

Municipality of the County of Inverness Governance and Boundary Review Study FAQs

WHY IS INVERNESS CONDUCTING A GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW?

Section 369 of the Nova Scotia *Municipal Government Act*, stipulates that “a study of the number and boundaries of polling districts in the municipality, their fairness and reasonableness and the number of councillors” is required every eight years beginning in 2006. The Act makes it the responsibility of the Council to apply to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB) to confirm or to alter the number and boundaries of polling districts and the number of councillors. The last such study was conducted in Inverness in 2014, at which time no changes to the number of councillors or the number and boundaries of polling districts were proposed by the Municipality. That application was upheld by the UARB.

WHAT IS A GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW?

The County of Inverness municipal council consists of six members, each elected in a separate polling district. A Warden and Deputy Warden are selected by a vote of council.

A Governance and Boundary Review (G&BR) is a task conducted on behalf of a Nova Scotia municipality to assess whether the present number of councillors and the number of polling districts are reasonable for governing the municipality. A polling district is a geographical division of a municipality used for administrative or political purposes.

In addition, a G&BR will assess the “fairness and reasonableness of the polling districts” themselves (taking into account their boundaries and other features of each district) and will propose alternatives in the event that the districts fail to meet these parameters.

WHAT DOES A GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW MEAN FOR ME?

Inverness council makes important decisions about the County that impact your daily life. The County is responsible for water and wastewater services, fire services, recreation & community wellness programs; plus, it provides support for tourism and much more. The County also participates in external bodies such as the Eastern District Planning Commission which is responsible for comprehensive land use planning in the region.

A “fair and reasonable” polling district system should ensure that all areas of the municipality are represented in such a way that your voice and needs are reflected in council decision making on these and other topics.

WHAT WILL BE CONSIDERED IN THE GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW?

The objective of the G&BR is to ensure that residents benefit from an effective and equitable system of representation.

The first consideration will be whether having six Councillors (the same number as in 1993) is sufficient from several perspectives: in its User Guide, the UARB has stated that “the size of council involves considering the desired style of the council, the governance structure of the council, and a determination of an effective and efficient number of councillors.” The style of the council can refer to the time councillors are likely to spend on Council matters per week, the number of councillors required to represent the municipality on external committees and similar expectations placed on elected officials. The UARB suggests that the size of council and its governance structure should be open to public consultation and be determined by council after “an informed debate.”

The subsequent consideration is the distribution of the polling districts across the municipality (that is, through a “boundary review”). Since council has the option of confirming the number and boundaries of the present polling districts, the boundary review will begin by evaluating the suitability of the present districts using the criteria spelled out in the *Municipal Government Act*, s. 368 (4): “number of electors, relative parity of voting power, population density, community of interest and geographic size.” It will also develop alternative polling districts and will subject them to the same criteria since no system of representation can uniformly meet all the criteria: some criteria may work at cross-purposes to one another or some alternatives give greater priority to certain criteria over others. Public consultation is regarded by the UARB as “a key part of the decision-making process leading to an application” to the Board. Ultimately, the final polling district design selected by council should be the one that best fulfills as many of the criteria as possible.

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION?

The concept of “effective representation” has become an integral part of the evaluation of electoral systems in Canada.

To help ensure that a municipal council represents the electors of the community within

the limits imposed by the social and natural environment, it is expected that voter parity is a priority but it is also necessary to consider other important factors, including geography, community history, community interests and minority representation. According to the Supreme Court of Canada's Carter decision (*Reference re Provincial Electoral Boundaries (Saskatchewan)* (1991)), all these factors contribute to the achievement of the "overriding" principle of effective representation.

When a Councillor casts a vote around the council table, each one should be reflecting roughly the same number of the County's electors. But since polling districts are drawn in an environment where there are variations in population density, distinctive communities of interest and a significant geographic size, "effective representation" will serve as a kind of summary evaluation built around the other criteria. For example,

- Are the individual polling districts plausible and coherent units of representation?
- Do they provide equitable access to councillors for residents of the municipality?
- Are the proposed polling districts of a size, scale, and shape that a representative can serve her or his constituents successfully?

In sum, do the polling districts constitute a system that can be judged on balance to deliver effective representation even if some of the specific criteria are only partially successful?

WHO IS CONDUCTING INVERNESS GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW?

The County of Inverness has retained Watson and Associates Economists Ltd. and Dr. Robert Williams to conduct a comprehensive and independent G&BR. The Consultants have extensive experience in such reviews in Ontario and were selected through a competitive tendering process established by the municipality.

Together, the consultant team has conducted more than twenty electoral reviews in Ontario. They will use their experience to assess the present electoral arrangements in Inverness County and will propose alternatives consistent with the criteria set out in the *Municipal Government Act*.

HOW AND WHEN WILL THE GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW BE CONDUCTED?

DISCOVERY

October 2022

First, the consultants will gather information on the present electoral system from interviews with municipal staff and elected officials, compile data on the distribution of population and electors in 2022 and assemble comparative examples of governance

and electoral arrangements from other municipalities in Nova Scotia.

DEVELOPMENT

October-November 2022

The consultants will assess the present electoral system and develop alternative designs.

ENGAGEMENT

January 16, 2023

Public consultation is essential for the review process to be legitimate and effective by allowing the community to provide input on the current and proposed composition of council and polling district boundaries.

- Virtual public consultation sessions (i.e., open houses) will be held on January 16, 2023 to advise the public and gain their feedback.

- **Monday January 16, 2023: 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm (AST)**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84337532888?pwd=bktlZzRhK0RZa0trQ1YwM0srY09zUT09>

Meeting ID: 843 3753 2888

Passcode: 472735

- **Monday January 16, 2023: 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm (AST)**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87420345805?pwd=VXI2U0VQMnRKdmhzUlhtOFZwT2NlZz09>

Meeting ID: 874 2034 5805

Passcode: 590236

Residents are invited to contribute to the Review by completing a brief survey that will be available on this website between January 16 and January 30, 2023.

COUNCIL'S APPLICATION TO THE UARB

March 2, 2023

A final report will be submitted to Council, which will serve as the basis for a decision to apply to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB) for an order establishing:

- the number of members of council; and
- the boundaries of the polling districts

UARB ORDER

2023

The municipality's application will be considered by the UARB at a hearing held either at the Board's offices in Halifax or at the municipal administrative centre in Port Hood. The municipality is required to issue a Notice of Hearing inviting members of the public to

advise the Board on the application.

The Board will consider the evidence presented to it by the municipality and members of the public and will issue an Order, normally within sixty days of the hearing, that establishes the number of councillors and boundaries of polling districts for the 2024 and 2028 municipal elections.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GOVERNANCE and BOUNDARY REVIEW?

Please contact info@invernesscounty.ca

See the County's website < <https://invernesscounty.ca/government/2022-district-boundary-review/> > for updated information on the public consultation process and other materials about alternative ward designs.