



Ward Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 25, 2024, 7:00 p.m.
Oliver Road Community Centre
563 Oliver Rd.

1. McKellar Ward Meeting 03-2024

Chair: Councillor Brian Hamilton

2. Resource Persons

Krista Power, Director - Legislative Services & City Clerk
Katie Piché, Council & Committee Clerk
Crystal DePeuter, Council & Committee Clerk

3. Guests

Rebecca Johnson, Chair - Council Composition Review Committee

4. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed those in attendance and provided introductory comments and a land acknowledgement.

There were approximately 19 people in attendance.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the McKellar Ward meeting held on May 28, 2024, for information.

6. Council Composition Update

Director - Legislative Services & City Clerk Krista Power and Chair - Council Composition Review Committee Rebecca Johnson provided a presentation relative to Phase Two of the Council Composition Review.

The presentation included an overview of the committee make up and process, and key findings from the consultations in Phase One:

- There was no clear preference on type of council
- 75% of community member respondents to survey want change and want to reduce council size
- Focus group with current Mayor and Council agreed with a review of ward boundaries and raised concerns on increased workload with a reduced council
- Indigenous focus groups voiced a need for more Indigenous representation on council and felt that the at-large model provides a greater chance of being elected.

It was noted that Thunder Bay's current composition of council has not changed since 1985.

There was a brief discussion on comparator municipalities:

- Average of 12 councillors
- Thunder Bay is an anomaly with a hybrid system
- Most reflected a full time mayor and part time councillors

Chair Johnson presented the two options that are being presented to the community for feedback during Phase Two:

- Option 1 – 10 elected at-large, mayor
- Option 2 – 4 wards (2 each) + 2 at-large, mayor
 - Wards will divide via main thoroughfares (Red River Road / Dawson Street; Oliver Road; Arthur Street) and will run east to west to include waterfront, urban, industrial, rural, potential growth areas in each ward
 - Names will be replaced with numbers
 - Wards will be balanced according to: population, income, education, number of households, and diversity.

Chair Johnson and Clerk Power fielded questions and comments from constituents:

- How will the 2 councillors per ward divide the work?
 - Would be up to the councillors on how to manage division

- Increase representation for constituents
- Do councillors need to live in the ward to be elected?
 - No - City used to have by-law to that effect but province overturned and now it is not a requirement
- Why propose a ward system?
 - Increased accountability and connection to the constituents in the ward.
- What was heard as a disadvantage to the at-large model:
 - Can be a higher value campaign and more expensive resulting in a decrease in diversity in candidates.
- Was an 8 ward model considered? 4 wards may be difficult for candidates trying to connect with residents during campaign
 - More wards required splitting up neighbourhoods to get population equity
- There was discussion that with current system people vote for 7 people out of 13 (5 at large, 1 ward councillor and mayor) which means there are 5 councillors that help make decisions that citizens aren't able to vote for. It was stated that this issue is not resolved with ward system. Wards should split north/south instead of east/west.
- Why do the north and south areas in the same ward have such different issues?
 - Needed to work with population and natural boundaries
- Request for clarification on streets and whether they are split down the middle?
 - Yes - streets are split down the middle and the dividing main thoroughfares are:
 - River Street / Dawson Street
 - Oliver Road
 - Arthur Street
- How were the Ward 2 waterfront boundaries set?
 - Population is high in that area

- There was discussion that Ward 3 will encompass both downtown cores which will be difficult to manage and how the two cores should be split.
- Could you have both part-time and full-time councillors?
 - Would not be able to do a split because all councillors are elected in the same process and can't be designated after the fact - would affect representation. If full-time, would need to all be full-time and would result in a high expense.
- If the final decision comes back to council and they can vote against it, shouldn't the authority for decision rest with a third party?
 - Clerk Power referenced that the councillors all have an interest in common and all have the same conflict of interest in a situation like this.
 - Encouraged constituents to remember how important and powerful voices are to affect change.
 - There are other options such as a petition to the Province of Ontario or a binding plebiscite.

Chair Johnson and Clerk Power emphasized the importance of formal feedback and encouraged all constituents to participate in the upcoming survey and other public engagement opportunities designed to capture feedback.

7. Surplus Lands

The Chair informed constituents that there may be movement related to surplus lands and additional properties may become available soon for development.

8. Budget 2025

The Chair provided the following information relative to Budget 2025:

The recent budget direction report recommends that the municipal tax levy increase should not exceed 3.8% before growth.

City Manager John Collin has referenced a focus on growth and is looking for higher performing services as opposed to service reductions for cost saving.

A constituent raised concerns about reinvesting growth revenue into a growth fund instead of returning to constituents via tax reductions.

9. Ward and City Issues

The Chair provided an update on the current road work being done on Simpson Street and noted that the first section of the project is expected to be completed up to Dease Street this year.

Constituents expressed concern and frustration related to the building debris on the sidewalk as a result of a car accident earlier this year, which caused further damage to the property. The Chair advised that there are circumstances that need resolution regarding the buildings affected and that movement of the debris could be dangerous and specific steps need to be taken prior to clean up.

A constituent raised concerns about trees being removed and replaced with pylons increasing a look of neglect in the area.

A constituent raised concerns about the length of time and resources needed to take down a tree designated for removal.

A discussion was held relative to emergency services, triaging, and challenges with assisting people who refuse treatment/assistance. Further discussion was held relative to housing, specifically related to emergency services and people in crisis. The Chair advised that through partnerships more transitional units are being created to house people who require support resulting in a total of 170 transitional units across Thunder Bay. The Chair advised that work on the housing crisis is ongoing. It is a long-term vision and will take time to see results.

The Chair advised that emergency services are facing significant labour challenges and discussed the costs of homelessness related to city services in addition to the impact on the mental health of service providers.

A constituent raised concerns with the condition of the road around Boulevard and that it has not been prioritized for repair. The Chair advised that with few exceptions he advocates for the repair and maintenance of existing infrastructure over new spending.

A constituent asked about a situation that was witnessed with soil being transported to Pool 6 and then tested. The Chair advised that there are usually reasons that things are being done a specific way and that Administration could provide a response to that particular situation if asked.

A constituent asked for an update on the lithium manufacturing plants and raised concerns about competition in the region. The Chair advised that more information on this topic will be available in the future.

The Chair provided an update on the traffic light synchronization project advising that hardware is now in place and software will roll out in the fall/winter. A section of Arthur Street (Kingsway Ave. to Brodie Street) will be receiving new software next year.

A constituent raised a concern related to the length of a walk signal (too short).

The Chair provided an update relative to Victoriaville advising that the demolition is a full year behind and that the structure is now planned to come down next summer. The project has been pared down to adjust for cost. A discussion was held relative to cost overages and the challenges with unanticipated issues with the Victoriaville project.

The Chair advised that work is nearing completion for the downtown area on Red River Road.

10. Adjournment

The Chair thanked those in attendance for their participation.

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.