



Understanding Council Structure Options

RE: Ward v at Large & Council Composition

The information detailed in this report explains the different ways a Municipal council can be structured, specifically ward vs. at-large representation, council size, and how the introduction of new legislation such as Strong Mayor Powers may affect these compositions.

1. Representation: Ward vs. At-Large

Ward System

In a ward system, the municipality is divided into geographic areas called wards, and each ward elects its own councillor. This structure helps residents understand exactly who to contact about local concerns, and it ensures that all areas of the municipality, including smaller or rural communities, have a guaranteed voice on council. By providing designated representatives for specific areas, local issues are more likely to be raised and addressed during council discussions. Members of the public should also be aware that, under current provincial election law, an eligible elector can run for council in any ward, even if they do not reside or own property in that particular ward; however, if a candidate runs in a ward where they do not reside, they will not be able to vote for themselves in that ward.

Potential Limitations:

- Councillors elected from specific wards may focus primarily on the needs of their own ward rather than on municipality-wide priorities, which can limit broader strategic decision-making.
- Establishing fair and balanced ward boundaries can be complex, and without careful review, wards with smaller populations may have disproportionately high influence relative to larger wards.
- While candidates may run in any ward, this flexibility can sometimes lead to perceptions that local representation is less reflective of actual community residency, and it may diminish the perceived connection between a councillor and the specific area they represent.

At-Large System

In an at-large system, all councillors are elected by the municipality as a whole and represent the municipality broadly. Councillors in this system focus on municipal-wide priorities, and conflicts between specific areas may be less likely. The election process is simpler, as there is no need to define ward boundaries.

Potential Limitations:

- Smaller or rural communities may feel underrepresented, and residents may not have a specific councillor to approach for local issues.
- Local concerns may receive less attention if councillors focus on areas with larger populations.
- There is the potential that a majority, if not all, of the councillors could be elected from a single geographic area, which may result in uneven representation and diminished consideration of the needs and perspectives of other parts of the municipality.

Additional Considerations for Residents:

Ward systems historically have been used in rural municipalities with dispersed populations to ensure geographic representation, while at-large systems were considered to suit municipalities with more concentrated populations (e.g. Arnprior). The choice affects how residents engage with council and how local priorities are addressed.

2. Council Size: How Many Councillors?

Six Councillors + One Mayor

- A larger council allows for more voices and perspectives, which can lead to broader debate and oversight.
- It is easier to assign representation across multiple areas, and councillors may have lighter workloads.

Potential Limitations:

Larger councils may take longer to make decisions, cost more due to salaries and administrative support, and may face disagreements or deadlock on complex issues.

Four Councillors + One Mayor

- A smaller council can make decisions more efficiently and respond quickly to emerging issues.
- Costs are lower, and coordination between councillors is simpler.

Potential Limitations:

- Fewer councillors mean fewer perspectives and higher workloads for each member.
- Some areas or interests may not be fully represented, which could affect local decision-making.

Additional Considerations for Residents:

Council size affects both efficiency and representation. Larger councils provide more diverse input but require more coordination. Smaller councils have the potential to be more efficient in decision making process', with potential cost savings due to fewer members, however, at the cost of representing fewer voices.

3. Impact of Strong Mayor Powers

The Township of Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards has been designated as a strong mayor municipality under Ontario's *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022* and related provisions of the *Municipal Act, 2001*. This designation was issued by the Province and took effect on May 1, 2025.

Strong mayor powers give the mayor specific authorities to support municipal and provincial priorities. These include:

- Bringing forward matters for Council consideration related to prescribed provincial priorities.
- Preparing and presenting the annual municipal budget to Council.
- Appointing chairs of committees and providing direction to staff in writing, as authorized by legislation.

These powers are intended to support more efficient municipal decision-making in relation to prescribed provincial priorities, while Council continues to exercise its legislative authority, subject to the specific mayoral powers, veto provisions, and council override thresholds set out in the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

Impact of Strong Mayor Powers on Council Composition:

- **Ward + Six Councillors:** A strong mayor can advance municipality-wide priorities while councillors represent their wards, ensuring local issues are addressed and debate includes multiple perspectives.

- **Ward + Four Councillors:** A strong mayor's influence may be stronger on a smaller council, allowing quicker decisions but fewer voices represented with a narrower range of perspectives and debate.
- **At-Large + Six Councillors:** A strong mayor can focus council on municipality-wide priorities, but representation of smaller areas depends on councillors' attention to local concerns.
- **At-Large + Four Councillors:** A strong mayor's power may strongly influence council decisions. Fewer councillors can lead to faster decisions, but fewer perspectives may be heard.

Important Note About Council Size and Strong Mayor Powers:

A reduction in the size of council does not automatically remove strong mayor powers. Whether the municipality continues to hold these powers is determined by provincial regulation or a decision by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; it would not be triggered by a reduction in Council size. These authorities are outlined in Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001 and supporting regulations.

4. Strong Mayor Powers & By-Law Impacts on Council Composition

If a strong mayor is of the opinion that a by-law(s) would support a prescribed provincial priority, they may propose the by-law(s) for council consideration and require council to vote on those by-laws. These by-laws must be circulated with justification to all councillors, and are deemed passed if more than one-third of council votes in favour, thus enabling minority support is sufficient for approval, with no opportunity of council veto. For example:

Strong Mayor + 4 Councillors (5 members total):

- One-third of 5 members = 1.666 → more than one-third means **2 votes** are required to pass.

Example: If the mayor supports the by-law and 1 councillor also votes in favour, the by-law passes even if the remaining 3 councillors vote against it. There is no opportunity of council veto.

Strong Mayor + 6 Councillors (7 members total):

- One-third of 7 members = 2.333 → more than one-third means **3 votes** are required to pass.

Example: If the mayor supports the by-law and 2 councillors also vote in favour, the by-law passes even if the remaining 4 councillors vote against. There is no opportunity of council veto.

Pros and Cons of One-Third Vote Thresholds:

Mayor + 4 Councillors (5 members total)

Pros:

- Quick decision-making: Only 2 votes required to pass.
- Strong mayor influence: The mayor's support alone carries increased influence.
- Reduced risk of deadlock: Fewer members make discussion and voting simpler and faster.

Cons:

- Majority councillors cannot prevent passage.
- Perception of weak representation: Residents may feel councillors have less influence.
- Risk of narrow perspective: Decisions may be perceived as reflecting the mayor's priorities, rather than Council as a whole.

Mayor + 6 Councillors (7 members total)

Pros:

- Broader input possible: More councillors can debate and influence decisions.
- Slightly higher threshold: Requires 3 votes, giving councillors more opportunity to negotiate changes.
- Balanced representation: Larger councils reflect diverse perspectives across wards or municipality at-large.

Cons:

- Slower decision-making: More members may lengthen discussions and voting.
- Potential for strategic voting: Councillors may try to block or delay by-laws.
- Mayor's influence slightly reduced: Mayor cannot pass by-law without at least 2 councillors supporting it.

Implications for Residents:

- Residents should be aware that provincial-priority by-laws can proceed even with a minority of councillors in support, making the mayor a key driver of such initiatives.
- Understanding the one-third vote threshold helps residents know when council has meaningful influence over by-law decisions and when the mayor may guide outcomes.

5. Cost Implications of Reducing Council Size

Current Remuneration Framework

Under the Township's current remuneration framework, Council compensation consists of two components:

- Annual honorarium
 - Councillor: \$8,998.08 per member
 - Mayor: \$19,281.60
- Per-meeting remuneration
 - \$160.00 per meeting attended by each member of Council

This structure reflects one of several remuneration models used by municipalities in Ontario. It is noted that remuneration frameworks are established locally and may vary significantly between municipalities. For example, some municipalities provide only a fixed honorarium with no per-meeting payments, while others incorporate meeting-based compensation, stipends for additional duties, or a combination of these approaches.

Any assessment of cost impacts associated with Council size must therefore be considered within the context of the Township's existing framework, rather than as a universal model.

Direct Financial Impacts of Reducing Council Size Under Current Framework

Reducing the size of Council from six (6) Councillors plus the Mayor to four (4) Councillors plus the Mayor would result in the elimination of two Councillor positions.

From a direct cost perspective, this would result in:

- A reduction in annual honorarium expenditures equivalent to two Councillor honorariums.
- A corresponding reduction in per-meeting remuneration costs, based on the number of meetings attended annually by those two positions.

The Mayor's remuneration would remain unchanged, as the position is not affected by the proposed reduction.

The precise annual savings associated with per-meeting payments would vary year to year, depending on the number of meetings held.

Indirect and Structural Cost Considerations

While honorarium and meeting payments represent the most visible cost impacts, Council size can also influence other cost-related factors, including:

- Administrative time required to support Council meetings and member correspondence.
- Orientation and training costs for members of Council.
- Technology, licencing, and support costs associated with Council members (e.g., devices, software access, and communications).

These costs may be incremental and not always directly proportional to Council size; however, a reduction in membership may contribute to modest operational efficiencies over time.

Cost-Related Pros and Cons of Reducing Council Size

Potential Cost-Related Advantages

- Reduced direct remuneration costs through fewer Councillor honorariums and per-meeting payments.
- Greater predictability of expenses, particularly if meeting frequency remains consistent.
- Potential marginal reductions in administrative and support costs related to Council operations.
- Alignment with smaller-council models used by some municipalities seeking cost containment.

Potential Cost-Related Disadvantages

- Cost savings may be relatively modest when considered within the overall municipal budget.
- Increased workload per Councillor may lead to additional committee assignments or meetings, which could offset some savings if per-meeting compensation remains in place.
- Future remuneration adjustments may be considered to reflect increased responsibilities per member.
- Framework dependency: any changes to Council size may prompt review or restructuring of the remuneration model, potentially altering cost outcomes.

Estimated Annual Cost Impacts (Illustrative)

The following estimates are provided for illustrative purposes only and are based on the Township's current remuneration framework. Actual savings would vary depending on the number of meetings held in any given year.

Assumptions Used for Estimates

- Council size reduced from **6 Councillors to 4 Councillors** (Mayor unchanged)
- Councillor honorarium: **\$8,998.08 per year**
- Per-meeting payment: **\$160.00 per meeting per member**
- Estimates consider **regular, special, and committee meetings** where per-meeting compensation applies
- No change assumed to meeting frequency or remuneration rates

Fixed Annual Savings (Honorarium Only)

Elimination of two Councillor positions would result in the following **fixed annual savings**:

- $2 \times \$8,998.08 = \mathbf{\$17,996.16 \text{ per year}}$

This portion of the savings is consistent and does not vary year to year.

Variable Annual Savings (Per-Meeting Compensation)

Per-meeting savings depend on the number of meetings held annually. The table below illustrates estimated savings under several common meeting-frequency scenarios.

Estimated Meetings per Year Annual Per-Meeting Savings (2 Councillors)

20 meetings	\$6,400
25 meetings	\$8,000
30 meetings	\$9,600
35 meetings	\$11,200
40 meetings	\$12,800

Calculation: 2 Councillors $\times$ \$160 $\times$ number of meetings

Total Estimated Annual Savings Range

Combining fixed honorarium savings with variable per-meeting savings results in the following **estimated annual savings range**:

- **Low-range estimate (20 meetings/year):**
 $\$17,996.16 + \$6,400 = \mathbf{\$24,396.16}$
- **Mid-range estimate (30 meetings/year):**
 $\$17,996.16 + \$9,600 = \mathbf{\$27,596.16}$

- **High-range estimate (40 meetings/year):**

$$\$17,996.16 + \$12,800 = \mathbf{\$30,796.16}$$

Summary

From a cost standpoint, reducing Council size would result in a clear and measurable reduction in direct remuneration expenditures under the Township's current framework. However, the overall financial impact should be viewed in context, as Council remuneration represents a limited portion of total municipal expenditures. Additionally, remuneration practices vary across municipalities, and cost outcomes are influenced by how a municipality structures honorariums, meeting compensation, and Council responsibilities.

As such, while cost savings are a factor for consideration, they represent only one component of the broader policy discussion surrounding Council composition.

6. Key Points for Residents

- **Representation:** Ward systems ensure geographic representation, which can be important for rural communities. At-large systems emphasize municipality-wide priorities but may reduce local representation.
- **Council Size:** Larger councils provide more perspectives and representation at council but may be slower and more costly. Smaller councils can act more quickly but may represent fewer voices. Smaller Council size also has the potential to result in financial savings to the Municipality.
- **Strong Mayor Powers:** Strong mayor powers give the mayor enhanced influence over council priorities and the municipal budget, while Council retains its legislative decision-making authority, subject to the mayoral powers, vetoes, and council override requirements set out in the *Municipal Act, 2001*.
- **Strong Mayor By-Law Thresholds:** If a strong mayor is of the opinion that a by-law advances a prescribed provincial priority, it may be passed if one-third of council votes in favour. This threshold allows provincial-priority initiatives to advance even if only a minority of councillors support them, while still enabling council debate and participation. In practice, this means that in smaller councils, as few as two members, including the strong mayor and one councillor, could pass a by-law, with no opportunity of council veto, effectively giving them significant control over council decisions. While this allows the strong mayor and a small group of councillors to advance provincial priorities efficiently, it also means that decisions made without broader support could

potentially expose the Township to liability or limit wider representation of residents' interests.

- **Council Remuneration and Cost Context:** Under the Township's current remuneration framework, Councillors receive both an annual honorarium and per-meeting compensation. Reducing Council size would result in a measurable reduction in direct remuneration costs; however, overall savings are influenced by meeting frequency, committee workload, training and conference participation, and administrative support requirements. As a result, while cost savings are real, they may be modest within the overall municipal budget and should be considered alongside representation, workload, and governance effectiveness.
- **Combined Impact:** The combination of representation system, council size, and strong mayor powers affects how residents' interests are represented, how issues are debated, and the speed of council decisions.

This information is intended to help residents make informed decisions and participate in public discussions about the future of municipal governance.
