This section also establishes the Ward boundary review process as the mechanism used to maintain the integrity of Ward boundaries. In keeping with Policy C469A, a Ward boundary review occurs following each municipal general election. Policy C469B proposes that reviews are conducted by the Returning Officer or by a Council-appointed Commission. Review by Commission takes place either when major adjustments to Ward boundaries are necessary by Council or following every third election cycle.

Process

Proposed Policy C469B retains the requirement for the Returning Officer to provide Council with a post-election report on the population and projected population of each Ward, and its estimated number of electors. Council uses this report as the basis to determine whether minor adjustments, as recommended by the Returning Officer, or major adjustments are required to the design of Ward boundaries in order to maintain the conditions conducive to effective representation.

High level process steps that further establish standards regarding the frequency, scope and delegated authority to conduct Ward boundary reviews are contemplated in this section. The Commission's recommendation to use Administration's Public Engagement Framework as the basis for public consultation, and the addition of individual Community Leagues as consulted stakeholders, are incorporated.

Criteria

The structure of Policy C469B establishes distinct 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.

In order to enhance the degree to which criteria can be operationalised during a review, a priority order is established within the Policy. . In alignment with the factors that establish effective representation, the principal criteria call for a substantially equal distribution of the city's population between Wards that is maintained within allowable growth thresholds for three election cycles. A third criteria regarding the relatively equal distribution of electors is included to support voter parity, a key component of effective representation. Finally, and to further reflect the conditions of effective representation, Ward boundary design must contemplate the needs of groups as well as individuals by ensuring that each Ward is composed of a variety of

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Communities of Interest. To that end, Policy C469B discourages ward boundaries that dissect neighborhood or Community League boundaries.

Policy C469B provides a secondary tier of considerations. Ward boundaries that are readily identifiable and that result in a variety of land uses within each Ward are to be contemplated when major adjustments are deemed necessary.

Definitions

Policy C469B offers a comprehensive set of definitions in comparison with Policy C469A.

The definition of Effective Representation is extracted from the Supreme Court Ruling cited by the Commission in its Final Report. This remains, in Administration's opinion, the most comprehensive definition of effective representation and aligns Edmonton's policy with that of other orders of government.

The substance of the Commission's recommended definitions are present in Policy C469B. In some cases, however, the language has been refined to provide further clarity and align with corporate terminology. These are described in detail in Attachment 4.

Ward Boundary Commission Recommendations | Analysis and Adaptations

Administration conducted a thorough analysis of the Ward Boundary Commission's recommendations to determine their legislative and operational viability, and to consider the potential implications for the stakeholders identified in Policy C469A. While the majority of the Commission's key recommendations are deemed to be viable in terms of their alignment with Council's policy standards and the data and resources available via Administration, some adaptations are necessary.

The tiered variance thresholds proposed in the Commission's report require a means to define anticipated 'significant' and 'slow' fluctuations in ward populations and the availability of data aligned to those definitions. Administration does not currently project population trends in this manner, making its application to Ward boundary design challenging. As such, the single variance threshold of +/- 25 per cent from the optimum currently outlined in Policy C469A is retained in proposed Policy C469B. This is also in-keeping with the allowable variance found in other Ward boundary design policies.

The Commission's report proposed the addition of school catchment areas as a means to identify a Community of Interest. However, the Edmonton School Division indicated concern in this regard, stating that while communities may express a shared interest in a particular overlay such as a school catchment area, that alone is insufficient to assume a collective set of needs and values. With this in mind, the definition of Community of Interest proposed in Policy C469B does not include school catchment areas.

While the Commission recommended retaining Council as a named stakeholder to be consulted during the engagement phase of a Ward boundary review, members of Council are omitted from this section of proposed Policy C469B. This mitigates the risk of a perceived conflict of interest that could arise if members of Council are thought to have undue influence over an emerging review process. Council's decision making authority to determine the scope of Ward boundary

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review and to direct subsequent amendments to Ward boundaries is both articulated directly in proposed Policy C469B and implied by the legislated requirements of the bylaw approval process.

Notwithstanding the feedback referenced above, both Edmonton School Division and the Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division indicate their support for the Commission's recommendations. Administration contacted the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) but did not receive a response. However, the Commission's recommendations did take into account the perspectives offered by the EFCL shared during the engagement phase of the 2019 Ward boundary review.

Policy C469B provides values based strategic direction and establishes fundamental operational parameters for Ward boundary reviews regarding scope, frequency and process in keeping Council's policy standards. Executive Committee is asked to recommend that Council approve Policy C469B.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Recommended Council Policy C469B Ward Boundary Design
2. Council Policy C469A Ward Boundary Design
3. Comparative Table