

Ward Boundary Commission Final Report

Background

In accordance with Council Policy CC017 - Ward Boundary Determination and Review, a major review of Calgary's ward boundaries was conducted by a Council-appointed independent Ward Boundary Commission (the Commission). In reviewing ward boundaries it was the responsibility of the Commission to utilize specific criteria in determining proposed changes to those 14 boundaries. In addition the Commission was required to conduct this major review as if no wards existed, provide an opportunity for input from members of Council, school boards and the public, and finally make recommendations to Council on proposed revisions to those boundaries.

Major Criteria.

In undertaking the task the Commission adhered to the following criteria:

1. The total population to be relatively equal between wards derived from the most recent civic census;
2. Deviation of population among wards to be kept between ten and 15 per cent with a maximum allowed deviation of 25 per cent;
3. Expected population growth over the next 10 years to be used in determining the new boundaries.

In applying these criteria the Commission's approach was to ensure that the proposed boundary changes would subsequently last and be effective for two future civic elections. The actual policy CC017, which references three civic elections, approved when election cycles were three years. From the point of Council consideration of this report, the period accommodated will be approximately 10 years, which recognizes what the Commission believes was the intent of the policy. In order to achieve this relatively long-lasting division of city wards, it was deemed vital to allocate higher current populations into those more stable wards and lower populations into wards most likely to experience higher growth in the decade to come. Because the Commission's interpretation of its mandate was to recommend changes that would cover two current civic election cycles, those divisions of the current population needed to be significant. Minor tweaking of current wards would not accomplish the mandate.

Given both the historical and projected pattern of high growth in the more outlying, suburban areas of Calgary, the application of this approach resulted in the Commission's proposal of significantly lowering current populations in those outer wards. Simply put they need to be reduced in population size before the next election in order to give them room to grow in years and elections to come. In tandem with this approach established wards, generally closer to downtown, would be relatively "bulked up" with higher current population numbers.

Additional Criteria

Further criteria were considered by the Commission, as required by the Council policy and deemed "where possible".

Those included:

4. Ward boundaries and community district boundaries should coincide;
5. Ward boundaries and community association boundaries should coincide;
6. Consider readily identifiable boundaries (major streets and topography);
7. Attempt to create block-shaped boundaries, not pie-shaped;
8. Try to equalize land use activities in each ward (commercial, rural, industrial, institutional, green space), and consider historical ward boundaries.

Process

In accordance with Council Policy CC017, the Commission designed a work program that combined initial internal analysis, an inclusive consultation process, review of input, and preparation of a final ward boundary map meeting established Council's policy:

1. Initial Internal Analysis:

After much investigation and experimentation the Commission prepared five initial scenarios for the proposed future electoral division of the city.

During this preparatory work, at all times applying Council's criteria, the Commission became very familiar with the various current and projected population distributions and, more importantly, their impact on the resulting shapes and sizes of each and every proposed ward.

After such intensive work five agreed upon scenarios were then put forward for discussion with members of Council in the late spring of 2015.

Those five, detailed scenarios included a pie-shaped map centered on downtown, a projected east/west, cross-city ward division, and three other more readily recognizable scenarios resulting from differing starting points around the city. This exercise allowed the Commission to provide City Council with alternative mapped scenarios reflecting different applications of criteria, and obtain initial feedback from City Council to guide future work.

2. Consultation:

The Commission met with all members of Council to present the five scenarios, test the logic of each, and then receive their views on potential changes. During these meetings it became clear there was little support for the pie-shaped ward scenario, and unnecessarily elongated ward shapes, which the east/west division would entail. Again, simply put, the idea that every elected person would have a piece and subsequent

interest in downtown because the tip of the pie landed there would actually mean no-one would be beholden to downtown because the balance of the populations they represented would still be in the outer lying areas. In addition, the sheer amount of travelling required of councillors under such pie-shaped scenarios deemed them unworkable.

Once these meetings concluded the Commission used the input to prepare two hybrid scenarios combining and focusing upon the views expressed from the initial consultation with Council following the five scenarios presented.

The Commission then tested those two scenarios (A and B) at a series of open houses, one in each quadrant of the city in accordance with Council's Policy, and a final open house at City Hall.

The Chair of the Commission presented both scenarios at each open house, conveyed the criteria used to produce the maps, and moderated a question / answer session with those in attendance. In addition, comment sheets were available to receive written submissions along with a website address for electronic comments.

The Commission then met with the Calgary Board of Education and the Calgary Catholic School Board. The Boards provided input and insight into operational issues and made some minor suggestions for changes that were accommodated.

3. Review of Input:

There were 50 written comment sheets handed in at the open houses. In addition there were 287 on-line submissions commenting on the two scenarios. 80% of the comment sheets and almost two-thirds (62%) of the on-line submissions supported Scenario B. While the two scenarios were similar, Scenario B was the clear favorite for several reasons, although there were suggested improvements to be considered by the Commission. Most respondents wanted logical, easily identifiable boundaries, protection of existing community relationships, and homogenous populations with little diversity in the range of potential issues within a ward.

The Commission reviewed all public input. Given strong support from the public, Scenario B was chosen as the base map for further review. Where additional deviation from ward populations could be accommodated, map changes based upon public input were made, resulting in a final proposed ward boundary map (attached). Clearly the Commission could not accommodate all requests for changes that came from the public, as many were mutually exclusive. Yet support for Scenario B at the open houses and on-line was sufficient that the Commission is satisfied the final proposed map based upon that scenario best achieves Council's ward boundary policy.

4. Final Map:

In carrying out the task of preparing a final proposed boundary map for Council's consideration, the Commission closely followed the objective, population-based requirements, mindful of recent legal decisions requiring adherence to deviation maximums in determining boundaries. It should be noted that as these proposals would not come into effect until the next civic election in 2017 then some of the deviations noted (using 2015 census numbers) in the Commission's proposal will have gone some

way to being reduced by the time that election takes place.

The other criteria set out in the Council policy were considered in a more subjective manner, which were then applied in order to arrive at a ward map that the Commission believes meets most policy objectives. It should be noted that the public often focused more on these additional, subjective criteria. The Commission then made a number of final modifications based on input from the public consultation process, meetings with members of Council, and the school boards.

Conclusions / Recommendations

At this point, as fellow Calgarians, the Commission should give a brief note in regards to the issues this city is facing with the recent downturn in energy prices and the potential effect on the City's growth projections. The Commission does not have the mandate to modify growth projections provided by Administration. However, if we look to the past, then we see Calgary has grown through tough times as well as through strong times. We are also mindful that growth projections are not taken lightly, as they impact on planning for major infrastructure and services. We are confident that the City will continue to grow and the impacts of recent events, though relevant in the short term, will not materially change the trajectory in the time horizon the Commission was directed to consider in preparing its recommendations. In short, our ten-year population increase assumptions – supplied by the City – cannot be prey to the short-term volatility in the price of oil and gas.

The Commission's recommendation in map, Attachment 2 to this report, reflects its best efforts to follow and implement Council's policy.

This recommendation provides for wards that balance population within acceptable deviation requirements, and allows for growth over future election cycles before another review is required, always assuming growth projections are realized.

The map also reflects general block-shaped wards, having regard for historical community relationships and obvious natural and man-made barriers. In addition, every effort was made to reflect existing community district and association boundaries, as well as school board requirements. In sum, Council can expect the proposed boundary map will stand the test of time.