Discussion Paper D:
Why a Ward Boundary Review?

The objective of this study is to conduct a thorough review of Barrie's ward boundary system. This evaluation will help identify which features need adjustment to achieve "effective representation" (as detailed in Discussion Paper C) and which features can remain unchanged.

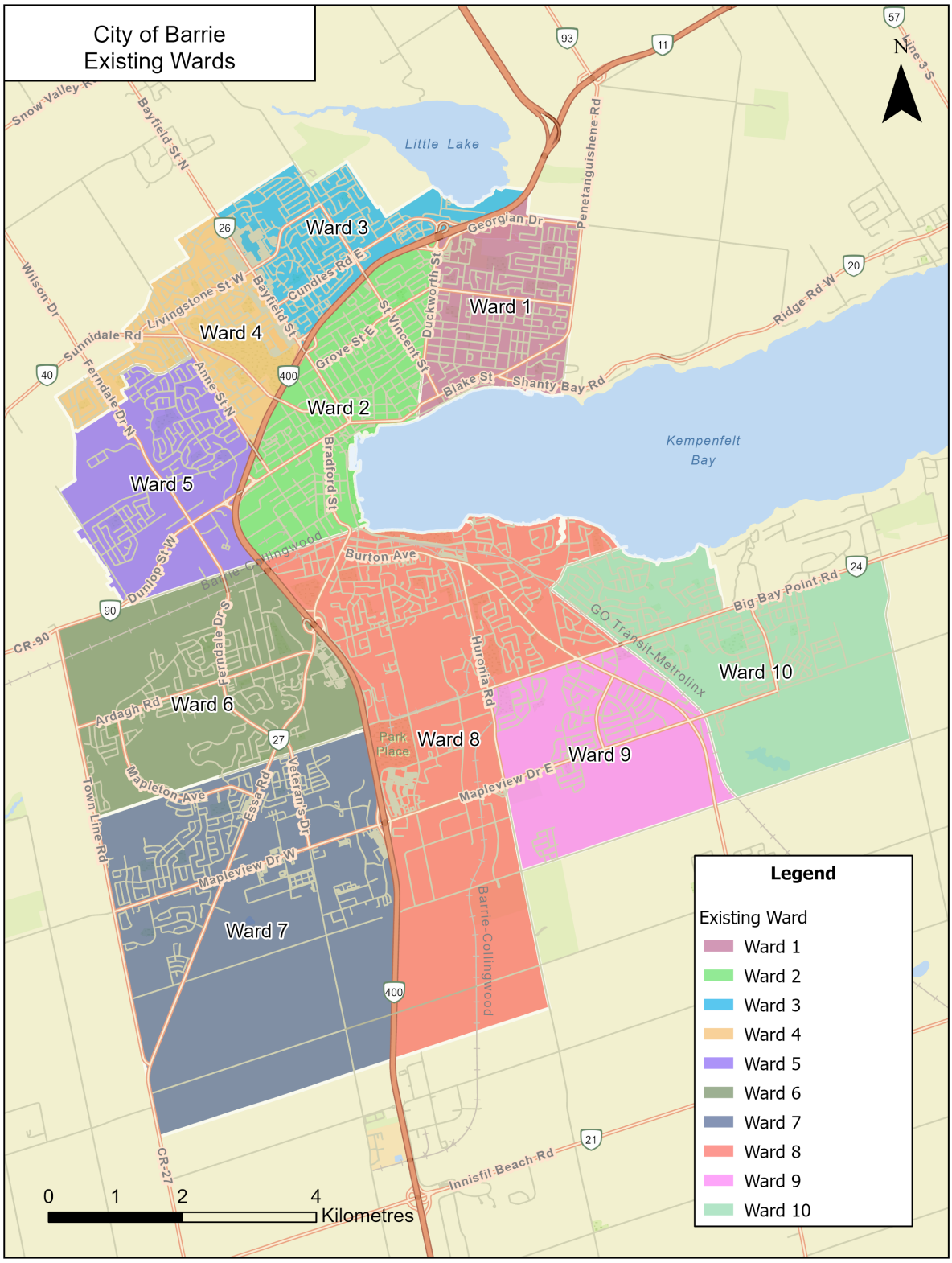
In Discussion Paper C, the Consultant Team outlined the guiding principles for reviewing Barrie's ward boundaries:

- Representation by Population and Consideration of Current and Future Population and Electoral Trends;
- Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries; and
- Communities of Interest.

These principles are all guided by the overarching principle of effective representation, as defined by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Carter decision (1991). Effective representation is rooted in the equality provision of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which ensures the right to vote and equitable representation in government.

A key step in the ward boundary review is to assess how well the existing wards meet these guiding principles. This Discussion Paper will initially evaluate the current system using the same criteria as any alternative designs, to identify its strengths and areas for improvement. The existing system is presented in Figure Di.

Figure Di: Existing Ward Configuration



Representation by Population and Consideration of Current and Future Population and Electoral Trends: One goal of this review is to design a system of representation that achieves relative parity in the population of the wards, with some degree of variation acceptable considering population densities and other demographic factors across the City. The indicator of success in a ward design is the extent to which the individual wards approach an "optimal" size.

In a symmetrical ward system where each ward elects the same number of councillors, optimal size can be understood as a mid-point on a scale where the term "optimal" (O) describes a ward with a population within 5% on either side of the calculated optimal size, which is itself identified by dividing the overall population of the municipality by the number of wards. For the Barrie Ward Boundary Review, variances of between plus or minus 25% of what is called the "optimal" ward population are considered within range. The principle is intended to ensure that residents have comparable access to their elected representative and that the workload of these representatives is relatively balanced. The classification "below/above optimal" (O+ or O-) is applied to a ward with a population between 6% and 25% on either side of the optimal size. A ward that is labelled "outside the range" (OR+ or OR-) indicates that its population is greater than 25% above or below the optimal ward size.

Table Di: Ward Population and Variance (2021)

Ward	Area (Sq. Km)	2021		
		Population	Population Variance	Optimal Range
Ward 1	5.7	16,056	1.09	O+
Ward 2	7.4	17,186	1.16	O+
Ward 3	5.0	12,892	0.87	O-
Ward 4	5.1	13,676	0.93	O-
Ward 5	7.2	13,338	0.90	O-
Ward 6	11.1	17,854	1.21	O+
Ward 7	19.8	17,218	1.16	O+
Ward 8	20.1	16,670	1.13	O+
Ward 9	8.1	11,798	0.80	O-
Ward 10	11.2	15,632	1.06	O+
Total/Average	**100.7**	**152,320**	**15,232**	

Source: Update to Population, Housing and Employment Forecast by Traffic Zone and Small Geographic Unit, March 8, 2024.

A review of the 2021 population figures in each ward demonstrates that the City currently had no "optimal" wards at the time. All ten wards are above or below the optimal range (±5%), but none are currently outside of the acceptable range. Certain wards, such as Ward 9, are close to falling outside of the optimal range. While none of

the wards currently fall outside of the acceptable population range, some disparities between the wards do warrant attention. For instance, the population difference between the most populated ward (Ward 6) and the least populated ward (Ward 9) is almost 6,000 residents.

Overall, the ward system in 2021 met population parity reasonably well. As such, the existing ward system largely meets this principle using 2021 census data. We know, however, that Barrie has experienced substantial growth between 2021 and 2025 and will continue to grow into the future. By 2036 the City is expected to have a population of 221,00, a figure that will increase to almost 300,000 by 2051.[1] This figure would mean that the City's population would almost double between 2021 and 2051. Even between 2021 and 2031, the City of Barrie is expected to add more than 40,700 residents. It is known that this growth will not be evenly distributed, with large number of newcomers to the city settling the within the south (Salem and Hewitts Secondary Plans) and City's Urban Growth Centre (U.G.C.), within the Major Transit Station Areas (M.T.S.A.s) and Strategic Growth Areas (S.G.As).

However, as a result of the location and timing of anticipated growth, if left unchanged, the existing ward configuration is not likely to meet population parity over time and may fall short of meeting this principle in the future.

Respecting Established Neighbourhoods and Communities: Electoral districts in Canada are not traditionally considered to be merely arithmetic divisions of the electorate designed to achieve parity of voting power. Rather, they are part of a system "which gives due weight to voter parity but admits other considerations where necessary."[2] One of the customary other considerations is "community of interest." The rationale is that electoral districts should, as far as possible, be cohesive units and areas with common interests related to representation.

Barrie contains several distinctive neighbourhoods and communities, such as Allandale, Cundles, Holly, Eastview, The Grove, Letitia Heights, Dalston, Horseshoe Valley, Little Lake, Ardagh Bluffs, Painswick, Kingswood, St. Paul's, Ferndale, Craighurst and Minet's Point. Barrie's growing downtown core could also be considered a community of interest. Most of these communities are comfortably contained with the current wards. Some wards contain multiple communities, but few identifiable communities are divided between two or more wards.

While the City is comprised of many smaller neighhourhoods, there is a "north Barrie" and "south Barrie" to also recognizable to many in the municipality. The north has largely older, more established neighbourhoods. These areas are more historic and

[1] Source: Update to Population, Housing and Employment Forecast by Traffic Zone and Small Geographic Unit – Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., March 8, 2024.
[2] Reference Re *Provincial Electoral Boundaries (*Sask.) [1991], known as the Carter decision, page 35.

emanate from the downtown are around the Kempenfelt Bay. The “south” is largely newer development, partly as a result of annexation with Innisfil. Residents in this are largely, but not exclusively, from the Greater Toronto Area and many still commute south too work.

There is not a precise, agreed-upon, geographic centre that separates north Barrie from south Barrie. Many agree that both areas are distinct, but there is little consensus regarding where both areas physically diverge. A likely point may be between Tiffin Street and Little Avenue, cutting through Wards 6 and 8. The northern portions of Ward 10 may also be considered as straddling both the north and south of the City.

Another prominent community within the City of Barrie is the post-secondary student cohort, concentrated around Georgian College in Ward 1. Given that students are not captured in Census data unless their permanent residence is listed in Barrie, and they are not included in Municipal Property Assessment Corporation data unless their name has been provided through enumeration forms or other documentation, the distribution of this population within the City is difficult to estimate.

As a result, it can be said that the existing ward system does a reasonably good, but not complete job of maintaining existing neighbourhoods as communities. Due to the divide between the north and south likely occurring in the middle of two sizable wards, it can only be said that the ward system is largely successful in protecting communities of interest.

Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries: As mentioned in the previous Discussion Paper, ward boundaries should be drawn impartially and with consideration for natural and human-made features within the City that may already serve as effective internal boundaries. There are some features in the City of Barrie that inherently divide the City internally, such as the Highway 400. None of the wards cross Highway 400 and all run around Kempenfelt Bay and conform the major roadways and markers, where possible. There are some areas within the ward system where marker lines are used in unnatural ways. For instance, the boundary between Ward 4 and 5 runs along Cundles Road West and then abruptly halts at Cundles West Park, forming an unnatural pattern that divides communities on either side of the park. Another example is the boundary between Wards 6 and 7. The boundary marker runs along Harvie Road from Essa Street and continues straight after the conclusion of Harvie Road, somewhat aligning with the Ardagh Central Creek Trail. Where boundary marker again meets up with a street it bisects Mapleton Avenue, dividing the neighbourhood in this area. In both areas, residents may be confused as to which ward they reside in and which councillor they should contact for information and service requests.

As a result, it can be said that the existing ward system does a reasonably good job of conforming to natural and physical boundaries, with a few notable exceptions.

Overview: No ward design is likely to meet all the principles in their entirety; however, the best designs maximize adherence to the principles, especially in relation to representation by population and effective representation. The current ward system in Barrie has many strengths. The boundary lines largely conform to natural and recognizable markers. The current wards also comfortably contain most communities of interest. While there are population disparities between the current wards, none exceed the 25% acceptable variance. However, given the substantial expected population growth in the City, these disparities will likely worsen over time. The ward system, therefore, largely provides for effective representation today, but the same cannot be said as the City moves towards the 2030 and 2034 elections.

Our preliminary assessment, then, points to the conclusion that a Ward Boundary Review in Barrie is necessary, as outlined in Table Dii.

Table Dii: Evaluation of Existing Ward System

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle*	Comment
Representation by Population and Consideration of Current and Future Population Trends	**Largely Successful**	All wards are within the acceptable population range, however growth patterns are likely to create population disparities that will worsen over time.
Consideration of Natural and Physical Boundaries	**Largely Successful**	Roadways and waterways are utilized well as boundaries.
Communities of Interest	**Largely Successful**	Most neighbourhoods are intact and contained fully in one ward; differentiation between north and south portions of city occurs over two wards.
Effective Representation	**Largely Successful**	Effective representation is achieved with current population figures, but population growth will hinder the achievement of fair representation across the City.

* The degree to which each guiding principle is satisfied is ranked as "**Yes**" (fully satisfied), "**Largely Successful**," "**Partially Successful**," or "**No**" (not satisfied).

Topical Discussion Papers A to E

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?*