

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

Discussion Paper C: The Component Parts of Vaughan Council

Some components of the City of Vaughan’s Council are outside the control of the municipality, namely that there must be a “head of council” elected by general vote. The mayor of Vaughan was granted additional powers in 2023 (along with 45 other municipalities) via amendments to section 284.2 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, including the ability to appoint and dismiss the chief administrative officer, propose a budget to Council, and veto certain decisions of Council, among others. 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 Local and Regional councillors, which is set by York 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 no specific reference in the Ontario *Municipal Act, 2001* to the office of deputy mayor, ^[1] 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 unwilling to complete such duties. In Vaughan, the deputy mayor also represents the municipality on York Regional Council by virtue of also being a city and regional councillor.

The deputy mayor of Vaughan is the Local and Regional councillor who receives the most votes in the last general election. If this position is declared vacant, as has been the case in the recent past, the Local and Regional councillor with the next highest vote total received in the previous election will become the deputy mayor.

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 York Region, lower-tier municipalities use a variety of selection methods. For instance, before establishing a ward system, Aurora used a practice similar to Vaughan

^[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*.



where the member of council who receives the most votes in the previous general election served as the deputy mayor. In Georgina and Newmarket, the municipalities' lone regional councillor serves as the deputy mayor. In King Township, the position rotates monthly between councillors.

There is no definitive or indisputable advantage from employing one method or the other to select the deputy mayor. Our intention is to stimulate some discussion in Vaughan about whether to confirm the appointment method or to consider a modification that would make the deputy mayor position an elected position. Doing so, however, would be in the scope of the Council Composition Review.

Local and Regional Councillors: Members of York Regional Council are elected in what is known as a “double direct” form of election, meaning that those elected from York Region’s lower-tier municipalities as either a mayor or regional councillor earn a seat in both their local council and their regional council for four years. The Chair of Regional Council is elected by members of Regional Council at the first meeting of the term. York Regional Council consists of 22 members.

Vaughan currently has five representatives, including the mayor and four Local and Regional councillors. A third Local and Regional councillor was added prior to the 2003 municipal election, while a fourth Local and Regional councillor for Vaughan was added prior to the 2022 elections. Local and Regional councillors are elected at-large during general elections in Vaughan and do not represent local wards or individual geographic communities. From this perspective, five of the members of Vaughan Council are elected to participate in governing two municipalities.

Local Councillors: ^[1] Council currently includes five local councillors. 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.

The wards in which local councillors are elected in Vaughan have remained unchanged since 2009. The municipality originally used an at-large system and later adopted a ward system in 1985. The history of these boundaries is detailed in Discussion Paper B. This is the status quo – the default “solution” – that was originally ordered by the Ontario Municipal Board. Again, the status quo requires a rationale rather than simply being accepted because it is familiar.

It is primarily because of the presence of several distinct and/or historically important settlements and neighbourhoods in Vaughan such as Woodbridge, Vellore, Concord, Kleinburg, Maple, Nashville, and Thornhill that this review should proceed on the

^[1] The term “local councillor” is used here since that is the present designation. Provincial legislation authorizes a council to “dissolve” the wards but that possibility is not being considered in this review.



supposition that Vaughan Council will continue to be elected in wards as a way to ensure that the voices of the City's particular localities are found around the Council table. At the same time, it should be noted that there are more of these identifiable communities than there are wards.

Of course, if the alternative of dissolving the wards to elect the local councillors is widely supported in the public consultations, the Consultant Team would share that information with Council, along with the reasons why residents support it.

Topical Discussion Papers A to D

- Discussion Paper A – Vaughan's Electoral System
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of Vaughan Council
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards