

City of Port City of Port Colborne Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review 2024-25 Backgrounder

Discussion Paper C: The Component Parts of Port Colborne's Council

Some components of the City of Port Colborne's Council are outside the control of the municipality, namely that there must be a "head of council" elected by general vote. The position of Mayor, the powers associated with the position, and the way that person is elected are not open to modification in this review. Neither is the number of Regional representatives, which is established by Niagara Regional Council. The remainder of the Council can be reconstituted, should the community and Council see some value in changing the status quo.

The Deputy Mayor: There is actually no specific reference in the Ontario *Municipal Act, 2001* to the office of Deputy Mayor¹, providing a great degree of freedom for municipalities to utilize (or not utilize) the position. In general, the Deputy Mayor is often conceived as supporting the Mayor, standing in to chair meetings or fulfil certain procedural or administrative duties if the Mayor is unable or unavailable to complete such duties.

The Deputy Mayor of Port Colborne is assigned on a rotating basis, as per Council's Procedural By-law. Each member of Council assumes the role for a six-month period. Rotation occurs in order of Ward 1 through Ward 4 and by the "seniority" of the Councillors. There are no stated additional stipends associated with holding the Deputy Mayor's role for the six-month period.

Alternatives exist to this model of selection. In some cases, the Deputy Mayor is chosen by a majority vote of the elected members of Council in a secret ballot. In other municipalities the Deputy Mayor is selected by the Mayor. Another method would involve directly electing the Deputy Mayor during the regular municipal election period. Across Niagara Region, a variety of selection methods are used. For instance, Councillors in Grimsby agree to a six-month rotation schedule at the start of the term of Council. In St. Catharine's, the Deputy Mayor is selected by Council to serve a two-year term. Notably, the Deputy Mayor of St. Catharine's is compensated for the hours they spend fulfilling the role, based upon the Mayor's basic hourly rate, which is \$60.66

¹ The term "mayor" does not appear in the *Municipal Act, 2001* either, having been replaced by the generic label "head of council," although "mayor" is used in the *City of Toronto Act*.



per hour. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Deputy Lord Mayor is filled by by-law by the Councillor who received the greatest number of votes in the at-large election.

There is no definitive or indisputable advantage from employing one method or the other to select the Deputy Mayor. The examples listed each have some advantages, however. Determining the selection order at the outset of council may allow councillors to determine when they would be potentially taking on additional duties as Deputy Mayor and provide them with an opportunity to manage other elements of their personal and professional life. Selecting the councillor who receives the most votes would ensure that person has support among the community but may foist upon that person responsibilities they had not planned upon when they ran for election. Selecting one person from amongst council for a longer term than six months, as St. Catharine's does, would also ensure that someone would potentially be taking on additional responsibilities with some degree of enthusiasm and that they have time to become familiar with the role and responsibilities. An elected Deputy Mayor would ensure the person filling the role has wide-spread community support. However, where elected Deputy Mayors are used in Ontario, that person also generally serves on an upper-tier council.

As mentioned, there is no “right way” to determine who should serve as Deputy Mayor. In Port Colborne, where neither Councillors nor the Mayor are conceived as “full time” positions, an effective Deputy Mayor could better support the role of the Mayor, both procedurally, at council and committee meetings, and in the community. Our intention is to stimulate some discussion in Port Colborne about whether to confirm the appointment method or to consider a modification, including making the Deputy Mayor an elected position. Doing so, however, would be in the scope of the Council Composition Review.

Regional Councillors: Port Colborne has two representatives on Niagara Region Council. The first is the Mayor, who by virtue of being elected as Mayor of Port Colborne also serves as a Regional Councillor. The second is a Regional Councillor elected at-large from Port Colborne. Each Regional Councillor is paid \$40,355.50 by Niagara Region, with Standing Committee chairs receiving an additional \$2,000.00.

Niagara Regional Council has 32 members – one Chair, the 12 elected Mayors of Niagara's lower-tier municipalities and 19 elected representatives from the lower-tier municipalities. Across Niagara, those elected as Regional Councillors do not also serve on Local Council. Port Colborne's procedural by-law, like others throughout the Region, provide the Regional Councillor the opportunity to report to City Council, using language that the Regional Councillor “shall have the opportunity...to report on the activities of the Region”, indicating that attendance and participation is not mandatory, required or expected.

To be clear, it is not within the scope of this review to alter the office of Regional Councillor.



Local Councillors: Port Colborne currently has eight City Councillors. Each Councillor receives a yearly stipend of \$22,973, meaning that it would be expected they would have some form of outside income (either pension or business/employment income). As a result, they are best considered “part-time” representatives – a description neither intended to be derogatory nor entirely representative of the hours or effort put into their position. 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.

Port Colborne’s eight Councillors are elected from four wards (two per ward) – a system that has been in place in the City since 1969. Familiarity, however, is not a sound basis to keep this system in place. Given the size and diversity of the community, it is worthwhile to consider possible alternatives, including an at-large system or electing Councillors (either full or part-time) in single-member wards. We explore each, in Discussion Paper D.

At a more basic level, the Council Composition component of this Review will consider whether the City can achieve more effective representation and political management by retaining eight Councillors or changing to some other number.

Topical Discussion Papers A to F

A series of Discussion Papers will be available to residents, each addressing one of the topics to be considered in this review:

- Discussion Paper A – Port Colborne’s Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- *Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of the Port Colborne’s Council*
- Discussion Paper D – The Method of Election for Councillors
- Discussion Paper E – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper F – Is a Ward Boundary Review Necessary?