

Andrew Sancton Consulting—Lambton Shores Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review

Supplement to Preliminary Report concerning the position of Deputy Mayor (October, 2020)

In our Preliminary Report, we assumed that, whatever other changes might be adopted with respect to council composition, Lambton Shores would continue to have a deputy mayor elected at-large. We assumed this because the deputy mayor (along with the mayor) represents the municipality on Lambton County Council. We assumed—and still believe—that ideally both representatives on county council should continue to be directly elected. Although indirect election (i.e. election by councillors from among their own group) is permitted by the Municipal Act, the dominant practice for lower-tier municipalities in Ontario is that their representatives on the upper-tier body (county or regional council) are directly elected.

In Lambton County, the only municipalities other than Lambton Shores with more than one representative on county council are the City of Sarnia and the Township of St. Clair. Sarnia is represented by its mayor and four city/county councillors, all elected at-large. St. Clair is represented by its mayor and deputy mayor in the same way that Lambton Shores is currently represented. If Lambton Shores were to change its representation such that its second county councillor was chosen by the municipality's councillors, such a representative (who could also presumably serve as deputy mayor, depending on council's wishes) would be the only member of county council not directly elected.

Nevertheless, during our initial consultations some people expressed the view that a directly-elected deputy mayor is no longer needed. Such people favoured indirect election of a county councillor for a four-year term by the municipal council from among their members. Most of the advocates of this view also favoured five wards rather than seven. They realized that this would create a six-person council, an option they tended to think was superior to one involving a seven-person council.

Given that the mayor can vote in Ontario municipal councils, the likelihood that some motions might be lost on a 3-3 vote would seem to increase under this plan. The Town of New Tecumseth (population 34,242 in 2016) in Simcoe County has ten council members, so having an even number of council members is certainly possible. Everyone recognizes that, due to absences and conflicts of interest, tie votes are still possible even with an odd number of members of council. It is perhaps significant, however, that none of the twenty other Ontario municipal councils that had similar populations to Lambton Shores and about which we reported in Table 1 of our Preliminary Report (pp.9-10) had an even number of council members.

Another possibility, still involving the indirect election of a second county-council representative, is to create six wards, such that the council would consist of a mayor and six ward councillors. Preliminary work on a six-ward model suggests that there are multiple difficulties, meaning that it would be difficult to defend. We doubt that there would be much public support for a six-ward model, with no deputy mayor but, if there is, we can revisit such an option.

During our public meetings and other forms of public consultation, we shall be soliciting views about the desirability of maintaining the position of a deputy mayor elected at-large who joins the mayor in representing the municipality on county council.