

Township of Severn 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper C: The Component Parts of the Severn Council

Some components of Severn Council are outside the control of the municipality: there must be a “head of council” elected by general vote and an additional member of the municipal council (currently the deputy mayor) who represents Severn on Simcoe County Council. The position of mayor and the way that person is elected are not open to modification in this review; however, the remainder of the Council can be reconstituted, should the community and Council see some value in changing the status quo. The size and composition of Council is not currently a focus of this review.

The Deputy Mayor: It is interesting to note that there is actually no specific reference in the Ontario *Municipal Act, 2001* to the office of deputy mayor,¹ although a position is formally included in many County arrangements (such as established through the *County of Simcoe Act, 1993*) and there are varying governance and electoral practices related to identifying the individual who fulfills the office of deputy mayor.

There are two basic approaches to how the deputy mayor is selected. The position can be open to any qualified elector who files a nomination paper to run specifically for the office and the position is filled on the basis of the votes cast on a separate ballot in a “general vote” (at-large) system. This is a common method at present across Ontario and is the practice in Severn. In this format, the office of deputy mayor is the second component of the composition of Severn Council (after the head of council) and is one of the seven designated seats on Council.

In some other cases across Ontario, however, the position is determined by a majority vote of the elected members of council in a secret ballot and the candidate pool for the office is limited to the people who have already been elected to council.² In this indirect format, the office of deputy mayor can be considered a subcategory of council and is not counted separately in the composition of council.

¹ The term “mayor” does not appear in the *Municipal Act* either, having been replaced by the generic label “head of council,” although “mayor” is used in the *City of Toronto Act*.

² In rare cases, such as the Township of Perth South, the elected councillor who receives the most votes in a general vote system for all members of council serves as deputy mayor.



At present, although the deputy mayor is chosen by direct election in a general vote (at-large) system and holds a seat on Simcoe County Council, all other roles deputy mayors are expected to play are entirely subject to local arrangements. This can include, for example, chairing certain committee meetings or performing various duties in the absence of, or on behalf of, the mayor.

Ward Councillors:³ The third component of Severn’s Council is the councillors themselves, currently five in number. As noted in Discussion Paper B, there is no standard or “appropriate” number of councillors, which means that the number of councillors can be changed, if Council wishes. At this point in the study, as mentioned earlier, council size or composition is not being considered within the scope.

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 – The Severn Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- *Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of the Severn Council*
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper E – Why a Ward Boundary Review?

³ The term “ward councillor” is used here since that is the present designation. Provincial legislation authorizes a council to “dissolve” the wards, but that possibility has not been considered in this review.