

## ***RECOMMENDATION***

WITH RESPECT to the Report 2025 –Council Composition Review Committee, we recommend that the Council Composition model outlined in this report be approved. This would change the composition of City Council to 11 members, 1 Mayor, 2 members elected At Large and 8 members elected in 4 wards;

AND THAT the existing ward boundaries be repealed and replaced with the 4 ward model that reflects the structure outlined in this report;

AND THAT Administration be directed to bring forward the associated by-law to enact this change in Council composition in advance of the 2026 Municipal Election;

AND THAT the Special Purpose Committee – City Council Composition Review Committee be dissolved with gratitude for their task;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

## ***LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN***

### **Maamawe - All Together**

Foster an inclusive, diverse and equitable community and workplace

## ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The report recommends altering the composition of the City Council of Thunder Bay and outlines the steps taken to reach this recommendation, including extensive public consultation and consideration of equity, representation, economic growth, and democratic health.

- **Recommendation for Council Composition Change:** The report recommends changing the City Council composition to 11 members: 1 Mayor, 2 members elected At Large, and 8 members elected in 4 wards, to be implemented before the 2026 Municipal Election.
- **Approval and Implementation:** The administration is directed to bring forward the associated by-law to enact these changes, and the Special Purpose Committee –

City Council Composition Review Committee will be dissolved with gratitude for their task.

- **Equity in Ward Boundaries:** The new ward boundaries will create equitable population, income levels, and demographics, ensuring each ward encompasses diverse segments of the city. This structure aims to minimize narrow local focus and promote comprehensive city representation.
- **Enhanced Representation:** The proposed ward system with 2 councillors per ward maintains a direct connection with neighborhoods, increases citizen engagement, and allows for shared workload among councillors. At Large councillors provide additional perspectives and alternative points of contact for citizens.
- **Economic Growth and Efficiency:** A reduction in council members is expected to increase decision-making efficiency and focus on economic and social sustainability, while maintaining a critical mass for healthy debate.
- **Democratic Health and Diversity:** The hybrid model encourages diverse candidate participation by lowering campaign costs for ward candidates and allowing At Large candidates to accumulate city-wide votes. This model simplifies the election process, promoting greater voter participation.
- **Public Consultation:** Public engagement was conducted in two phases to gather feedback on voter relationships with City Council, effectiveness, and potential models. Key findings included support for reducing councillors, maintaining the ward system, and addressing councillor workload concerns.
- **Financial Implications:** There are no financial implications associated with this report. Although a decrease in elected representatives is recommended, it is anticipated that councillors may need more administrative support or increased budgets to fulfill their duties.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The City Council Composition Review Committee (Committee) considered a range of sources to inform their recommendation including two phases of public consultation, mapping recommendations, municipal comparator data, and presentations from subject matter experts.

Rationale for the final recommendation is based on the following improvements to the current composition:

### **Equity**

The current ward system divides the city into 7 wards that reflect drastically varied population numbers and features. The Committee recommends a redrawn ward map that will create 4 wards running east to west which will address current demographic inequities between the wards. By design, each ward will reflect equitable population, income levels, and demographics. In addition, the proposed structure introduces broader equities between the wards to ensure that each ward encompasses a portion of waterfront, urban, residential, industrial, and rural segments of the city. The makeup of each ward will support City Council's focus on making decisions to benefit the City as a whole. Ward councillors will continue to relate to specific neighbourhoods while also being exposed to the full scope of the city, minimizing the risk of parochialism.

### **Representation**

The model recommended by the Committee reflects a slight increase and redistribution of ward councillors compared to current composition. A ward system with 2 councillors per ward maintains a councillor's direct connection with the ward neighbourhoods and community; increases a citizen's ability to engage with an elected official, both in terms of logistics and ideology; and may allow for a reduction in workload through elements of job sharing.

Ward councillors may come to the council table with united or differing perspectives from the same ward, strengthening the decision-making process and providing an increase in representation to residents.

It was determined by the Committee that At Large councillors also play an important role in representation. As a result, At Large councillor positions were included in the model though decreased from the current composition. The At Large positions will increase the number of representatives a single voter selects, bring additional perspectives to decision-making, and offer an alternative point of contact for citizens advocating for policy or

process change. The Committee felt that 2 positions could adequately fulfill these functions.

The existing workload for councillors is seen as a barrier to effective representation, based on feedback from current and former councillors. This was a frequent point of discussion, and the Committee sees a benefit in reviewing current practices as it relates to workload. This may include providing additional staff support, decreasing committee representation, and creating opportunities to leverage technology to respond to resident concerns.

### **Economic Growth and Community Development**

A reduction in council members from 12 to 10 will increase efficiencies in decision-making processes and allow City Council to focus on their role as the overwhelming driving force behind the city's economic and social sustainability. A reduction of 2 councillors will produce efficiencies in time and the effectiveness of meetings, while maintaining a critical mass for healthy debate. With the city poised for growth and addressing social issues, efficiency is needed to encourage informed, debated, and timely decision-making.

All councillors are bound by law to make decisions in the best interest of the city regardless of whether they are elected as a Ward or At Large councillor. Based on this decision-making principle, a City Council made up of those who have intimate knowledge of distinct areas and those whose focus is the city as a whole is best positioned to debate and work through challenges.

The Committee did take time to reflect on which system would support the greatest amount of economic development and growth as this was recognized as an important piece to the municipality's overall financial health. In the end, the Committee is challenged to make a decision that has the broadest impact on many different challenges, economic development being one of those challenges, and felt the proposed system achieves that result.

### **Democratic Health**

The Committee endorsed the hybrid model because it acknowledges barriers that candidates may face. A system designed to encourage the participation of the highest number of diverse candidates is important to ensure a healthy democracy. Ward candidates typically have lower costs associated with their campaigns and are not as reliant on name recognition. At Large candidates may have the ability to accumulate votes from a particular demographic from across the city. Both types of councillors encourage diverse representation in different ways which lowers barriers to successfully run in a municipal election.

It is important to note that both the hybrid model proposed, and the current hybrid model in place, represent compromises. There are certainly benefits to having an all ward system and there are also benefits to having an all at-large system. These specifics were shared with the committee during our rounds of consultation. The Committee feels that the proposed hybrid system, with the changes to larger more equally dispersed wards, not only represents the outcomes of our consultation, but is also the strongest design to support the broadest concerns of a specific electoral model.

In this hybrid model, voters will be responsible for electing 4 councillors and a mayor, lowering barriers by simplifying the selection process to encourage greater voter participation. Creating an environment that promotes voter engagement is an opportunity to improve democratic functions.

Over the course of the Committee's task, Indigenous representation on City Council was a recurring conversation and the Committee encourages the City of Thunder Bay to explore ways to increase Indigenous representation.

## ***CONSULTATION***

Public engagement was completed at two key junctures in the process: to determine priorities for further examination and to gather feedback on potential models.

### Phase One

The focus for public engagement in Phase One was to provide direction to the Committee based on the public's current view of voter relationships with City Council, the effectiveness of City Council, and the existing ward boundaries. Feedback was gathered through a survey (659 responses), both online and in person (hard copies); a partnership with Thunder Bay Public Library to host an Indigenous Sharing Circle and 2 sessions targeting under-represented voices; youth engagement at City Hall; pop-up locations at the Thunder Bay 55 Plus Centre, Goods & Co., and Thunder Bay Country Market; deputations from members of the public; and focus groups with sitting members of City Council and the Executive Leadership Team.

Key findings from Phase One public engagement included:

- Most people supported a reduction in the number of councillors although the reason why was not voiced.
- Some residents discussed positive representation by the ward system.

- Many people spoke to the value of both ward and at large councillors.
- The need for a review of ward boundaries was raised.

Concerns were raised following the completion of the Phase One engagement that included a lack of understanding of how municipal councils function and the perception that any reduction of City Council would result in cost savings for residents. During consultations, an important focus was to increase the public's understanding about the role and responsibility of local government with more emphasis on the fact that no cost savings are anticipated in any reduction of council.

### Phase Two

The focus for public engagement in Phase Two was to gather public perspectives on two potential models. Feedback was gathered through a survey (563 responses), both online and in person (hard copies); engagement with 240 youth during Local Government Week; pop-up locations at the Country Market, 55 Plus Centre, and a Thunderwolves game; deputations from members of the public; engagement with the City's Indigenous Advisory Council; and presentations at Ward and Town Hall meetings.

Key findings from Phase Two public engagement included:

- Responses favoured maintaining the ward system either through a hybrid or all ward model.
- The ability to connect with a councillor and have interests represented was a significant factor in weighing options.
- Reducing barriers for candidates to increase diversity on City Council was important.
- Some people referenced the balance of power and number of councillors making decisions that affect the entire city.
- Loss of voice with respect to neighbourhood identity and representation was a recurring concern.
- Workload of councillors was raised as a concern with the increase in ward size.

## ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATION***

At this time, there are no financial implications associated with this report. No cost savings are anticipated. While a decrease in the number of elected representatives is the recommended outcome, it is anticipated that members may need more administrative support or an increase to individual budgets to fulfill their duties.

## ***CONCLUSION***

It is concluded that the recommendation to adopt the proposed changes to the City of Thunder Bay Council composition for implementation in the 2026 Municipal Election be approved.

If the recommended changes to council composition are not adopted, the Committee sees value in reviewing ward boundaries as a separate exercise.

As Indigenous representation was frequently discussed, the Committee sees value in reviewing and exploring avenues to increase Indigenous representation on City Council.

## ***BACKGROUND***

At the Committee of the Whole meeting held on August 24, 2020, a motion relative to a council composition review was deferred to the September 21, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting.

At the September 21, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting, a resolution was passed requesting that Administration complete work associated with the process and requirements to undertake a public consultation process relative to decreasing the composition of City Council and report back with a recommended plan for consultation, financial implications relative to this work and the legislative deadlines and considerations required to make any changes in advance of the 2022 Municipal Election.

At the November 23, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting, the recommendation presented in Report No. R 126/2020 (City Manager's Office - Office of the City Clerk) was approved which provided for a review of Council Composition led by the City Clerk to commence in 2023 and be completed prior to the 2026 Municipal Election.

At the June 19, 2023 Committee of the Whole meeting, the recommendation presented in Report 188-2023-2023-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk was approved which provided the Terms of Reference for the Council Composition Review Committee.

At the September 23, 2024 Committee of the Whole meeting, a presentation was provided to members of Council by Committee Chair Rebecca Johnson to provide an update on the completion of Phase One of the project, with respect to the Council Composition Review Committee's work completed to date, and to provide an overview of the Committee's next steps.

***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

Terms of Reference – Council Composition Review Committee

Proposed Ward Boundary map – 4 wards

Breakdown of Ward information – infographics

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

The Council Composition Committee:

Rebecca Johnson, Chair Cody

Fraser, Vice-Chair Wayne

Bahlleda

Riley Burton

Heather McLeod

Carlos Santander-Maturana

Date (02/24/2025)



**Council Composition Committee  
Special Purpose Committee  
Terms of Reference**

**Approved by Committee of the Whole: June 19, 2023  
Ratified by City Council: June 26, 2023**

**1. Name of Committee**

The Special Purpose Committee shall be named the City of Thunder Bay City Council Composition Review Committee.

**2. Background and Assumptions**

By resolution of Council, the Council Composition Review Committee is established as a Special Purpose Committee to undertake a review of the composition of City Council and review the ward system and consider the review of ward boundaries if applicable and necessary.

It is assumed that representation fair and equitable to voters across the City of Thunder Bay must be achieved and is the paramount goal of this work. It is further assumed that the distinct needs and pressures of the regional functions of Thunder Bay within a larger geographic area must be considered. It is further assumed that members of Council should be tasked with work that is achievable within the allocated time and fairly reflects the demands of the position, and, in comparison to council members at similar municipalities in Ontario.

It is further assumed that it is appropriate to consider the workload of the members; the opinions and feedback from current and future voters; data from other municipalities similar in nature to Thunder Bay; potential growth and decline in population and changing demographics of neighborhoods as it relates to the current ward system and the general expectation and demands on members when recommending potential changes in the composition of City Council and/or the ward system or ward boundaries.

**3. Resources and Finances**

Members of the Council Composition Review Committee are not paid for their participation. Expenses by members for Committee business will be reimbursed provided these expenditures are made in compliance with the City's established policies. Remuneration received by members will be reported annually as required by the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

Resource personnel in the form of subject matter expertise from within the corporation will support the Committee from the following areas:

- Legislative services – City Clerk and/or Deputy City Clerk
- Planning services (GIS Mapping) – Susan Henton, Chief Mapping Technician

- Corporate Communications & Public Engagement – Stacey Levanen, Supervisor Corporate Communications
- Community Connection – Marginalized Voting Population – Cynthia Olsen, Manager– Community Strategies
- Indigenous Relations – Alain Joseph, Acting Manager of Indigenous Relations

#### **4. Deliverables**

The Committee will make specific recommendations on the number of members of council that would best serve the City of Thunder Bay, the validity and rationale for a ward system with specific boundaries. Changes recommended to City Council will be reviewed by the public via public engagement opportunities prior to presentation and if approved must be approved by City Council by By-law which would be required to be in place in advance of the 2026 Municipal Election.

Should significant changes to the composition of City Council be proposed, the remuneration for elected officials will be included in this scope of work.

#### **5. Membership and Responsibility**

##### **Committee Composition**

The Committee will be composed of 6 individuals - one (1) representative to be appointed by the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, and five (5) representatives to be appointed by City Council by recommendation from the City Clerk as it relates to the requirements of the work associated with the Committee. All members must be eligible for appointment in accordance with the City of Thunder Bay's Corporate Policy 08-0101 Council and Citizen Appointments to Committees and Boards.

Areas of expertise from citizen members includes:

- legal background and an understanding of the municipal legislation;
- a background or field of study in political science;
- a background or experience in the labour movement as a member or representative;
- experience in the field of communications and citizen engagement; or
- all applicants must have the ability to work in a collaborative setting with a group of individuals from a variety of sectors.

All members are voting members. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee are selected by the members at the first meeting of the Committee.

##### **Term of the Committee**

The term of the Committee will expire upon the delivery of its final report; it is anticipated that this will not exceed December of 2024.

## **6. Governance**

The Committee is mandated by City Council to examine the composition of City Council and the ward system including a potential ward boundary review. The Committee will do this in a way of its own design, with an emphasis on public engagement and data collection from peer municipalities. After doing this, the Committee will make recommendations to Council as to regarding what it deems to be an appropriate number of representatives and type of representation (ward system, at large system).

The minutes and reports of the Committee shall be presented to City Council through the appropriate session of Committee of the Whole.

Voting on motions and questions before the Committee shall be in accordance with the By-law 51/2021 Procedural Rules of City Council and its Committees. Quorum for meetings will be by simple majority which will require at least 4 members to be present. All meetings shall be open to the public unless they are closed in a manner in compliance with the *Municipal Act*, 2001.

The City Clerk will act as the chief resource to the Committee, assisting and advising the Committee as required. The Office of the City Clerk will provide administrative support including compiling and coordinating the distribution of agenda and minutes, correspondence to and on behalf of members, and booking of meeting rooms etc. Additional resources have been assigned to fulfill the mandate of the committee.

## **7. Timelines**

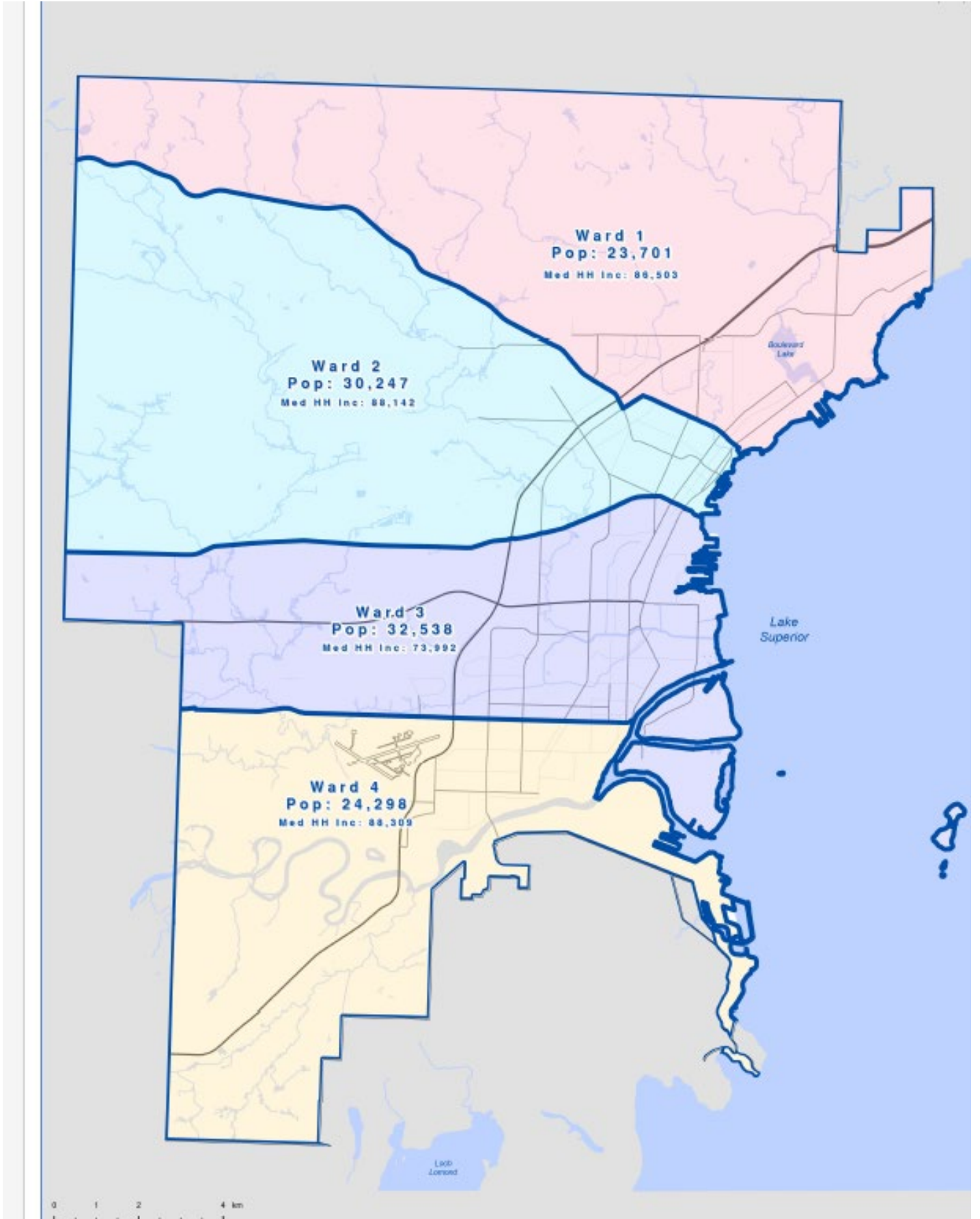
The Committee will meet at the call of the Chair, or on a schedule determined by the Committee in consultation with the resource members from administration supporting the Committee.

All meetings of the Council Composition Committee will be open to the public except to deal with matters that are deemed to fall within the conditions of a closed meeting as defined in Sect. 239 of *the Municipal Act*, 2001.

## **8. Contact**

The Administrative contact for the Council Composition Committee is the City Clerk. Each Committee member is asked to make sure that their contact information is kept current with the City Clerk.

# Proposed 4 Ward Boundary Map



# Ward 1

Area: 95.67 square kilometers

## Population

**23,701**

With growth of 1,020, the population is expected to reach 24,721 by 2025.

## Households

**10,612**

An estimated 1,824 of households live below the poverty line, while 934 households have an income over \$200,000

## Visible Minority

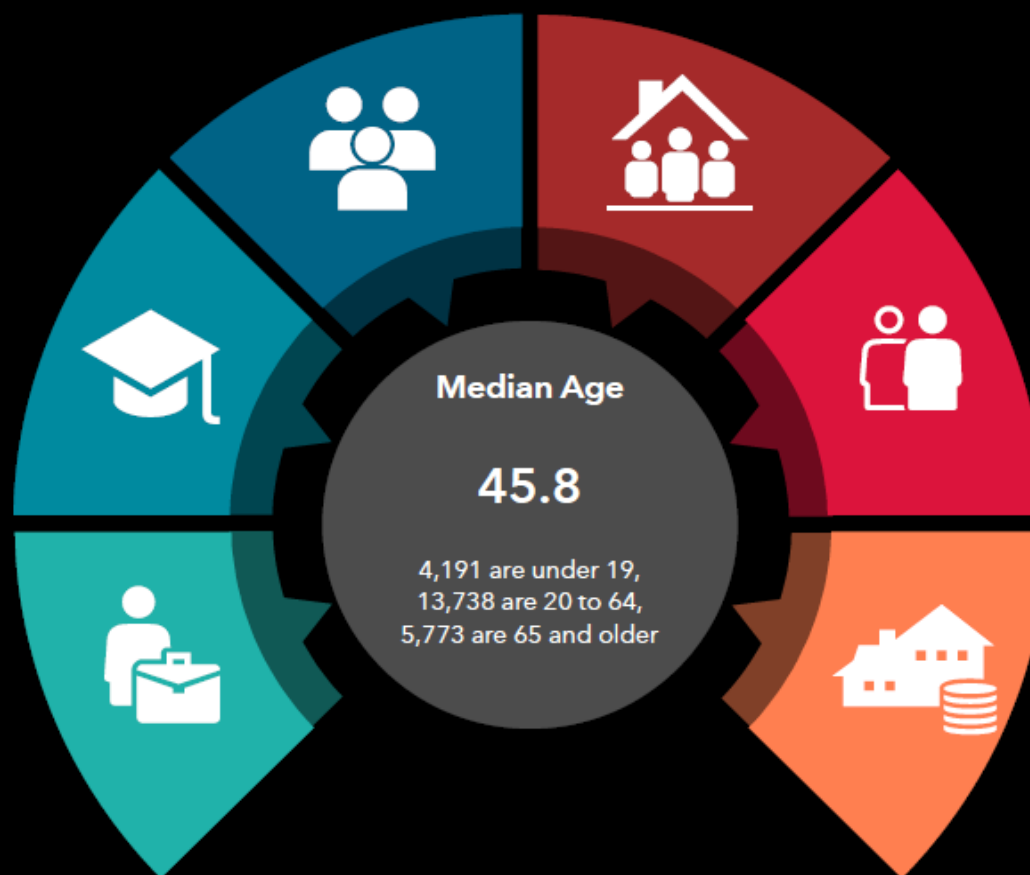
**648**

There are 2,182 first generation immigrant population, and 75 immigrating to Canada since 2017.

## Median Household Income

**CA\$86,503**

With an average of 2.2 people per household, the average household income is CA\$101,298.96



## University Degree or Higher

**4,512**

3,202 have no High School Diploma, 5,141 are High School Graduates, and 5,268 have College.

## Labour Force

**12,002**

There are 793 self-employed individuals, and 783 working from home.



# Key Facts

# Ward 2

Area: 97.44 square kilometers

## Population

**30,247**

With growth of 1,080, the population is expected to reach 31,327 by 2025.

## University Degree or Higher

**7,810**

4,047 have no High School Diploma, 5,961 are High School Graduates, and 6,001 have College.

## Labour Force

**15,807**

There are 1,465 self-employed individuals, and 1,083 working from home.

## Households

**13,487**

An estimated 2,496 of households live below the poverty line, while 1,700 households have an income over \$200,000

## Visible Minority

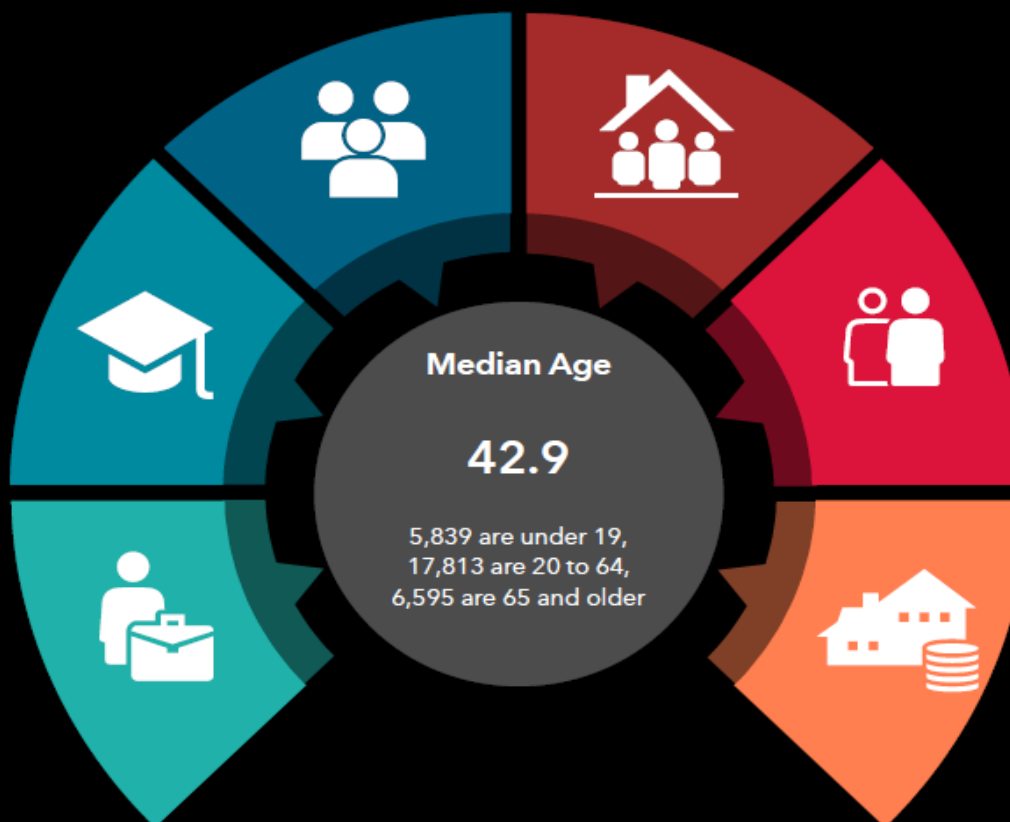
**1,677**

There are 3,535 first generation immigrant population, and 188 immigrating to Canada since 2017.

## Median Household Income

**CA\$88,142**

With an average of 2.2 people per household, the average household income is CA\$107,861.84



# Key Facts

# Ward 3

Area: 64.48 square kilometers

## Population

**32,538**

With growth of 276, the population is expected to reach 32,814 by 2025.

## University Degree or Higher

**5,625**

4,904 have no High School Diploma, 7,951 are High School Graduates, and 6,784 have College.

## Labour Force

**15,404**

There are 966 self-employed individuals, and 966 working from home.

## Households

**14,768**

An estimated 3,373 of households live below the poverty line, while 991 households have an income over \$200,000

## Visible Minority

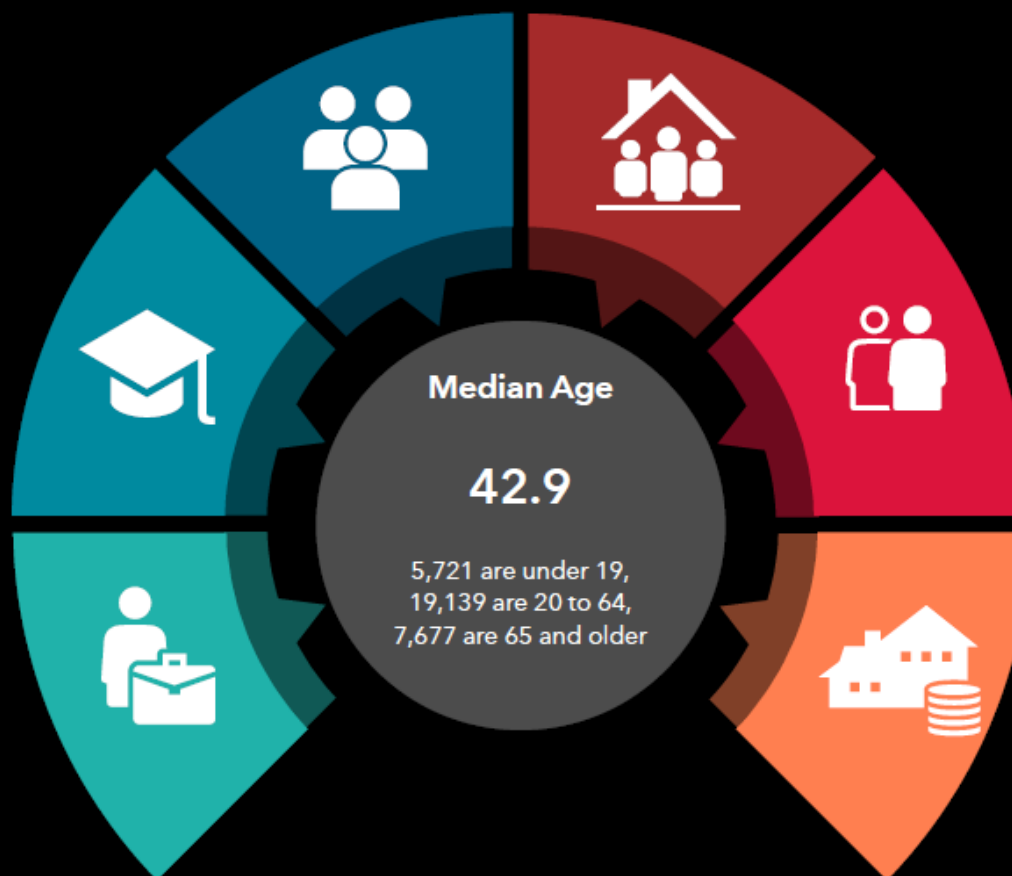
**1,765**

There are 3,234 first generation immigrant population, and 221 immigrating to Canada since 2017.

## Median Household Income

**CA\$73,992**

With an average of 2.1 people per household, the average household income is CA\$89,905.22



## Key Facts

# Ward 4

Area: 74.55 square kilometers

## Population

**24,298**

With growth of 599, the population is expected to reach 24,897 by 2025.

## University Degree or Higher

**4,146**

3,224 have no High School Diploma, 5,723 are High School Graduates, and 5,662 have College.

## Labour Force

**12,841**

There are 870 self-employed individuals, and 823 working from home.

## Households

**10,707**

An estimated 1,704 of households live below the poverty line, while 1,163 households have an income over \$200,000

## Visible Minority

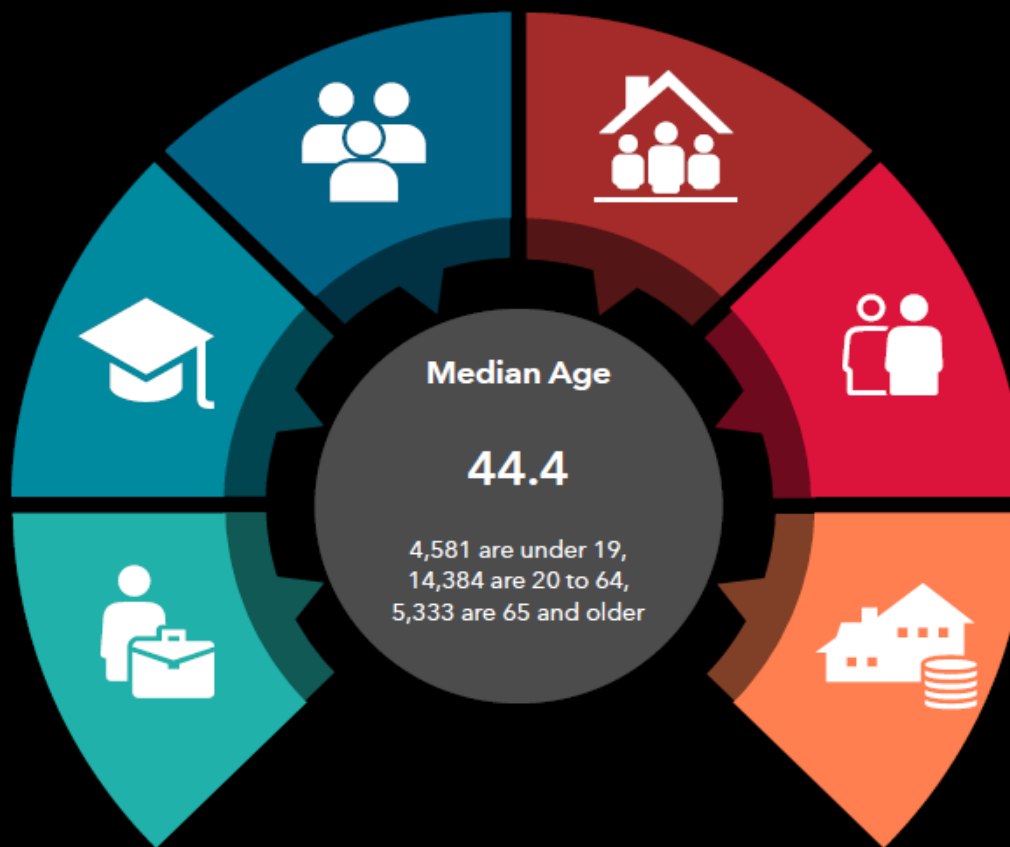
**960**

There are 1,591 first generation immigrant population, and 46 immigrating to Canada since 2017.

## Median Household Income

**CA\$88,309**

With an average of 2.2 people per household, the average household income is CA\$105,979.29



# Key Facts