

Engagement during round two of the ward boundary review for the City of Guelph

What was done

The second round of consultation took 13 ward boundary options to the residents of Guelph for consideration and input. The 13 options were based on council's November 2020 directive to develop options for 8-, 10-, and 12-person council sizes, and on the prioritized principles from the first round of public consultations in January 2021.

Communications:

The City of Guelph staff publicised the ward boundary review, advertised the online town hall meetings, and encouraged people to provide input. The City employed a wide spectrum of communications and outreach tools, mainly digital because the consultation was digital, including:

- Updated engagement website page.
- Emails to a targeted list of community groups.
- Advertising in local newspapers and social media boosts.
- Media release to local and regional audiences.
- Digital screenscapes in City facilities and curbex signs in three high-traffic parks and trails.
- Social media posts.

As a result of this communication effort:

- 1,161 people visited the engagement website page.
- 617 people read pages, downloaded documents, and interacted with some of the engagement tools.
- Most importantly, 186 people completed the survey to provide input to the consultant team (either directly themselves or with assistance from someone else).

Engagement:

- Hosted two online town hall events:
 - Presentations and live questions and answers, plus open discussions.
 - Live streamed on guelph.ca and Facebook, with comments open.
- Shared documents on the engagement website page:
 - 13 ward boundary options with maps, features, and benefits listed, plus a summary report and all previous background materials.
- Shared an interactive web-based map for experimentation/play:



- Visitors could turn on/off each of the 13 maps to compare with each other as “layers.”
- Shared maps of ward options to which comments could be added:
 - The engagement site has a mapping tool that allows visitors to put pins and detailed comments directly onto each map.
- Posted answers to questions on the “Q and A” section of the engagement page:
 - Questions and answers from town hall meetings were added to this forum as well.
- Asked questions through a survey:
 - For collecting insights and helping people to think through the large number of options (i.e. this was not an election, poll, or referendum).
 - People were asked which options they would remove, support and prefer, and why. This information is reflected in Figure 1.
- Ran a small focus group about the survey results four days after the survey closed:
 - To ensure the Consultant Team interprets survey input accurately.

What we heard

- Roughly half the respondents (51%) support continuing the current model of a 12-person council with two councillors per ward. Comments in this and earlier rounds of consultation indicate the belief that large councils offer more representation and increased ability to connect to constituents. It was argued to be more democratic. This opinion shows up in Figure 1 in preference for two of the three 6-ward configuration options and greater “support” (orange bar) than “remove” (blue bar) indicators for those same options.
- There is an equal amount of support for reducing the council size. The assumptions from this and earlier consultations are that fewer councillors would cost less and fewer voices around the table makes for more efficient decision making. This set of opinions is more widely distributed across eight different preferences (short orange bars in Figure 1), so although it might seem inconclusive, it totals 49%.
- There is clear support for the principle of two or more councillors to be elected per ward. Most of the models contained that assumption and captured 63% of the preferences (grey line in Figure 1). Comments from this and previous rounds of consultation express the belief that having two or more councillors representing a ward might improve the diversity of representation and hope for those who would like to transition away from first-past-the-post voting. That said, cases were made for one representative per ward, because it might reduce council size and cost, and that it is more “normal” for the voter experience.
- When presented with so many options, people are twice as clear about what they do not want (1,761 “remove” recommendations) than what they do want (633 “support” recommendations). Not everyone could state a single preference (176 out of 186).



- Only four of the options received more pro than con sentiments (orange bar longer than blue bar in Figure 1). This information, coupled with the “preferred” (grey line in Figure 1), provides solid clues to which models to bring to the third round of consultation. For example, one of the two 4-ward, 8-councillor models was indicated as “preferred” by a number of people, but it was rejected by a much larger number, so it was not brought forward for further consideration.
- Opinions about whether councillors should be full time or part time showed a preference towards full time (44%); however, 31% preferred part time and 20% were unsure (and 5% skipped the question) so the results are not conclusive.

What it means

- There are four ward boundary options that the consultant team will revise using some of the detailed suggestions and then put forward for further consideration in the third round of public consultation. The four models crystalize the interests in the community and are listed in increasing degree of change from least-changed to most.
 - Option 6A is the least-changed option that retains the current composition (six wards with two councillors per ward) and tinkers with the existing ward boundaries to improve population balance, but only somewhat.
 - Option 6B keeps the council composition (six wards with two councillors each) yet disrupts the ward geography in the interest of achieving better long-term population balance and perhaps better-defined communities of interest.
 - Option 5B retains the two-councillors-per-ward element and achieves very good population balance and defined communities of interest while reducing the size of council slightly from 12 to 10.
 - Option 8A reduces the size of the wards to make them easier for councillors to represent, achieves good population balance, and reduces the total size of council at the expense of having two councillors per ward.

