



# City of Guelph Council Remuneration Committee

City of Guelph

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The role of a municipal councillor: background report

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# 1. Introduction

Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. (Watson), in conjunction with Dr. David Siegel, hereinafter referred to as the consultant team, was retained by the City of Guelph in August 2021 to provide input into the council remuneration and support review.

The City of Guelph established a council remuneration and support advisory committee in the fall of 2021. This citizen-based advisory committee is expected to review and establish compensation, employment status (i.e., full-time/part-time status) and administrative support requirements for the next term of municipal council. The consultant team is providing input into this review, leveraging data and observations prepared in the recently completed City of Guelph Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review.

The purpose of this report is to describe the responsibilities of a city councillor for the City of Guelph. The first section of the report provides an overview of the formal duties of a councillor as set out in the Ontario Municipal Act and the informal roles as seen by residents. This is followed by some specifics related to the position of councillor in the City of Guelph. The next section discusses the circumstances which could lead to a city choosing to have full-time councillors with reference to how these relate to Guelph. The next section discusses some of the possible implications of choosing to have full-time councillors. Finally, the last section discusses the support staff and other costs associated with full-time councillors.

## 2. The duties of a municipal councillor in Ontario

Assigning a rate of pay to a position usually begins with an evaluation of the job description. Finding a job description of a municipal councillor is an elusive task. Provincial legislation defines the role of council collectively, which allows inference as to what the role of an individual councillor should be, but some of the job description is a product of the expectations of the local residents that the councillor represents, as well as how each individual councillor sees the role. Andrew Sancton and Paul Woolner probably captured it best: There is no job description for the municipal councillor. It is a



role which is, in a sense, invented by the incumbent.<sup>[1]</sup> This section will begin with a discussion of the formal, legal part of the duties set out in the Ontario Municipal Act and move to the less formally prescribed, but very important, part of the role that arises from the expectations of residents.

## 2.1 Ontario Municipal Act

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The Ontario Municipal Act does not define the role of a councillor, but section 224 does say the following about the collective role of the council:

### Role of council

- 224 It is the role of council,
- (a) to represent the public and to consider the well-being and interests of the municipality;
  - (b) to develop and evaluate the policies and programs of the municipality;
  - (c) to determine which services the municipality provides;
  - (d) to ensure that administrative policies, practices and procedures and controllership policies, practices and procedures are in place to implement the decisions of council;
  - (d.1) to ensure the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality, including the activities of the senior management of the municipality;
  - (e) to maintain the financial integrity of the municipality; and
  - (f) to carry out the duties of council under this or any other Act. 2001, c. 25, s. 224; 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 99.

The Municipal Act refers to the role of council and does not discuss the role of the individual councillor because it is a basic principle of municipal governance that all governing decisions are made by the council collectively. Neither the mayor nor any individual councillor has authority to make decisions that bind the municipality in any

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<sup>[1]</sup> Andrew Sancton and Paul Woolner, “Full-time municipal councillors: a strategic challenge for Canadian urban government,” *Canadian Public Administration*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Winter 1990), p. 502.



way. All decisions about policies or any other matter before council must be approved by an action of council.

This section of the Act could be summarized as imposing two types of duties on councillors:

- Policy-making – Deciding on the policies of the municipality and what services the municipality will deliver, and at what level those services will be provided.
- Administration – Ensuring that the municipality has the proper quality of administration in place.

The first duty covers the main role that most people associate with a municipal council. The council collectively adopts policies that determines how the municipality will be governed, what service it will provide, and how those services will be funded.

The second duty has a lower profile but is very important. The council has a stewardship role to ensure that the municipality is managed in such a way that council's policies as defined above are carried out in an economic, efficient, and effective manner. This does not mean that the council or individual councillors engage in the day-to-day management of municipal services, but it does give council collectively the responsibility to hold the city's chief administrative officer (CAO) accountable to ensure that services are delivered properly and in line with the policies set by council.

This legalistic statement of the duties of council is a good starting point; however, the voters who elect councillors have a somewhat expanded view of what they expect of a councillor.

## **2.2 Residents' expectations of the role**

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Residents have expectations of how councillors that they have elected will carry out their roles. These are not explicitly stated in the same ways as the roles defined in the Municipal Act, and different residents likely view the roles of councillors differently, but this section suggests some of the roles that residents expect of their councillors.

### **2.2.1 *Representative role***

Municipal government is the front line of democratic government. It is the level of government that is closest to the people. John Stuart Mill called it the training ground

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for democracy because ordinary citizens can understand and become involved in local issues more easily than they can become involved in complex national issues, many of which do not affect the average resident directly anyway.

In the words of Tindal et al.:

[M]unicipal governments perform a vital political role and provide local citizens opportunities to choose representatives who will make decisions reflecting—or at least addressing—community views and concerns. From this perspective, the municipality is an extension of the community and depicts the community governing itself.<sup>[2]</sup>

Local electors have a direct role in choosing councillors who will represent the local community and make decisions that benefit the local community. Local electors also have an expectation that they can take their local concerns directly to their local councillors who will be able to respond in some way to those concerns.

### **2.2.2 Policy maker**

The municipal council is responsible for making decisions about local policy. Council sets tax rates, imposes user charges for municipal services, and determines how much the municipality will borrow. Council decides which services the municipality will provide, at what level those services will be provided, and how they will be delivered.

This is the most visible part of a councillor's role, and it generates the greatest public interest for a very good reason. When a council makes decisions about an official plan, it is determining what the municipality will look like for many years into the future. When it decides on recreation programs, it is determining the types of recreational opportunities that residents will have available. When it sets economic development policies, it is determining the level and types of employment that will be available in a municipality. Even a decision about a local dog park will have significant consequences in terms of the way residents view their local community.

The most visible evidence of this role is the periodic meetings of council and committee of the whole. Sometimes observers who watch these two- or three-hour meetings think that this is the extent of what a councillor does. The truth is that this is the tip of the

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<sup>[2]</sup> C. Richard Tindal, Susan Nobes Tindal, Kennedy Stewart, and Patrick J. Smith, *Local Government in Canada*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2017), p. 12.





iceberg. Before these meetings, councillors will receive a very large package of material that will require several hours to read and digest. A part of the digestion process might involve considerable research in the form of searching for additional information, or sending emails, or making telephone calls to staff or other people to gather background information. Proper preparation for a council or committee of the whole meeting would normally require much more time than the amount of time spent at the meeting itself.

### **2.2.3 Oversight of the municipal administration**

As important as making policy is, ensuring that policies are implemented as originally planned, and ensuring that the implementation is carried out in an economic, efficient, and effective manner is equally important. Like most municipalities in Ontario, Guelph has a CAO who is the senior manager appointed by council to manage the staff of the municipality. This person is regarded as the sole direct employee of council. Council instructs the CAO with regard to how it wants its policies carried out and holds the CAO accountable for ensuring that those policies are being carried out as intended by council. Council should not become involved in micro-managing the activities of staff, but council should hold the CAO accountable for the quality of management of the municipality.

### **2.2.4 Ward spokesperson**

Guelph has a ward system for electing councillors, meaning that councillors are elected from and represent a specific geographic area in the city. The residents of the ward expect their ward councillor will spend time becoming familiar with the issues affecting their ward, and that the councillor will ensure those issues are presented to council, and that other councillors will take these issues into account when they vote on a city-wide issue.

This aspect of a councillor's role can sometimes pose an ethical dilemma. The ward residents expect their councillor to represent the interests of the ward. Sometimes the interests of the ward will conflict with the overall good of the city. The principle in such cases is very clear; a member of a decision-making body must make decisions in the interest of that body, regardless of how that person attained their office. In other words, the interests of the municipality must take precedence over the interests of any ward within the municipality. Deciding how to vote in these circumstances poses a real challenge for conscientious councillors.



This ward representation role of a councillor's job can take a great deal of time. Councillors must stay in touch with the issues that are relevant to their ward. This could involve holding periodic town hall meetings and attending meetings of various community associations. The visible part of this role might be a short speech on the floor at a council meeting, but this can require a significant amount of background preparation to understand the issue thoroughly, to discuss the issue with other councillors and staff members, to prepare the short speech to council, and to do follow-up to ensure that the issue is understood by all relevant parties. Councillors are aware that one of the most significant ways they will be judged at election time is how well they have represented the interests of their ward.

### **2.2.5 Ombudsperson**

Sometimes a resident will need personal assistance in dealing with an issue related to municipal government. A resident has been denied a building permit for reasons they do not understand. A resident has been held in violation of a municipal by-law for reasons they feel are unfair. Residents do not know their way around City Hall, and they need advice and support from their municipal councillor. These issues can put a councillor in a difficult position because the councillor might understand very well why the city has taken the position it has, but the councillor must still serve as an intermediary to ensure that the resident is being treated fairly and that the resident understands the city's position on the issue.

These kinds of constituency issues can take up a great deal of a councillor's time, but the councillor cannot afford to ignore or minimize these issues because residents have a legitimate right to expect that their councillor will assist them.

## **3. The city of Guelph context**

The role of councillor is influenced significantly by the nature of the municipality in which the councillor serves. The role of a councillor in a small, rural municipality is considerably different from the role of a councillor in a large city. This section discusses some of the characteristics of the city of Guelph which have a significant impact on the duties and roles of its councillors.





### 3.1 Single-tier municipality

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Guelph is a single-tier municipality. This distinguishes Guelph from the two-tier county or regional system of local government traditionally found in Ontario. A county system such as Wellington County contains area municipalities such as Puslinch and Erin. A regional government such as Waterloo has area municipalities such as Kitchener or Wilmot. In a two-tier system such as the county or region, responsibility for service delivery is divided between the two tiers so that the weight of the duties is divided between the county or regional council and the councils of the area municipalities.

Guelph is located geographically within Wellington County, but it is separated administratively from the county. This means that Guelph is responsible for a much broader range of services than cities of a comparable size within two-tier systems such as Caledon, Cambridge, or Milton. There are other examples of single-tier cities within counties such as London, Peterborough, and Windsor. Some of the largest cities in Ontario are now single tier because of the amalgamation of regions such as Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto.

Guelph does share some services with Wellington County such as public health and social services, but there are many services for which Guelph is responsible that would not be found in similar cities in a county or regional system. Some examples are policing, long-term care facilities, non-profit housing, water and wastewater, and solid waste collection and disposal. The city also has complete responsibility for land-use planning which would be divided in a two-tier system.

### 3.2 Growth trends

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Over the past 25 years, the city of Guelph has experienced strong population growth across all major demographic groups (i.e. children, adults and seniors), largely driven by steady net migration across all age groups and, to a lesser extent, natural increase (i.e. births less deaths). Over the 1991 to 2016 period, Guelph's population expanded from 91,400 to 136,300 – an increase of 44,900 or an annual growth rate of 1.6%.<sup>[3]</sup> This is relatively higher than the annual growth in Wellington County (1.0%), the Greater

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<sup>[3]</sup> Statistics Canada Census. Includes census undercount of approximately 3.4%.

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Golden Horseshoe (GGH) (1.5%) and provincial average (1.1%) over the 25-year period.

Guelph's 2021 census population is estimated to total 147,100.<sup>[4]</sup> Over the next decade, population growth for the city of Guelph is anticipated to remain strong. In accordance with the city's official plan, Guelph's census population is expected to increase to 175,000 by 2031.<sup>[5]</sup>

In accordance with schedule 3 of A Place to Grow: Growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan, 2019), Guelph is forecast to accommodate a total of 203,000 persons by 2051. This represents an increase of 38% over the 2021 to 2051 period. Over the latter portion of the 2021 to 2051 planning horizon, however, the rate of annual population growth within the city of Guelph is forecast to slow as the city continues to mature and build out.

Figure 1 below compares historical and forecast population growth rates in Guelph and other upper/single-tier municipalities in the GGH.

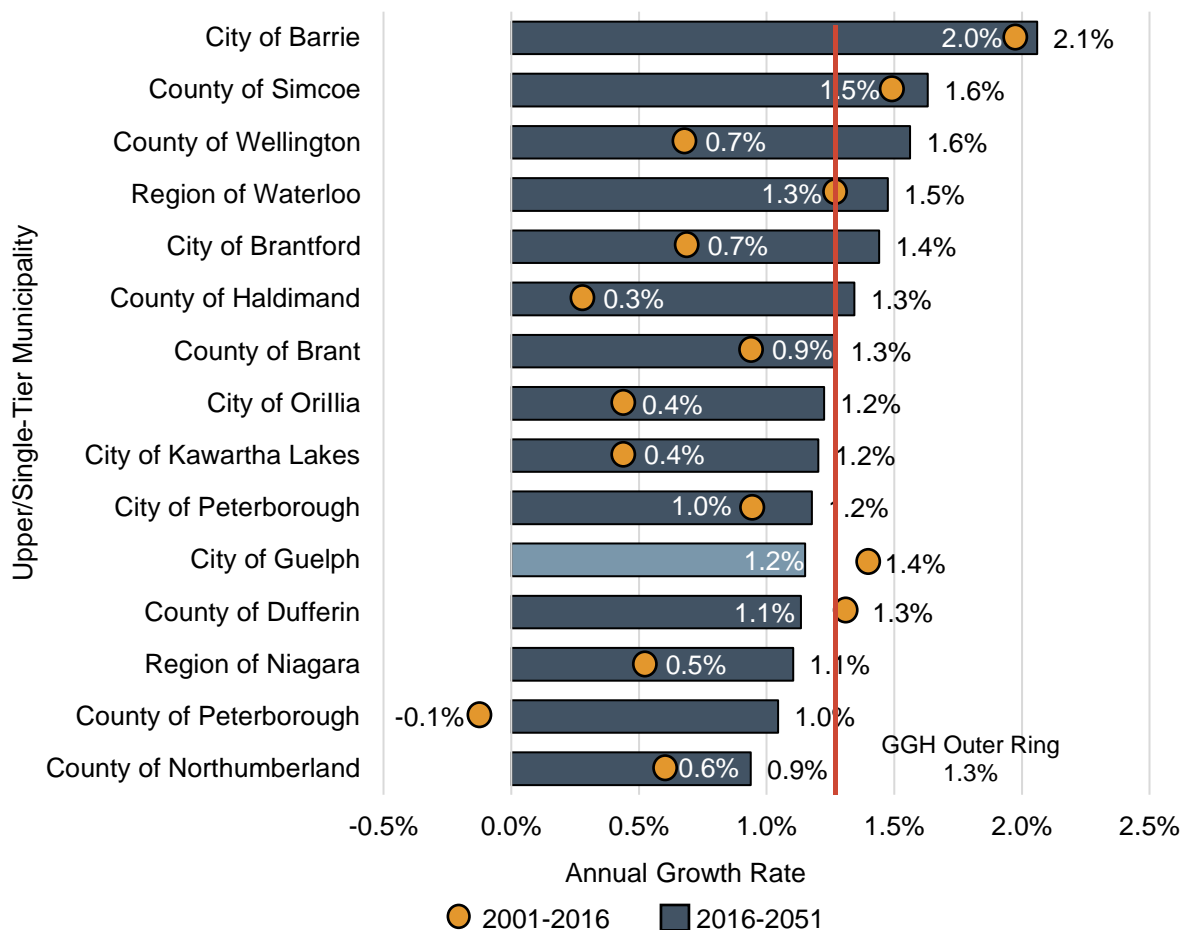
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<sup>[4]</sup> Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. estimate. Includes census undercount of approximately 3.4%.

<sup>[5]</sup> City of Guelph Official Plan. Includes census undercount of approximately 3.4%. Excludes non-census post-secondary student population.



Figure 1  
G.G.H. Outer Ring, annual population growth rate by municipality, 2016 to 2051  
(Schedule 3)



Note: Population includes the net Census undercount.

Source: Derived from Greater Golden Horseshoe: Growth Forecasts to 2051 Technical Report, August 26, 2020, Hemson Consulting Ltd., by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., 2020.

## 4. What makes a full-time councillor?

As Guelph grows, one of the issues it will need to address is the employment status of its municipal councillors. Should councillors continue to serve on a part-time basis? Or are the duties of the position expanding in such a way that Guelph needs councillors who can devote their full attention to their municipal council duties?

There is no legal distinction between a part-time and a full-time councillor. A councillor is a councillor; all councillors have the roles explained earlier. The distinction is the



expectation that residents have of the amount of time and effort councillors will devote to their duties, as well as the amount of compensation they will receive.

This section will discuss some of the factors that should be considered in determining whether the job of a municipal councillor needs the full-time attention of incumbents.

## **4.1 All qualified residents should be able to serve on council**

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The qualifications to run for municipal office are deliberately not terribly onerous. Anyone who is a qualified elector can run for office, except members of the federal and provincial legislatures. This is important at the individual level because every individual in the municipality should feel that he or she is not unreasonably disqualified from running for office. It is also beneficial for the municipality because the composition of the council should reflect the population of the municipality. Providing only part-time pay for an occupation that requires full-time attention would limit the type of person who could stand for office to those who were independently wealthy, retired, or had the luxury of living off a benevolent relative or friend.

Both fairness and equity require full-time compensation for a job that requires full-time attention. The corollary to this is that when someone is paid on a full-time basis, then there is an expectation that the incumbent of the position will devote their full-time attention to the job.

## **4.2 Workload**

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Fairness demands that a person working a full-time job should receive full-time pay for doing that job. To address this issue, the consultants administered a questionnaire to the current councillors in February 2020 as part of Phase 1 of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review study to determine how much time they spent on the job of councillor in an average month. Figure 2 provides the results of that survey.



Figure 2  
Time commitment to council activities  
(hours per month)

Question	Number who responded	Range (hours)	Average (hours)
Approximately how many hours do you spend attending meetings of council and committee of the whole in an average month?	11	10-24	17
Approximately how many hours do you spend reading and preparing for council and committee of the whole meetings in an average month?	11	5-34	15.27
Approximately how many hours do you spend attending other meetings of committees directly related to the city of Guelph (Police Services Board, Conservation Authority, etc.) in an average month?	11	1-13.5	5.64
Approximately how many hours do you spend meeting with constituents (including meeting with staff and others to deal with constituent issues) in an average month?	10	4-20	10.5
Approximately how many hours do you spend meeting with other councillors and staff to deal with internal city issues in an average month?	11	2-10	4.05
Approximately how many hours do you spend on activities related to municipal issues beyond the scope of the city of Guelph (AMO, FCM, etc.) in an average month?	9	1-10	3.33



Question	Number who responded	Range (hours)	Average (hours)
Approximately how much time do you spend on council-related work not listed above in an average month? Please identify the type of activity and the hours spent.	9	4-54.4	18.93
Total time on direct council business.	8	35-135.4	78.36*
Approximately how much time do you spend on service with other community groups not directly related to city of Guelph business, but that are important for your role as councillor (service clubs, recreation associations, faith-based organizations, etc.) in an average month? If you're comfortable, please also provide examples of these organizations?	11	2-29	9.64
Total time on community and council activity.	8	39.5-143.4	85.68*
Do you have full-time or part-time employment in addition to your role as a councillor? If so, how much time do you spend on that employment in an average month?	9	0-200	57.44
On average, how many constituent emails do you receive weekly?	10	10-50 emails	24.45 emails
On average, how many constituent telephone calls do you receive weekly?	11	0-10 calls	3.73 calls

\* These totals include data only from councillors who responded to all questions.

Councillors estimated they spent about 78 to 86 hours per month on council business. This works out to approximately 20 hours per week. The normal work week is usually considered to be 35 to 40 hours, so this is approximately half the normal work week; however, there are some complications that go along with this.





The job of a municipal councillor is not like the stereotypic “9 to 5” job. Councillors can be expected to attend meetings morning, noon, and night, and they feel they should be on call any time a constituent needs them. Councillors told us that the advent and expansion of social media have complicated their lives considerably.

When councillors told us they worked an average of 78 to 86 hours a month, they made it clear there was significant week-to-week variation around that average. Some of this variation is expected and can be planned for; budget time always requires an extra time commitment. Some variations, however, cannot be planned for. The City could face a crisis because of a natural disaster or a public health issue. A simple neighbourhood issue could become a much larger issue. The presence of social media has changed the role of the councillor. They feel they need to monitor social media to keep track of local issues, and at times they will receive large numbers of messages to which they must respond very quickly.

This adds some complications to this apparent part-time job requiring an average commitment of 20 hours per week. The nature of this part-time job is that in a given week the number of hours demanded of the job can expand significantly with no advance warning. This high variability and uncertainty in time commitment makes it very difficult to find a supplementary part-time job that would fit around the variable hours of being a city councillor.

The previous section argues that all eligible residents should be able to run for council. If, however, the position of city councillor offers part-time compensation, but the duties of the position make it difficult for an incumbent to supplement that part-time pay in ways that could support a family, then the position is not really open to all residents of the city.

## **4.3 Growth**

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Subsection 3.2 described the growth that the city of Guelph will be facing in the immediate and longer-term future. This level of growth will place the city and its council under considerable pressure to approach this issue in a careful and conscientious manner and make good decisions that will determine the future development of the city of Guelph.



Planning and development issues are both incredibly important and very complex. They determine what a city will look like and how it will develop for the indefinite future. The right decisions create a model city which will attract new residents and create a very positive environment. The wrong decisions create major problems that will take years for the city to alleviate. Guelph needs to have the resources in place to make the right decisions, and one of the most important resources any city has is a high-quality and well-functioning council.

The growth decisions are both very important and very time-consuming. The planning process with regard to the Baker District and the Clair-Maltby area has illustrated the care that is required and the time that is invested in making careful and conscientious planning decisions. In the foreseeable future, Guelph will be engaging in similar planning processes for the Guelph Innovation District and the Dolime Quarry lands. At the same time, there will likely be a considerable number of in-fill proposals that are smaller in scope, but can be very contentious.

Future Guelph councils will face some very challenging and very important decisions.

## **4.4 Single tier**

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The concept of the single-tier municipality was discussed in subsection 3.1. In county or regional structures, the responsibility for policy decisions and the provision of services is divided between the county or region, on one hand, and the area municipalities, on the other. Neither tier of government is responsible for providing the full range of services. The county or region typically has responsibility for long-term care homes, non-profit housing, policing, land ambulance, while the area municipality typically has responsibility for fire service, parks and recreation, and libraries.

The division of responsibilities for land-use planning is illustrative. The county or region prepares a broad-scope policy plan which gives area municipalities the starting point for their local land-use plans and zoning by-laws. The county or region does not have to delve into the detailed planning and zoning rules, and the area municipalities do not have to make the broad-scope decisions. In Guelph, responsibility for the full range of planning, development, and zoning decisions falls on the City.

A single-tier municipality has responsibility for a much broader scope of services than similar municipalities in a two-tier system.



## 4.5 Comparison to other jurisdictions

Only three other municipalities in Ontario provide full-time compensation to their councillors: Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto. These all have a considerably larger population than Guelph. Hamilton is the smallest with a population of over 500,000. Figure 3 provides information on councillors' compensation in several single-tier municipalities.

Figure 3  
Compensation of councillors in select single-tier municipalities  
various years

Municipality	Census population 2016	Number of councillors (2018-22)	Annual compensation (\$)
Toronto	2,731,571	25	117,164 <sup>[1]</sup>
Ottawa	934,243	23	105,684 <sup>[1]</sup>
Hamilton	536,917	15	97,357 <sup>[2]</sup>
London	383,822	14	33,337 <sup>[3]</sup>
Windsor	217,188	10	45,748 <sup>[1]</sup>
Greater Sudbury	161,531	12	38,734 <sup>[4]</sup>
Barrie	141,434	10	32,125 <sup>[2]</sup>
Guelph	131,794	12	41,528 <sup>[5]</sup>
Kingston	123,798	12	40,000 <sup>[2]</sup>
Thunder Bay	107,909	12 <sup>[7]</sup>	30,672 <sup>[6]</sup>
Chatham-Kent	101,647	17	32,000 <sup>[1]</sup>

As indicated by the footnotes, the compensation figures are from different years. They can be used for general comparisons between part-time and full-time compensation, but should not be used for precise comparisons between similar municipalities.

<sup>[1]</sup> 2019

<sup>[2]</sup> 2018

<sup>[3]</sup> 2017

<sup>[4]</sup> Average of remuneration of councillors in 2018. This includes compensation of work on council and committee(s).

<sup>[5]</sup> 2020

<sup>[6]</sup> Base salary effective 2019 but before additional pay from sitting on outside boards (average \$2,650 in 2018).

<sup>[7]</sup> Thunder Bay has seven councillors elected by wards and five elected at-large.



Figure 4, however, indicates that councillors in several two-tier regional governments receive the equivalent of full-time compensation because they serve on the councils of both their area municipality and the regional government. In most of these municipalities, not all councillors actually serve in both governments, although in Burlington and Mississauga the entire local council also serves at the regional level. As mentioned previously, Guelph, as a single-tier municipality, carries out many of the same functions as the two tiers in a regional government.

These comparisons put Guelph in an intermediate position. If it opted to have full-time councillors, it would be the smallest single-tier municipality to have full-time councillors by a wide margin. If, however, Guelph were compared to two-tier governments, which is entirely reasonable, it is considerably larger than Caledon and Pickering, both of which have what are effectively full-time councillors, and Guelph is slated to grow to the same size as Burlington and Oshawa, which also have full-time councillors. If Guelph opted to have full-time councillors, it would not be an outlier; it might well be a forerunner of other single-tier municipalities in its population range.



Figure 4  
Compensation of councillors in select regional and area municipalities  
various years

Municipality	Census population 2016	Number of local councillors serving on local council <sup>[5]</sup>	Number of local councillors serving on regional council	Annual compensation (\$) area municipality	Annual compensation (\$) upper tier	Annual compensation (\$) total
Caledon	66,502	8	4	37,234 <sup>[1]</sup>	55,957 <sup>[1]</sup>	93,191
Mississauga	721,599	11	11	94,790 <sup>[2]</sup>	55,957 <sup>[1]</sup>	150,747
Vaughan	306,233	8	3	78,953 <sup>[3]</sup>	55,955 <sup>[3]</sup>	134,908
Oshawa	159,458	10	5	27,110 <sup>[4]</sup>	54,694 <sup>[1]</sup>	81,804
Pickering	91,771	6	3	35,317 <sup>[1]</sup>	54,694 <sup>[1]</sup>	90,011
Burlington	183,314	6	6	56,796 <sup>[1]</sup>	51,026 <sup>[1]</sup>	107,822

<sup>[1]</sup> 2018

<sup>[2]</sup> 2020

<sup>[3]</sup> 2017

<sup>[4]</sup> 2017, 1/3 is non-taxable

<sup>[5]</sup> This is the total number of elected councillors on the local council. It includes the regional councillors, but does not include the mayor.



## 4.6 Public engagement responses

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The first phase of the Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review study involved an on-line public engagement process. A survey tool was widely publicized in the community and was available 24 hours a day from August 14 to September 4, 2020. It drew 670 responses regarding residents' perspectives on the role of city councillors as summarized in figure 5.

Figure 5  
Survey question: From a citizen's perspective, how do you recommend that the role of city councillor be viewed in Guelph?

Response	Number	Per cent
Part time	265	39.6
Full time	327	48.8
Doesn't matter	17	2.5
Not sure	61	9.1
Total	670	100.0

Source: City of Guelph Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review Phase 1 Report, October 14, 2020.

The responses to the survey question indicate that most of those who expressed a view favoured full-time councillors. It was not an overwhelming majority, but it is fairly significant. This indicates that the residents of Guelph are open to the idea of full-time councillors.

There were other questions in the survey about the size of council, but this question did not include any reference to changing the size of council. Respondents were invited to provide comments in the sections labelled:

- "What would be the advantages of having part-time city councillors?"
- "What would be the advantages of having full-time city councillors?"

Some of the comments related to the advantages of part-time councillors were:

- "Keeps costs down."
- "I do not think Guelphites want more full-time, career politicians. I also personally like the idea that the councillor will continue to have a "real world" job that keeps them connected to the people, whether that be SAHM/caregiver, retail, professor,





business owner, what-have-you. I think we risk having city council become too insular with full-time councillors.”

- “I believe there should be separation between governance and operations. Full-time councillors will probably be much more involved in operations and therefore unable to properly govern from the right distance.”
- “Not sole source of income, could attract broader spectrum of candidates that don’t have to leave a career or calling.”
- “They remain connected to the city and are not career politicians.”
- “Based on today's numbers its part time, if you have 1 per ward could consider full time.”
- “They only really work part-time anyways, meetings are not held 8 hours a day. They can still work full time or part time in their existing career.”
- “If only one per ward, it could be full time, but with two it is definitely part time.”

Some of the comments related to the advantages of full-time councillors were:

- “Devote more of their time to the job. Make better more informed decisions, more community engagement.”
- “If one councillor, this would be their job, their main responsibility, not a part-time do when I have time job. They will work hard to keep that job as each 4 years they would want to keep their job.”
- “Increase access to councillors; enable a more diverse group of candidates & councillors.”
- “We need councillors to be fully engaged in understanding the work of the city and representing their constituents. They cannot do this part-time.”
- “More time spent on local issues; less conflicts of interest perhaps?”
- “Having a representative available at all times, not just when they're free, is better for democracy. Some councillors are notoriously difficult to get a hold of because of other commitments, thus resulting in unequal representation at city hall.”
- “A more diverse pool of candidates can run in elections. I'm having a hard time imagining a councillor can be anything but affluent if they are able to take a part-time salary. Full-time pay might bring out candidates who are passionate about their community and are able to dedicate themselves to city council business without sacrificing taking care of themselves and family.”
- “We’re a big city. Big decisions, millions dollar decisions. If I was a councillor, I would want to be able to give the job my full time attention.”



## 5. Impact of having full-time councillors

The presence of full-time councillors will have an impact on the system of governance of the city. It will affect the councillors themselves, the staff who interact with councillors, and the stakeholders. This section will speculate of how those changes could unfold.

### 5.1 The Research

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There has been very little evidence-based research on what happens when an elected body moves from part-time employment to full time. The simple reason for this is that this type of once-and-for-all shift has seldom occurred. The movement from part time to full time has tended to occur in incremental steps rather than as a result of a conscious decision.

Another factor that has limited the research into the idea of full-time councillors is that they are a relatively rare species. Full-time mayors are fairly common, but only three municipalities in Ontario pay councillors what would be regarded as full-time compensation. There are, however, many councillors in regional municipalities who receive what is essentially full-time compensation for serving on the regional and area municipal council; from the standpoint of each level of government, these are part-time councillors.

For all these reasons, making direct comparisons between full-time and part-time councillors is very difficult.

Sancton and Woolner developed the table recreated on the following page which identifies the issues and opportunities associated with full-time councillors.<sup>[6]</sup> This table provides a good summary of some of the changes that could occur.

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<sup>[6]</sup> Sancton and Woolner, p. 499.



Figure 6  
Issues and opportunities concerning full-time municipal politicians

Item	Politicians: opportunities	Politicians: issues	Administrators: opportunities	Administrators: issues
<b>Policy</b>	In depth involvement. More opportunity for follow-up on cost-benefits of policy decisions.	Mechanisms for policy development.	More opportunity for council to reflect community at earlier stage of policy development.	Increased time/resources used differently by politicians between constituent problems and policy. Council committees dominated by operational detail, seen to reduce accountability of managers as responsibility can be passed up the hierarchy to committees.
<b>Operations</b>	Better able to act as information source/mediator with bureaucracy on behalf of constituents. Time for and interest in higher quality administrative reports.	Resistance by bureaucracy by over-emphasizing “professional manager” role.	Public access Watchdog of administration on behalf of community. More interaction between politicians/managers.	Politicians taking on quasi- professional role. Increased individual aldermanic requests – growing workload.
<b>Resources –</b> secretarial, research assistants, technology, office space	Better supported politician, more effective at role, managing agendas.	Electorate support for added resources. Influence on democratic process, incumbents’ advantage.	Better informed politicians. More points of contact between politician/ managers and staff.	Political staff as counter- bureaucracy.
<b>Remuneration</b>	Allows for greater attention to role. Less limiting for economic reasons.	Motivation: Public services vs. opportunism. May limit those who do not wish to serve full time. Establishing associated benefits package.	-	-

Source: Andrew Sancton and Paul Woolner, “Full-time municipal councillors: a strategic challenge for Canadian urban government,” *Canadian Public Administration*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Winter 1990), pp. 482-505.



There has been considerable research in the United States related to levels of pay of politicians. Most of the empirical work has been on state legislatures (50 cases provide a good dataset), but very little on local governments. Peverill Squire related the level of professionalization of state legislatures (defined by levels of compensation and staff support, and length of legislative session) to the proportion of women and Blacks in state legislatures and determined that states in which legislature were more professionalized were likely to have more Black legislators, but there was no impact on the number of women.<sup>[7]</sup>

In a study of local governments in Brazil, Claudio Ferraz and Frederico Finan found that jurisdictions with higher pay attracted more candidates, particularly older and better educated candidates. There was also a slight increase in the number of female candidates.<sup>[8]</sup> The higher-paying jurisdictions also experienced “an increase in the number of schools, local clinics and an improvement in their infrastructure.”<sup>[9]</sup>

There is another stream of literature grounded in theoretical economics.<sup>[10]</sup> This generally begins with the standard supply curve that economists use which dictates that if the price paid for a resource increases, then the amount of the resource supplied will increase. In other words, increasing the compensation paid to councillors should increase the number of people running for the position. (The quality of this research is somewhat weakened by the fact that economists generally have difficulty factoring in the insecurity of pursuing a political career.)

This conclusion is always followed by the caveat that increasing the quantity of candidates does not equate with increasing the quality of candidates. In fact, the argument is sometimes made that higher compensation could attract more people who are unemployed or working in low-income occupations. The opportunity cost incurred by a high-status professional leaving their occupation would be considerably greater than that incurred by a ne’er-do-well living in their parents’ basement. Of course, a

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<sup>[7]</sup> Peverill Squire, “Legislative Professionalization and Membership Diversity in State Legislatures,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1 (February 1992), pp. 69-79.

<sup>[8]</sup> Claudio Ferraz and Frederico Finan, “Motivating Politicians: The Impacts of Monetary Incentives on Quality and Performance,” (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2008), p 17.

<sup>[9]</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>[10]</sup> A good summary of this literature is found in: Timothy Besley, “Paying Politicians: Theory and Evidence.” *Journal of the European Economics Association*, vol. 2, no. 2-3 (January-May 2004), pp. 193-215.



response to that would be that it is unclear what the determinants of a good councillor are. A low-income person who is hard-working and closely in touch with the community might be a better councillor than someone who had a lucrative career in a high-flying profession.

This leads us back to the idea that the best policy might be to ensure that every eligible member of the community has the ability to run for office and allow the voting public to choose.

## **5.2 Diversity**

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Full-time councillors would be a new experience for Guelph, so it is impossible to determine how it will change the nature of people who will run for office. The theoretical economists referred to in the previous section were quite certain that more people would run, but they had caveats about whether the quality of people running would necessarily improve.

In the public engagement portion of this project, many respondents expressed a desire for a system that would promote more diversity in councillors. It is likely that higher compensation will attract more candidates, but will that necessarily change the level of diversity?

Figure 7 provides information about the experience in jurisdictions with full-time councillors with regard to diversity. This data indicates Guelph already does better than the three cities with full-time councillors in terms of gender balance.



Figure 7  
Diversity in Guelph and full-time municipal councils  
2010 to 2022

### Guelph

Years	Male: number	Female: number	Female: %	Total councillors: number
2018-22	7	5	41.7	12
2014-18	8	4	33.3	12
2010-14	7	5	41.7	12

### Toronto

Years	Male: number	Female: number	Female: %	Total councillors: number
2018-22	17	8	16.0	25
2014-18	31	13	29.5	44
2010-14	29	15	34.1	44

### Ottawa

Years	Male: number	Female: number	Female: %	Total councillors: number
2018-22	15	8	34.8	23
2014-18	-	4	17.4	23
2010-14	17	6	26.1	23

### Hamilton

Years	Male: number	Female: number	Female: %	Total councillors: number
2018-22	8	7	46.7	15
2014-18	11	4	26.7	15
2010-14	11	3	20.0	15





## 5.3 Council-staff relations

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The analysis by Sancton and Woolner referred to earlier in figure 6 suggests that relationships between council and staff will change if councillors become full time. The nature of that change will depend on how the participants adapt to the change. Sancton and Woolner use positive phrases like “more interaction between politicians/managers” and “better informed politicians,” but there are also caveats like “council committees dominated by operational detail” and “increased individual aldermanic requests—greater workload.”

In other words, a switch to full-time councillors will present the opportunity for better understanding and cooperation between councillors and staff members, but it will be up to the individuals involved to make the best use of this changed relationship.

## 6. Support services

If Guelph councillors became full time, residents would expect that councillors would view their role differently and councillors would want to live up to those expectations. This would mean councillors would need more support services than they currently have. Research concerning municipalities with full-time councillors indicated four types of support that could be required.

### 6.1 Administrative

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Councillors would likely have offices at City Hall so this would become their workspace. This would result in them needing more administrative/clerical support to perform such duties as arranging appointments, maintaining the councillor’s calendar, organizing files, preparing expense reports, and so forth. We heard that some of this is already done for councillors by city staff, but councillors would expect more if they were working full time in the office.

A staff member providing these types of services could easily be shared among several councillors.



## 6.2 Constituency

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Councillors currently spend considerable time dealing with concerns and issues brought to them by constituents. If councillors were employed full time, constituents' expectations of them would likely increase. Councillors would not want to lose touch with constituents by inserting an intermediary staff person, but an aide doing constituency work could handle routine follow-up and liaison with staff members. This person could also assist the councillor in activities such as organizing ward town hall meetings and similar activities with constituents.

Depending on the volume of work, this position could be shared by several councillors.

## 6.3 Policy advisor

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Councillors currently receive a great deal of information from city staff and other sources having to do with policy and legislative matters. A conscientious councillor would also want to remain current on issues unfolding at the provincial and national levels, as well as activities in the broader community. A policy advisor could digest this information for a councillor and assist a councillor in deciding how to respond to certain issues. This could also involve speechwriting and preparing newsletters and other information messages for constituents.

The confidential nature of this work would mean each councillor would likely want their own advisor, although this would not necessarily be a full-time position.

## 6.4 Physical space

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Full-time councillors would feel the need to have workspace within City Hall in order to stay on top of issues and to provide space for meeting with constituents. Office space would be needed for each councillor and for any assistants as discussed above. The duties of a councillor would require that this space be private rather than a shared office with other councillors.

In addition to private offices for each councillor, councillors collectively would likely want some shared space such as a reception area, meeting room, and a coffee/lunchroom.



## 7. Conclusion

There would be budget implications associated with any of these alternatives. This could involve hiring people and making a long-term commitment to those people. If Guelph were to move forward with full-time councillors, this would be a new initiative, and it is unclear how councillors' work styles would unfold. A wise action would be to defer making any decisions about resources until after the system had been in place for some period of time. Councillors could then take stock of how they are working and decide on the nature of support needed at that point.