



Town of Lincoln 2024-25 Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review Background

Discussion Paper E: Is a Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review Necessary?

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive review of Lincoln's ward boundary system and council composition. In Discussion Paper D, the Consultant Team identified three guiding principles that will guide any review of the ward boundaries and council composition in Lincoln:

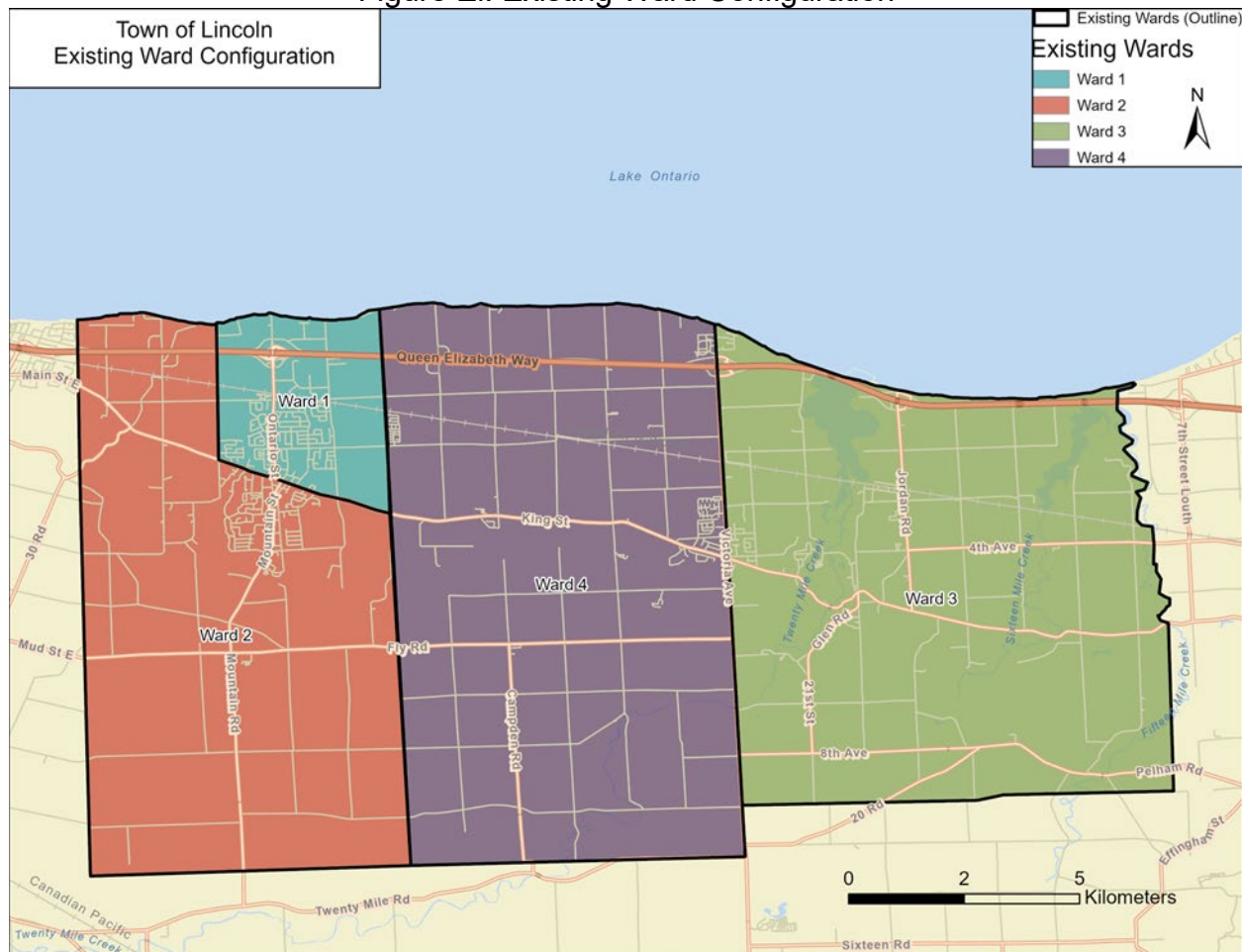
- Balancing the present and future population distribution among the wards;
- Respecting established neighbourhoods and communities (communities of interest); and
- Respecting geographical features and the defining natural and infrastructure boundaries.

As described in the discussion paper, these principles are all subject to the overriding principle of “effective representation” as enunciated by the Supreme Court of Canada.¹ The concept of effective representation was derived from the equality provision of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* related to the right to vote and, by extension, the right to be represented equitably in the deliberations of government.

A necessary step in a ward boundary review is to assess the extent to which the existing wards meet the guiding principles for a ward boundary system that achieves the goal of effective representation. In this Discussion paper, the status quo will therefore be subject to the same “tests” as any alternative designs to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The existing system is presented in Figure Ei.

¹ Reference re Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Sask.) [1991], known as the Carter decision.

Figure Ei: Existing Ward Configuration





Balancing the present and future population among the wards: 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 in light of population densities and other demographic factors across the Town, both now and into the near future. 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 Lincoln Ward Boundary Review, variances of between plus or minus 25 percent of what is called the “optimal” ward population are considered within range. The adoption of a 25% maximum variation is based on federal redistribution legislation but is widely used in municipalities like Lincoln where there are both higher density urban concentrations as well as many smaller settlements and rural territory where residential development is expected in the future. 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 Ei: Ward Population and Variance (2021)

Ward	2021		
	Population	Population Variance by Ward	Optimal Range
Ward 1	7,149	1.11	O+
Ward 2	7,925	1.23	O+
Ward 3	5,806	0.90	O-
Ward 4	4,839	0.75	O-
Total/Average	25,719	6,430	

Source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census – DB Level Data compiled by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

As illustrated in Ei, none of the wards are above the 25% variance range. None, however, can be classified as “optimal” ($\pm 5\%$). In fact, there is tremendous variation between the wards, with the councillors for the most populated ward (Ward 2) representing over 3,000 more people than the least populated (Ward 4) – a significant amount, given it is over 10% of the total population.



Lincoln has experienced modest growth through much of its history. This growth, however is intensifying. For instance, according to Census data, between 2011 and 2021, the population grew by 14% (or 3,232), far higher than the 10.8% growth experienced throughout the Region of Niagara. The Region is expected to experience significant growth in the future, with a total population of 694,000 anticipated by 2051. At that time, Lincoln is expected to have a population of 45,660 – a substantial increase from 2021 figures. With large population disparities between the existing wards and sizable development projects, such as Prudhommes, coming on line in the near future, it is natural to expect these disparities to worsen given the rapid growth within the Region.

Respecting Established Neighbourhoods and Communities (Communities of Interest): 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” (Carter decision, page 35). 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.

In the municipal context, “community of interest” is frequently linked to “neighbourhoods” since the neighbourhood is the most identifiable geographic point in most people’s lives; it is where they live. More importantly, the responsibilities of the municipality are also closely associated with where people live: roads and their maintenance, the utilities that are connected to or associated with their dwelling, and the myriad of social, cultural, environmental, and recreational services are often based on residential communities. Even municipal taxation is inextricably linked to one’s dwelling. Identifying such communities of interest recognizes that geographic location brings shared perspectives that should be reflected in the municipal representational process.

In most municipalities there are more communities of interest or neighbourhoods than there are electoral districts, so wards will of necessity have to be created by grouping together such building blocks for the purposes of representation. This principle addresses two perspectives: what is divided by ward boundaries and what is joined together. Alternative ward configurations will therefore be assessed in terms of how successfully they separate or aggregate certain communities of interest into plausible units of representation. The first priority is that communities ought not to be divided internally; as a rule, lines are drawn around communities, not through them. Secondly, as far as possible wards should group together communities with common interests.

Lincoln is a municipality that is home to several identified neighbourhoods and communities, including Beamsville, Vineland, Vineland Station, Campden, Jordan, Jordan Station and Rockway. Some of these communities, namely Rockway, Campden, Tintern, Jordan and Jordan Station are contained within single wards. However, some of the larger communities such as Beamsville, Vineland and Vineland Station are split between more than one ward.



Lincoln also has a large rural area, which cuts across Wards 2, 3 and 4 along the escarpment. Some of this land is agricultural and home to large portions of the community's vibrant winery and tender fruit sectors.

Respecting Geographical Features and the Defining Natural and Infrastructure

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 community that may already serve as effective internal boundaries. The boundary line separating Wards 1 and, subsequently, 2 from Ward 4 runs along Sann Road around Beamsville, which is recognizable, but abruptly ends at King St, continuing around Quarry Rd, eventually picking up at a major roadway at Dutch Lane. In the area between Sann Road and Dutch Lane, the boundary line follows an unrecognizable configuration, despite being straight. The boundary line between Wards 3 and 4 does make use of a major roadway – Victoria Avenue – which helpfully runs the length of the municipality from Lake Ontario.

The boundary lines used to separate Beamsville between Wards 1 and 2 and Vineland Station between Wards 4 and 3 do appear to use major recognizable roadways – Victoria Avenue in Vineland Station and King Street in Beamsville.

Effective Representation: As noted earlier, effective representation is not based on the performance of incumbent Councillors. It is, rather, a concept that is premised on the on-going relationship between residents and elected officials – not just on the way the resident is “counted” on election day, although that is an important component of a fair system of representation. Is each individual ward a plausible and coherent unit of representation? Are they drawn in such a way that representatives can readily play the role expected of them? Do they provide equitable (that is, fair) access to Councillors for all residents of the municipality?

The combination of current population imbalances, amplified disparities based upon population projections over time, and the boundaries that, in part, do not consistently adhere to natural and well-known infrastructure features suggests that the present wards in Lincoln are only partially successful at effective representation. Additionally, being “part-time” means that each councillor – and the Mayor – have a significant workload, with little direct administrative support to help them in their roles.



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 population of certain wards is out of line when compared to others. This will likely worsen over time, given the expected population growth within Niagara Region. This trend has significant implications for councillor workload, responsiveness and representation. Given the current deficiencies in the system, it cannot be said that the ward system is providing entirely effective representation to the residents of Lincoln.

Our preliminary assessment, then, points to the conclusion that a Ward Boundary and Composition Review in Lincoln is necessary, as outlined in Table Eii.



Table Eii: Evaluation of Existing Ward System

Principle	Does the Current Ward Structure Meet the Respective Principle*	Comment
Balancing the present and future population distribution among the wards	Partially Successful	Preliminary analysis would suggest that most wards are in the acceptable range (i.e., 25% variation) but no wards are optimal (i.e., 5% variation). The disparity between the most and least populated wards is significant and will likely worsen over time.
Respecting geographical features and the defining natural and infrastructure boundaries	Partially Successful	Roadways and waterways are utilized well as boundaries, although the boundary between Wards 1 and 2 and 4 partially runs along an unnatural configuration.
Respecting established neighbourhoods and communities	Largely Successful	Most neighbourhoods are intact and contained fully in one ward with the exception of Beamsville and Vineland Station.
Effective Representation	Partially Successful	Accelerating population imbalances, inconsistent boundary lines and the sizable range of population disparity hinder effective representation.

* 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 – Lincoln's Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of Lincoln's Council
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- *Discussion Paper E – Is a Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review Necessary?*