

COUNCIL MEETING
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

REPORT CLK-2024-11
November 26, 2024

SUBJECT: **Response to Notice of Motion – Options to Reduce Council Size to Lessen Financial Impact on Taxpayer and Public Engagement**

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APPROVING: **Rob Axiak, Chief Administrative Officer**

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WELLAND approves the reduction of the council size to six (6) councillors and Mayor effective (7 total) for the 2026 Municipal Election; and further

THAT Welland City Council subsequently directs staff to conduct a ward boundary review based on this reduced council composition, including options for a ward-based, or an at-large system.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This recommendation is aligned to Council’s strategic priority of ensuring “**Liveability**” by creating a sense of belonging while enhancing mobility by improving access to recreation and community events, ensuring adequate housing options, encouraging job growth, and improving ways to efficiently move people throughout the city.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report responds to Welland City Council's directive to explore options for reducing council size to lower taxpayer costs. By comparing Welland with similar municipalities, it identifies over-representation as a potential issue due to a lower residents-per-councillor ratio. Three options are presented, with a recommendation to reduce the council to seven members. This option aligns with provincial directives for municipal efficiency and balances financial savings with effective governance. To implement these changes, a by-law must be passed by December 31, 2025, to ensure they take effect in the next municipal election.

In addition, this report integrates community feedback collected through the Engage Welland platform to refine the options presented for council composition. A key finding is that 44.3% of survey respondents support a council size of 5-7 members, aligning with the recommendation to reduce to seven members. The report recommends further public engagement to ensure community support and inform subsequent decisions.

BACKGROUND:

This report fulfills the Notice of Motion (NOM) passed by Welland City Council on April 9, 2024, which is as follows:

“THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WELLAND directs staff to provide council with options on a reduced council size, with the sole objective to reduce the cost on to the taxpayer.”

On September 3, 2024, Welland City Council directed staff to develop and implement a public engagement strategy to gather resident input on the potential reduction of council size.

DISCUSSION:

Below outlines various municipal comparators for municipalities within a part-time councillor system. Niagara Falls and St. Catharines were chosen as comparators as they more closely align with Welland in terms of operational and service levels as lower-tier municipalities. These cities are among the larger municipalities in the Niagara Region, making them more relevant for comparison than the smaller municipalities in the area.

Municipal Comparators

Municipality	Population	Number of Councillors	Number of Residents per Councillor
Welland	57,933	12	4,828
Niagara Falls	94,415	8	11,802
St. Catharines	136,803	12	11,400
Halton Hills	62,951	8	7,869
Brantford	104,688	10	10,469
Kawartha Lakes	79,247	8	9,906
Clarington	101,427	4	25,357

To ensure a comprehensive analysis of the councillor-to-citizen ratio, it is also important to consider municipalities outside the Niagara region. Different areas in Ontario have varying governance structures, population densities, and community needs, which influence how municipal representation is organized. By including comparators from across Ontario, the report can offer a broader

perspective, identifying best practices that could be relevant to the Niagara region while ensuring that the recommendations align with broader provincial trends and standards.

Ratios:

The last column of the above chart shows the number of Councillors per Resident. By comparing these ratios with other municipalities, it will help Council identify if the Welland governance structure is over, or under-represented. A lower residents-to-councillor ratio could suggest that each councillor serves fewer constituents, potentially indicating over-representation relative to typical standards.

Options:

Through the Notice of Motion cited in this report, council had directed staff to provide recommendations for reducing the council size with a primary focus on reducing the financial impact on the taxpayers of Welland. With this in mind, various configurations were examined, and shown below.

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Part Time Councillors • 1 Full Time Mayor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Part Time Councillors • 1 Full Time Mayor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Part Time Councillors • 1 Full Time Mayor
5 Elected Officials	7 Elected Officials	9 Elected Officials

As recommended in this report, reducing the council to 7 elected officials total (Option 2 above) would be the most optimal solution to meet the direction provided in the NOM, as:

- It meets the intent of the NOM from a Financial perspective while maintaining service levels (i.e. cost savings – One Councilor per Ward rather than the current Two per Ward structure), and
- It would only require a basic update / review to the current ward structure as the current six wards would remain with only minor modifications based on the number of residents in each ward, including growth projections.

Timing:

As outlined in the Municipal Act, sections 217(1) and 222(8), the deadline for a municipal council to approve a by-law changing the ward structure and/or the council composition is December 31, 2025. Meeting this deadline is essential for these changes to be effective for the upcoming municipal election. Moreover, step one as noted in this report is to gain approval by council to reduce the composition of council to 7, allowing enough time to complete a ward boundary review this Fall before the December 31, 2025, deadline.

Provincial Oversight:

At the time this NOM was presented, some members of Council had tabled discussion around the province, and their interest in municipal council sizes and the desire for more efficient local government. A session was hosted by the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Culture Policy in January of this year in Niagara. The hearing was intended to inform a study on regional governance as overseen by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This study is still ongoing. In May of this year, the Niagara Region hosted a three-day advocacy event at Queen's Park known as Niagara Week. At this event, some discussions were had regarding the overall structure of Niagara elected officials. No conclusions were reached on this topic at this scheduled event. That said, the Province of Ontario has directed municipalities to find efficiencies as part of its broader agenda to ensure more effective and fiscally responsible local governance. This directive stems from the increasing financial pressures on municipalities, which are tasked with managing a growing list of responsibilities, including infrastructure, housing, and social services, often without corresponding increases in revenue. Key elements of this push for efficiency include reassessing the structure of local governments, such as the number of elected officials, to streamline operations and reduce costs. As such, the NOM and subsequent recommendation in this report, would continue to proactively align to the interests put forth by the province.

Public Engagement Survey

Below provides a summary of the feedback collected through the Engage Welland platform regarding council composition and size. The survey ran from October 21 to November 19, 2024, and received 141 responses.

Key findings highlight community preferences and concerns about the potential reduction in council size.

Participation Overview:

- Total Participants: 141
- Engaged Visitors: 105
- Aware Visitors: 259

Key Findings:

Preferred Council Size:

- 44.3% supported a council of 5-7 members.
- 17.1% preferred 8-10 members.
- Only 0.7% supported a council with more than 13 members.

Representation Effectiveness:

- 36.2% rated the current council (13 members) as providing "average" representation.
- 28.4% believed the representation was "poor."
- 22.7% rated it "well."

Criteria for Determining Council Size:

- Population Size:** 84 responses.
- Geographic Area:** 71 responses.
- Representation of Diverse Voices:** 45 responses.

Adjustments for Future Growth:

- 42.6% supported decreasing council size.
- 44.0% supported maintaining the current size.

Community Feedback Themes:

- Concerns about equitable representation, particularly for areas experiencing growth.
- Questions about the fiscal impact of reducing council size.
- Desire for a transparent process that includes future community growth projections.

The survey results demonstrate a significant portion of the community is open to reducing the council size while emphasizing the importance of representation and accessibility.

FINANCIAL:

Based on the 2024 Budget, the total financial expense of a Council of 13 members, including remuneration, professional development, mileage, allowances, pension, benefits, health tax, and cell phone, equate to **\$631,848.00**. The options shown below is based on the 2024 Mayor and Council Budget for Remuneration and Expenses. As noted in this report, Option 2 is what is being recommended to Council based on the intent of the NOM.

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 Part Time Councillors• 1 Full Time Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 Part Time Councillors• 1 Full Time Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 Part Time Councillors• 1 Full Time Mayor
<u>5</u> Elected Officials	<u>7</u> Elected Officials	<u>9</u> Elected Officials
Mayor: \$123,348 4 Councillors: \$169,500 Total: \$292,848	Mayor: \$123,348 6 Councillors: \$254,250 Total: \$377,598	Mayor: \$123,348 8 Councillors: \$339,000 Total: \$462,348
Savings: \$339,000	Savings: \$254,250	Savings: \$169,500
Tax Savings Impact: 0.69%	Tax Savings Impact: 0.52%	Tax Savings Impact: 0.34%

CONCLUSION:

The recommended solution is to reduce the council to seven (7) members and to subsequently conduct a ward boundary review, addressing financial concerns while ensuring effective representation. To implement these changes for the next municipal election, the necessary by-law must be approved by December 31, 2025, as per the *Municipal Act*.

ATTACHMENT:

Appendix I – Summary Report Engage Welland - Council Composition