City of Guelph Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review – Phase 1

Members of Council and Senior Staff Interviews – Summary of Interview Notes

The following are notes prepared by Drs. Siegel and Williams following interviews with members of council and senior staff. The interviews were semi-structured, beginning with a series of open-ended questions aimed at discovering what the interviewees saw as the major issues in Phase One of the review. Discussions were always focused on council activity but sometimes they went beyond the prepared questions.

Interviewees were promised anonymity at the outset of the discussion in order to obtain candid responses. This is a summary of the responses, not direct quotations.

Thematic Summary

1. Council Composition

   No change
   - This is a reasonable size for a corporation of this size.
   - It is counterfactual to reduce the size of Council now: the City is growing
   - There is a risk of a cabal in a smaller Council.

   Reduce
   - Council is too big. Too much grandstanding, repetition at meetings.
   - I would not want a lot fewer Councillors but a couple less who are here full-time would be a good result.
   - It is onerous with twelve members – there is too much talk. Eight or ten would be a happy medium.

2. The Guelph Ward System

   - The wards are so big that trying to manage everything contributes to the volume of work.
   - The present boundaries are arbitrary.
   - Smaller wards would improve access to Councillors; "contact" would be severed in an at-large system.
   - What about a couple of at-large councillors?
   - An at-large system would be a deterrent to candidates. Also "who is 'my' councillor?"
   - A mixed system would confuse people.

3. Two-member Wards

No
- Councillors often seem to be tripping over each other. Not only is there duplication in terms of contacting staff, the responses from Councillors to the same question are frequently different and may be sent to different staff to handle the issue.

Yes, but . . .
- On a practical level it is a problem but there is a cushion for people if one of the councilors is absent. It gives people two Councillors to contact but duplication is fairly common.
- I appreciate having a ward colleague and sharing the workload but it takes some effort.

Yes
- A second Councillor can be a back-up on various tasks. It puts two people at the forefront for people with concerns.

4. How Councillors Use Their Time

- The role of Councillor has changed considerably: the complexity of the legislative framework, the pace of change, the expectations of constituents, the expectation to participate in outreach (social media and information dissemination). There is more active political discourse and that takes more time to participate properly. These things are all taking an emotional/psychological toll.

Governance
- There is a tendency to want to micro-manage but we need to keep boundaries, to keep our distance from management.
- Councillors need to understand their governance role; it is the micromanagers who complain of overwork.

Customer-service
- We spend an inordinate amount of time on referrals
- We should be facilitators not problem-solvers.
- The customer-service side of the job is enjoyable – helping people – being a "navigator" for them.

5. Full-time vs. Part-time

Pro Full-time
- The oversight requirements for the corporation need a full-time (dedicated) focus not people with two full-time jobs.
- It would eliminate the "I was too busy at work to . . ."

Con Full-time
- Being full-time does not make you a better councillor. There would be a lot of make-work projects.
- You are asking people to step into an uncertain future.

Questions
- What would full-time status do to the pool of candidates?
- There is not enough work to justify full-time status; I have made it a full-time job but I don't have to do all of those things.
- Does going full-time mean we would be better governed?
- Full-time Councillors would be easier to sell to residents if the size of Council is reduced

6. Other Topics

- Best practices may be very significant to the outcome of this review.
- A stronger governance board is needed to monitor and provide oversight.
- I would prefer a Committee structure (rather than Committee of the Whole) so we could get deeper into some issues. The CoW is more efficient but that is not the only measure of how we should do our job.
- The CoW system was a huge mistake. We seem to know a bit about everything but are not experts on anything.

Full List of Comments

1. Council Composition

- Council is too big. Too much grandstanding, repetition at meetings.
- We don't need 12 full-time Councillors. Either we reduce the Council to fewer full-time people or we look for some sort of staff support.
- I would not want a lot fewer Councillors but a couple less who are here full-time would be a good result.
- We have 'way too many Councilors; six or seven would be better instead of having to listen so much to each other.
- With 12, it is hard to get enough people on side to make a decision. The shortcoming of a smaller council would be less divergent viewpoints.
- I like 12 members: we get good decisions with a wide and diverse range of experiences, etc.
- There is a risk of a cabal in a smaller Council.
- It is onerous with twelve members – there is too much talk. Eight or ten would be a happy medium.
- This is a reasonable size for a corporation of this size.
- It is counterfactual to reduce the size of Council now: the City is growing.

- Perhaps reduce to eight single-member wards; as it is, one person takes the bulk of the work. We also would not need two-members per ward if we are full-time.
- Twelve are warranted as part-time Councillors – convergent and divergent views are available.

2. The Guelph Ward System

- There appears to be loyalty/identity with Wards 3 and 5 (older sections of the City) not found elsewhere in the City.
- The wards are so big that trying to manage everything contributes to the volume of work.
- The present boundaries are arbitrary.
- Even though we are elected in wards, only about 20% of our work is concentrated on the ward; the rest is City business.
- (from a Councillor in the same ward): About 60-70% of my works is from Ward X
- An at-large system would be a deterrent to candidates. Also "who is 'my' councillor?"
- A mixed system would confuse people.
- Smaller wards would improve access to Councillors; "contact" would be severed in an at-large system.
- What about having a hybrid system – three at-large and the rest in wards? This could be a half way step to full-time Councillors.
- What about a couple of at-large councillors?

3. Two-member Wards

- Councillors often seem to be tripping over each other. Not only is there duplication in terms of contacting staff, the responses from Councillors to the same question are frequently different and may be sent to different staff to handle the issue.
- A second Councillor can be a back-up on various tasks. It puts two people at the forefront for people with concerns.
- I am unclear how to make the division between the two of us. Perhaps a single member with support would work better.
- There is some duplication with two members but a non-responsive ward-mate can be an issue.
- We have the Mayor's EA as an unofficial helper, but we are too sensitive to the public purse to add support for Councillors.
- My colleague and I co-operate informally, we copy each other on responses to reduce duplication.
- It is not necessary. With only one Councillor, you would not have to figure out how to work with your wardmate.

- On a practical level it is a problem but there is a cushion for people if one of the councilors is absent. It gives people two Councillors to contact but duplication is fairly common.
- I appreciate having a ward colleague and sharing the workload but it takes some effort. If I have a ward colleague who did nothing and still got re-elected, I have to remember that they were elected.

4. How Councillors Use Their Time

- Customer-service a waste of their time: some support would help but how would that improve governance?
- Some administrative support (not without cost) would be helpful but it should not lead to "busy work."
- Councillors need to concentrate on their fiduciary duties, focus at the strategic level not "gum on the sidewalk"
- Too many councillors are not focused on the governance agenda and get tied up with the mundane. Would a 311 system be an improvement? Or a recognized/centralized point of contact (a staff person) for Councilors to direct questions?
- Councillors should focus on the horizon, not at their feet.
- If they just want to solve the problems, they should apply for a job with the City.
- Customer-service has increased as residents seek instant answers to their questions/complaints.
- Councillors need to understand their governance role; it is the micromanagers who complain of overwork.
- We spend an inordinate amount of time on referrals. There needs to be an education process for the community about addressing these routine matters.
- The customer-service side of the job is enjoyable – helping people – being a "navigator" for them.
- We should not have staff handle constituency work. The City needs better education and better tools to handle these things.
- The business imposed by staff has increased but not our responsibilities. My role is to create the solutions - to lead, not to follow.
- I am not trying to please people so I forward all concerns from the public to staff.
- I never respond to emails directed to all members of Council.
- The email never stops – from the public and staff.
- If I can save staff time by answering an email myself, I'll do that.
- We should be facilitators not problem-solvers.
- Councilors are not as well-versed in the topics on the agenda as they used to be – things are more complex but there is a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to learn.

- I would say that 55% of the matters raised by constituents are not the Councillor's business to solve. We should be going to a constituency assistant who could generate a workorder to deal with the matter. People need to know how this works; it would save an awful lot of work for Councillors.
- There is a tendency to want to micro-manage but we need to keep boundaries, to keep our distance from management.
- The role of Councillor has changed considerably: the complexity of the legislative framework, the pace of change, the expectations of constituents, the expectation to participate in outreach (social media and information dissemination). There is more active political discourse and that takes more time to participate properly. These things are all taking an emotional/psychological toll.

5. Full-time vs. Part-Time

- There are significant City-issues related to growth pressures that will be present for another ten years; full-time councillors might be better able to handle such responsibilities.
- Those who already make it a full-time job are likely retired.
- If they are full-time you know where to find them.
- A few better-paid Councillors would be better for the City – maybe not full-time.
- Councillors are now considered "employees" so receive some benefits but full-time Councillors would be eligible for OMERS.
- The oversight requirements for the corporation needs a full-time (dedicated) focus not people with two full-time jobs.
- Full-time status would attract more qualified people.
- Job insecurity is a deterrent – would a pension help?
- You are asking people to step into an uncertain future.
- This would eliminate the "I was too busy at work to . . ."
- There is a huge difference between the job and what people think it is. Many already think we are full-time because of all of the things we do and are surprised at how much – how little - we are paid.
- For some people the part-time salary ($40,000) is a lot of money and is already too much.
- You get what you pay for.
- I am making a financial sacrifice to do this job and having some financial stability would be a benefit but I am not sure who would want it on a full-time basis. It would need to tie into the person's career path.
- I think there would be better candidates, a better cross-section of the community and more "regular" people.

- I would support full-time Councillors if the added time brings more value but it is probably closer to three-quarter time.
- Full-time Councillors would be easier to sell to residents if the size of Council is reduced.
- Part-time status encourages the self-employed and the retired. Full-time status would attract younger candidates with present (not past) experiences, with family perspectives and more community engagement. They would be more in touch with today's working world.
- We will always exclude some people, whatever the employment status.
- The community needs to value the role.
- You can put in as much time as you want.
- We are not well served by having part-time Councillors at the ward level. We do not have control because we are part-time; we are led around by the nose by staff.
- Being full-time does not make you a better councillor. There would be a lot of make-work projects. There is already too much interference with staff.
- Our Council meetings are too long because people have not prepared and don't ask questions ahead of time.
- I originally supported going full-time; it would allow people to concentrate on Council business. Presently, Councillors are people with free time on their hands but we don't pay a living wage for what we get.
- We are not at the point where we need full-time Councillors; it would become a "day job" but municipal politics is not a 9-5 job. It would also mean holding daytime meetings which are not in the public's interest.
- Full-time limits potential candidates
- Does going full-time mean we would be better governed?
- What would full-time status do to the pool of candidates?
- There is not enough work to justify full-time status; I have made it a full-time job but I don't have to do all of those things.
- Many Councillors are disengaged outside the chamber.

6. Other Topics

- If nothing changes, at least we have "date-stamped" this aspect of our organization.
- I would prefer a Committee structure (rather than Committee of the Whole) so we could get deeper into some issues. The CoW is more efficient but that is not the only measure of how we should do our job.
- At present, the committee chairs are not directing the agendas.
- Best practices may be very significant to the outcome of this review.
- I thought there would be more cohesion on Council.
- We seem to know a bit about everything but are not experts on anything. The CoW system was a huge mistake.

- A stronger governance board is needed to monitor and provide oversight.
- Councillors have the prerogative to disagree with staff but some councillors show a blatant lack of trust in staff.