

Town eyes targeted communication to boost awareness of Ward system



This October's Municipal Election will be a very different one than in years past for Aurora residents as the Town adopts a brand-new Ward system.

Out is the old system in which residents were, most recently, able to vote for one mayoral candidate and up to six members of Council. This time around, residents will still be able to vote for one mayoral candidate, but just one Council candidate to represent their specific communities.

"This is the biggest change from elections in years past in terms of how the electoral system works," says Town Clerk Mike de Rond, noting in the weeks ahead the Town will focus on "targeted communications" to "make sure residents are aware of the new system and the change they haven't experienced before."

"It's a lot to get across to people," he continues. "Sometimes they are a little bit apathetic but we're doing everything we can to make sure they're aware of adopting a Ward system and, going forward, this is how it works."

Adopting the new Ward System was a decision made by the 2018-2022 Council.

While residents in the previous municipal election voted against adopting a Ward system in a Town-wide referendum, the outgoing Council decided that the time was right to adopt it and hired consultants to define six wards Town-wide.

"The Supreme Court of Canada's Carter Decision [in the 1990s] talked about when you're re-aligning electoral districts and you're subdividing territory these are the principles you align with: the overarching one is rep by pop (representation by population)," says de Rond. "All of our wards are supposed to be the same population - difficult to be that close, but plus or minus 15 per cent is the accepted variance on that."

Other criteria included obvious landmarks such as the railway line that bisects Aurora as well as communities of interest.

"When you think of stable neighbourhoods on the west side of Town in older Aurora versus the newer area in the northeast, those aren't really compatible so you don't put them in the same ward if you can avoid it," says de Rond. "Consultants sat down and used population projections from reputable sources and came up with this. It is, in their estimation, the fairest way. It was the decision of Council to adopt a Ward system but [the consultants] were here saying, 'If you want to adopt a Ward system, here's what we think is the fairest model.'"

While the Ward system was a hotly debated topic across the community, and while its implementation was greeted both positively

and negatively, de Rond says the Town may see some benefits once candidates are duly elected and find their places at the table.

'There's a single point of contact,' he says. 'Our customer service staff will tell you right now they get people all the time asking, 'Who is my Ward Councillor?' Well, 'Here are your six options plus the Mayor.' This is going to be a lot simpler. There is one person to go to and just have your questions answered or have your issue aired to let them know this is what's happening. Other than that, the government is still seven members coming together to make a decision but I do think the single point of contact is something that residents will see as a difference going forward.

'Voters will find the experience of voting isn't so different than it has [been] in the past. It's exactly the same as 2018. Internet voting in the advanced period ends the day before the election. You'll still get your voter notification card in the mail that says if you want to vote online here's how you do it, if you want to vote in advance at the Seniors' Centre here's the times, and if you want to vote on voting day here's your voting location and you can vote with your paper ballot counted by tabulator. The difference is instead of a list of 20 councillors and it says 'Vote for Six' it will be 'Vote for One.''

For more information on the upcoming election, candidates, and the Ward system, visit www.aurora.ca/en/your-government/elections.aspx or email the Clerk's office at elections@aurora.ca.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter