Discussion Paper A: Barrie's Electoral System

Background

The City of Barrie has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Zachary Spicer, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Ward Boundary Review.

The primary purpose of the study is to prepare City Council to make decisions on whether to maintain the existing ward configuration or to adopt an alternative structure. Matters that are integral to a comprehensive review include the balancing of population among the wards for the 2026 municipal election and beyond, while respecting established neighbourhoods and communities within the municipality. These considerations and others form the guiding principles that together will be used to assess the present wards and will be applied in possible alternative options to be presented to the community and Council.

This Ward Boundary Review is premised on the legitimate democratic expectation that municipal representation in Barrie on election day and throughout the term of Council will be effective, equitable, and an accurate reflection of the contemporary distribution of communities and people across the municipality.

Setting

Barrie was incorporated as a Town in 1870 and formally separated from Simcoe County in 1959 when it became incorporated as a City. Barrie has been governed by a council of 11 (10 councillors and the Mayor elected at-large) since the 1982 term of council, when the number of councillors was reduced from 12 to 10. Between 1982 and 1995, residents elected two councillors from five wards. In 1995, the City moved to a 10 ward system (with one councillor elected from each ward) that has been in place ever since.

As the City of Barrie grew, changes to the electoral system were necessitated to account for and to adjust to new populations. The last ward boundary review was conducted in 2013, when the City's population was estimated to be 137,000 – a 26% increase since the prior ward boundary review in 2002. Both reviews adjusted the City's ten wards to bring about greater population parity. In 2009, the provincial government passed Bill 196 (*The Barrie-Innisfil Boundary Adjustment Act*), resulting in annexation of a portion of the Town of Innisfil. Ontario Regulation 501/09 altered the City of Barrie's

ward boundaries by adding new lands from Innisfil to the southern portion of the Barrie's existing wards 7, 8, 9 and 10. At the time, this resulted in the allocation of 519 individuals to these wards. Since, the population of this area has increased substantially with new growth occurring throughout southern Barrie. According to the 2021 census, the City of Barrie had a population of approximately 153,000 – an almost 12% increase since the last ward boundary review.

Topical Discussion Papers A to D

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

- *Discussion Paper A – Barrie's Electoral System*
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper D – Why a Ward Boundary Review?