

Guelph's Current Electoral System

The current municipal electoral system in Guelph has been in place, without significant modification, since 1991. This purpose of our project is to consider whether that system could be improved to make it more effective and responsive to the needs of residents.

Guelph's Council currently consists of 13 members—the Mayor and 12 councillors who are elected from six wards.

The Mayor is elected at-large, meaning that all qualified electors in the city have a vote to choose the Mayor. In the current system the Mayor is the candidate who wins the most votes in the election, even if that percentage of votes is considerably less than 50%. This system has been set out in the Ontario Municipal Act for many years and municipalities have only very limited scope to change it.

The Municipal Act was changed for the 2018 election to allow municipalities to adopt a system of ranked balloting. This will be considered in Phase 3 of this project, so we will not be considering any change in the method of electing the Mayor in Phase 1.

The City of Guelph is currently divided into six wards for the purpose of electing councillors. The wards are shown in Figure 1. Each elector has two votes for councillor and the two candidates who receive the largest number of votes in a ward are elected from that ward.

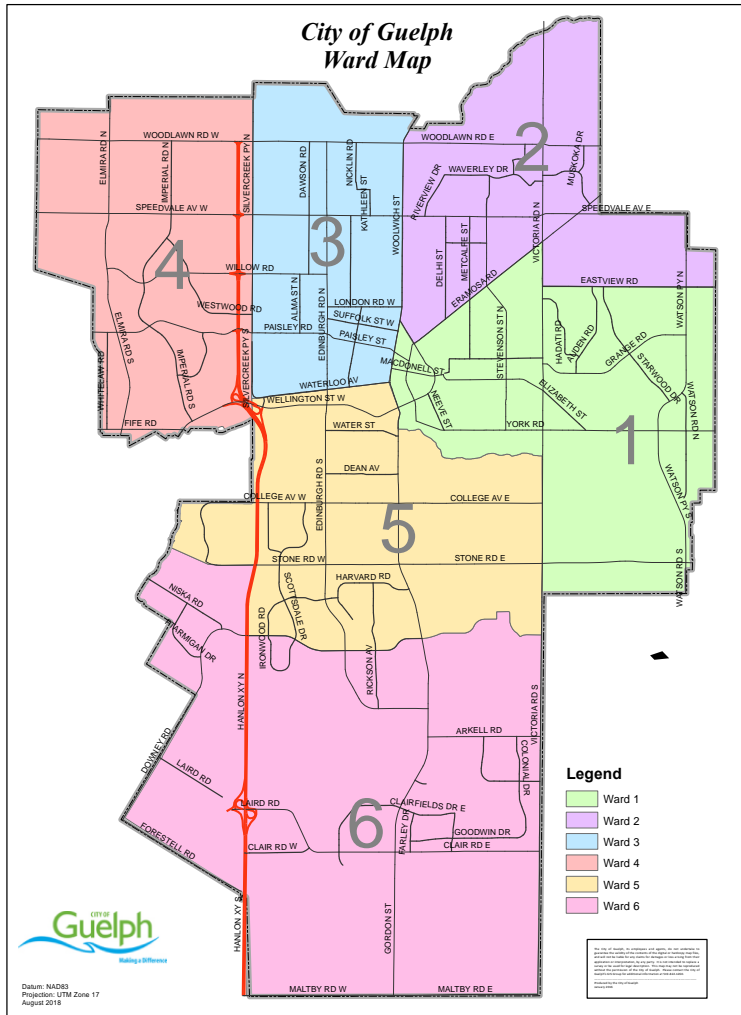
The principle of 'one person, one vote' assumes that the population in each ward should be roughly equal. There are other principles that enter into the drawing of ward boundaries, but equality of population is a very important consideration.

Table 1 shows the number of electors in each of the populations six wards in Guelph's current system at the time of the 2018 municipal election. Ward 6 has been growing rapidly since then so the imbalance in the number of electors per ward would be even greater in 2022 unless some change is made in the ward system.

The numbers here make it clear that the wards have grown over the years in ways that put Guelph at odds with the 'one person, one vote' principle. At a minimum, the boundaries of the existing wards need to be changed to bring Guelph into alignment with this principle. Specific ward boundaries will be considered as a part of Phase 2 of this project.

However, Guelph has the authority to make changes in the number of wards and the number of councillors. One purpose of Phase 1 of this project is to consider whether these changes should be made.

**Figure 1
Map of Wards**



**Table 1
Population per Ward – 2016**

City of Guelph Population		
Ward	2016 Population ¹	Share
Ward 1	24,700	19%
Ward 2	20,000	15%
Ward 3	17,500	13%
Ward 4	21,800	17%
Ward 5	20,100	15%
Ward 6	27,700	21%
Total	131,800	100%

¹ Population excludes census undercount and student populations. Numbers have been rounded.