

Township of Severn 2024-25 Ward Boundary Review Backgrounder

Discussion Paper A: The Severn Electoral System

Background

The Township of Severn has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Robert J. Williams, hereinafter referred to as the Consultant Team, to conduct a comprehensive and independent Ward Boundary Review.

The primary purpose of the study is to prepare Township Council to make decisions on whether to keep the existing ward configuration or to adopt an alternative. Matters that are integral to a comprehensive review include the following:

- Is it appropriate to consider dissolving the wards to elect all councillors at-large (in what the *Municipal Act* calls a “general vote” system)?
- Is it appropriate to consider changing the composition of council (its size and/or how council is elected) as part of the review?
- If councillors will continue to be elected in wards, what guiding principles will be observed in the design of the wards?

This Ward Boundary Review is premised on the legitimate democratic expectation that municipal representation in Severn on election day and throughout the term of Council will be effective, equitable, and an accurate reflection of the contemporary distribution of communities and people across the municipality.

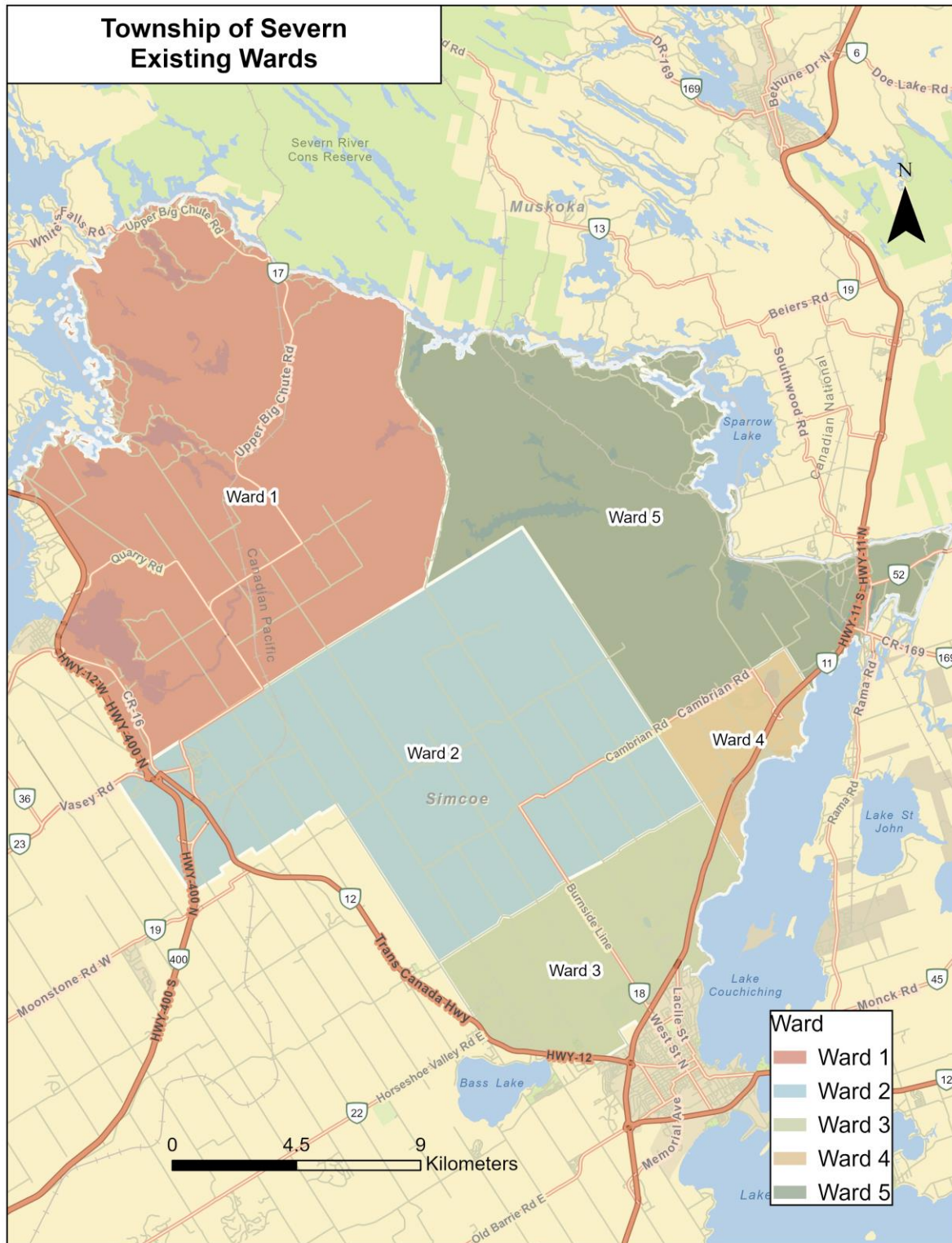
Setting

The Township of Severn was incorporated on January 1, 1994, under the *County of Simcoe Act, 1993* as an amalgamated municipality within the restructured County of Simcoe. The municipality is an amalgamation of the former Village of Coldwater, the Townships of Orillia and Matchedash and portions of Tay and the former Medonte Townships. The *Act* established a Council composed of a Mayor and a Deputy Mayor, both elected by general vote, and five Councillors elected in five wards.

Severn’s original post-amalgamation ward boundaries were set out under Ontario Regulation 953/93 in August 1994 but were changed following a ward boundary review conducted by Watson and Associates in 2016. The five ward system accepted by Council at that time remains in place and is the subject of this review and is presented in Figure Ai.



Figure Ai: Current Ward Boundaries





The present review follows a council composition review undertaken by the County of Simcoe in 2020 that was in response to a study initiated by the Province of Ontario to examine regional governance models and services that included Simcoe County. The important point is that options were considered to modify County Council by reducing each lower-tier municipality's representation from two (the mayor and deputy mayor) to one (the mayor), but no change was adopted ahead of the 2022 municipal election.

Topical Discussion Papers A to E

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

- *Discussion Paper A – The Severn Electoral System*
- Discussion Paper B – What is the Optimal Size for a Municipal Council?
- Discussion Paper C – The Component Parts of the Severn Council
- Discussion Paper D – Guiding Principles to Design Wards
- Discussion Paper E – Why a Ward Boundary Review?