



Memorandum

TO: Krista Power, Director Legislative Services & City Clerk **FILE:**

FROM: Rebecca Johnson, Chair – Council Composition Review Committee

DATE: March 20, 2025

SUBJECT: **Follow Up Information for Council Composition Review Committee – Final Report**

MEETING & DATE: Committee of the Whole Meeting – April 7, 2025

At the March 3, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council Composition Review Committee - Final Report relative to Council Composition, was presented as a First Report to allow Committee of the Whole and the general public time to consider the implications of the report before its recommendations are considered by Committee of the Whole on April 7, 2025.

Outlined here are responses prepared by the Council Composition Review Committee to questions raised at the March 3, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting.

What is the reason behind the drop from 13 to 11 and why has it been the focus of the committee’s work to look at a decrease to the size of City Council?

The feeling that a slightly smaller Council would likely facilitate more efficient discussion and therefore decision making for the council was raised by several current Councillors in our consultations with Council in the first phase of our work. This was very influential.

Secondly, once the well-balanced division of our city into four wards was identified, a Council of two representatives per ward plus two at large best represents the ratio of ward: at-large we recommend to lower barriers to democratic participation.

The reduction of Councillors was a focus from the start of the committee work, whether through the first survey which showed a reduction to 8 Councillors, to media surveys, to ward meetings, etc. There was not one person that indicated an increase in numbers.

The impetus for change was ignited by Council themselves and through engagement with the public.

The report noted that additional administrative support may be required with a decrease to City Council, can more information be provided on that and what that means?

One of the concerns raised by Councillors when interviewed is the administrative burden of the job. The idea is that additional support would make the job feasible for a broader range of candidates, and more sustainable for those elected. We recommend Council investigate what administrative support would be valued by Councillors, then invest in that additional support. This recommendation got confused with a common assumption among voters that less Councillors would mean significant savings, when in fact even a very modest investment in additional support for Council would outweigh any savings from a smaller Council, because Councillors (like those in comparator municipalities) earn so little money for the role.

We don't know what strategic and targeted administrative support of Councillors would be of greatest benefit, but we recommend they be identified and secured. Some of the options that came up include:

- Space (lowering barriers of participation to those who would rather meet constituents and review confidential material in a supported and professional setting, not just the corner of their kitchen table, in coffee shops and grocery aisles);
- Support with communication and schedule management;
- Better city-service concern systems to spare Councillors being involved as much in those issues (as well as better data collection concerning them)

We think the right additional administrative support could lower barriers to participation and make the role more attractive to a broader range of people, further improving the representative diversity of Council. This is why we recommend that Council investigate that possibility.

Additional costs may result. Most important is the focus on efficiencies in operation.

Additionally, a major overall is needed with the city website, which the General Manager stated was a priority. He stated that a one call system placed into a cue was badly needed, as he himself was aghast in trying to deal with public related issues. Feedback received from Councillors commonly voiced a concern with the number of service calls fielded, and frustration in not knowing who to call.

What was the rationale for 4 wards, 2 members per ward and 2 at large. Was the composition of 4 wards, 1 member per ward and 6 at large discussed and why wasn't this presented as an option?

The rationale for the four wards with two Councillors each, and two At- Large Councillors becoming parochial, in direct opposition to their duty as Councillors to make all decisions for the benefit of the city as a whole.

Having wards balanced not just in population but in economic regions, education, average household composition and income is intended to counter that perceived and historical risk, while making ward borders easy to recognize.

Lesser reasons recommending this structure were the possibility of a measure of job-sharing between Councillors (to lower barriers to participation by making the job less onerous) and a measure of ranked ballot within wards & the at-large race (lowering a barrier and supporting greater diversity in our Council).

The composition of one member for each of these four wards and six at large was discussed. Most of the committee agree it does not support our reasons for recommending this composition.

All Councillors make decisions on city wide issues. Our recommended wards increases Councillors' knowledge base on all rural, suburban, waterfront and industrial issues. We noted in attending ward meetings that ward issues raised there were then championed by Ward Councillors often without success. Our system broadens knowledge base horizon in all the geographic zones.

We expect two key improvements to the functioning of our City Council through this recommended change to its composition: firstly, to lower bars to participation (both by voters and candidates) and secondly to improve the efficiency of Council's decision-making.

Wards lower bars to participation by making running for election less expensive and knowing your candidates less daunting. We have concluded that Thunder Bay, like other Canadian cities of our demographic and geographic size as well as our municipal complexity, is not best served by an At-Large dominated Council. However, At-Large Councillors can bring experience or perspective that has gained them city-wide support in the role. Therefore, we recommend maintaining a hybrid structure with only two At-Large Councillors. Having two At-Large Councillors will lower the bar to voter participation like it does for Ward Councillors as it is expected to shorten the number of candidates on that ballot.

A change to our Council composition is well worth adding to our efforts to improve our city's economic wellbeing and future prosperity.

Members of the Council Composition Review Committee will be present at the April 7, 2025 meeting should there be any questions for committee members.