



Municipality of the District of Argyle

Item: Boundary Review results –
Phase one of two

Date: August 4, 2022

VISION

We see Argyle as home to a healthy and thriving rural population. Our municipality promotes and supports economic and social opportunities for the region and engages in the active expression of our unique Acadian heritage. We are a place of choice for rural living and are widely recognized for our warm hospitality and joie de vivre. Surrounded by fresh air and cool ocean breezes, we work and play in the great outdoors. People choose to live in Argyle because of our commitment to each other, to our community and to our neighbors. Argyle is a place we are proud to call home.

Background:

Council approved the hiring of WSP to lead the first phase of community engagement regarding the determination of the number of councilors to represent the region in 2024. As you have been advised, this is one of two decisions that Council must make, the second being where the boundaries of the districts shall be drawn. Both decisions are influenced by public engagement but are for Council to decide.

The decisions shall be scrutinized by the Utility and Review Board (UARB) therefore our process is critical to a successful result. The UARB shall endorse (or not) the recommendations of Council, and how the Municipality came to a decision is a critical measure in all of this.

The process as led by WSP is attached to their report, so will not be repeated here. I would add that the surveys as well as the open houses were advertised using primarily social media (Facebook) and was announced on Y95 to be sure residents were aware of the process.

MGA considerations:

Boundary review is a provincial mandate, and the process to follow is found on the UARB website at <https://nsuarb.novascotia.ca/mandates/municipal-boundaries>.

Results of Report:

Before addressing the survey, I would say that our open houses were not successful in obtaining appropriate input or interest. There are several reasons we could speculate why, including post COVID tendencies, lack of interest in the issue, or lack of confidence that their input would make a difference etc. The purpose of the report in its entirety would be to aid Council in determining the size of Council, based on resident input, recognizing, respectfully, that residents may not follow municipal politics as diligently as we do 😊. If you read the questions, they were carefully crafted to ask residents what they considered important in their Council representatives.

Overall, you will note that our residents consider the direct connection for local issues to be a very important factor in having a council represent them. they appreciate the friendly approach

you currently display to them and consider your local connection to be very important. Furthermore, they believe that enough councilors are needed to govern a municipality that is involved in more and more complex issues. To staff, this means there cannot be a significant reduction in councilors as this decision would counter what our residents consider to be important.

When considering the later questions that ask about the number of councilors, the results help, but are not a clear direction to Council regarding the appropriate number of Councilors.

What the survey uncovered for us was that 5, 6, 8, and 11 councilors are less desirable, and that the current number of 9 or a reduction to 7 are more desirable. In short, the residents told us what they didn't want, which leaves some work left for staff and council to uncover the proper number.

In keeping with the process and procedures of the UARB, and the importance of community input, it is our view that more work is required to meet the test of meaningful public engagement, as you will see in the recommendations below.

Internal assessments:

Parallel to the public engagement work led by WSP, we asked our GIS Tech to do a preliminary assessment of current boundaries and eligible electors in each district. The data used came from Elections NS on April 4, 2022. The percentages below represent the difference (+ or -) from the average number of electors. The results are listed below that display 2004 numbers to 2022 numbers:

<u>Electors</u>	<u>2014 (approved)</u>		<u>2022 (draft)</u>	
District 1	785	12.8%	789	7.4%
District 2	784	12.6%	796	8.3%
District 3	789	13.4%	819	11.5%
District 4	641	-7.9%	637	-13.3%
District 5	791	13.6%	917	24.8%
District 6	618	-11.2%	705	-4.1%
District 7	597	-14.2%	682	-7.2%
District 8	632	-9.2%	634	-13.7%
District 9	627	-9.9%	634	-13.7%
Total electors	6,264		6,613	

What does this mean?

First, it means there was considerable growth in eligible electors. Second, the UARB states that each district should be within 10% (+ or-) of the average total electors, unless there are geographic, cultural, or other considerations to support a different number. In 2014, there were 6 of 9 Districts that exceeded the 10%, but not by much. The UARB accepted our minor changes in 2014 due primarily to protecting existing district boundaries for cultural, language purposes. In 2014, we also presented 7 councilors as an option, but in doing so, split communities in a way that they did not agree to, so preferred 9 councilors.

What we observe in 2022 is a need to adjust boundaries regardless of the # of councilors decided by Council. District 5 has exploded in elector population and that percentage is an unacceptable variance (which will require adjustment). Further work will be required to adjust District 4,8 and 9 to bring their percentages within or close to the 10% variance. With adjustments to one District, it shall have reactionary adjustments in other Districts.

The survey has given us some insight on communities of interest – specifically, whether certain communities have a sense of disconnect with its district representative. This input will be considered in needed adjustments, regardless of number of councilors.

Our initial staff discussions consider the impact of moving certain communities to other Districts, so as not to separate communities, simply changing the representative for that community. Areas of early consideration include the following: East Kempt, Hubbard’s Point, SAR, Eel Brook, Rocco Point. These communities are expected to be impacted based on our need to reduce District 5 and its subsequent impact. We also recognize that Districts 8 and 9 should be increased in population to bring the number closer to 10% variance. All these considerations assume 9 councilors. A decision to move to 7 will have more considerable changes.

CAO’s Recommendation:

In staff’s view, the public did not provide us conclusive input to make a solid recommendation to Council on the number of councilors. Also, the public was not yet informed of a recommended change in boundaries assuming status quo number of Councilors. This is an indication that we are not done with phase one of two of Boundary Review.

We recommend that two options be presented to the public. Specifically, an option of 7 councilors including a significant amendment to boundaries, as well as an option of 9 councilors, with modified boundaries. In short, status quo with the same lines is no longer a recommendation to council. Change shall be recommended, but we do not have clarity on whether it should be 7 or 9 councilors.

Suggested motions:

Recommended motion

Move that staff create two boundary options to Council for approval, namely the option of 9 councilors and 7 councilors, and that the maps, upon council approval, be presented to the public to obtain their input and engagement.

It should be noted that this motion means that Council has not yet approved the number of Councilors and decided that more information is needed to make a decision. Based on our time frame, it would be recommended that both number of councilors and boundaries be presented in one larger public session. This is a conservative approach and is consistent with WSP conclusions.

If Council is prepared to choose the number of councilors now, then it can pass a motion stating that number, and the motion would be:

Alternative motion

Move that Council approve the selection of 7 (or 9) councilors to represent the Municipality of the District of Argyle, and those two options be presented to the public regarding the potential boundaries of that option.

In this decision, staff would prepare 2 maps (using the number of districts approved) and present the options to the public for them to provide input on the best location for boundaries. It should be noted that if Council chooses the second motion, it may subject itself to deeper questions from the UARB presuming they agree with staff recommendations. The UARB may agree with your assessment that enough information was obtained. It should be noted that you know your community differently than staff and consultants, so as long as you as a council feel justified in making this decision now, it is equally appropriate to do so.