

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: July 22, 2025
To: Finance and Labour Relations Sub-committee
From: Tatiana Dafoe, City Clerk
Report Number: FIN25-025
Attachments: None

Title: Composition and Size of Council for the 2026-2030 Term

Objective: To consider the pre-election report on the composition and size of Stratford City Council and to seek direction.

Background: Since 1885 when the then Town of Stratford was incorporated as a City, the composition of Council and how members are elected has changed several times. Over the past several elections, electors have been asked to vote for:

- 1 Mayor, and
- 10 Councillors

Section 186 (2) of the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25 (hereinafter the "Act") specifically allows Council to, among other matters, change the composition of Council. Council by way of a by-law may change the composition of Council but for the by-law to be effective for the 2026 election it will need to be passed prior to January 1, 2026. If it is not passed prior to that date, then the by-law will not be in effect for the 2026 election but will apply to the subsequent 2030 election.

Section 217 (1) of the Act allows municipalities to change the composition of its council subject to the following rules:

1. There shall be a minimum of five members, one of whom shall be the head of council.
2. The members of council shall be elected in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.
3. The head of council shall be elected by general vote.
4. The members, other than the head of council, shall be elected by general vote or wards or by any combination of general vote and wards.

5. The representation of a local municipality on the council of an upper-tier municipality shall not be affected by the by-law of the local municipality under this section.

Composition / Size of Council:

The size of Council has ranged from as high as 15 members to the current 10 members (not including the Mayor's position). Since 1931, the number of Aldermen/Councillors has been 10 representatives and this number has not changed even with an expanding City size and growing population.

Method of Electing Council:

The City has experienced ward and at-large elections since at least 1885. In 1886, a ward system for electing Aldermen was put in place. Wards were abolished in 1890 and replaced with an at-large system. Then in 1922, the ward system was re-established. In 1923 the ward system was abolished and replaced with at-large elections.

As the next Municipal Election will be held on Monday, October 26, 2026, the purpose of this report is to consider whether the composition and size of Council is to remain at 11 members elected at large or whether it is to be changed.

Analysis: A summary of municipalities with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 has been compiled showing the corresponding size of Councils and type of local government.

Table 1: Comparison of selected information of similar size municipalities

Municipality	Population*	Single or Lower Tier**	Size of Council
Bradford West Gwillimbury	42,880	Lower tier	9
Brant County	39,747	Single tier	11
Cornwall	47,845	Single tier	11
Fort Erie	32,901	Lower tier	7
Georgina	47,642	Lower tier	7
Grimsby	28,883	Lower tier	9
Innisfil	43,326	Lower tier	9
Lakeshore	40,410	Lower tier	8
LaSalle	32,721	Lower tier	7
Leamington	29,680	Lower tier	7
New Tecumseh	43,948	Lower tier	10
Orangeville	30,167	Lower tier	7

Municipality	Population*	Single or Lower Tier**	Size of Council
Orillia	33,411	Single tier	9
Owen Sound	32,712	Lower tier	9
Quinte West	46,560	Single tier	13
St. Thomas	42,840	Single tier	9
Stratford	33,232	Single tier	11
Timmins	41,145	Single tier	9
Whitchurch-Stouffville	49,864	Lower tier	7
Woodstock	46,705	Lower tier	7

*2021 Census

** Lower tier municipality forms part of a County or Regional Government (Upper tier)

Municipalities that have reviewed the composition of their councils have considered the following points:

- Past changes and current composition
- Population forecasts
- Legislated roles, responsibilities, duties and workload of councillors
- Potential impact of having fewer councillors
- Representation should be fair and responsive
- What is the appropriate number of constituents to be represented by a councillor
- Cost of governance

Stratford is a single tier municipality and provides the following services:

- Public works / infrastructure: roads, bridges, sewers, storm water, waste water systems
- Municipal water treatment and distribution systems
- Fire services and emergency control
- Public transportation systems
- Waste collection, recycling and yard waste collection
- Building and by-law services
- Land-use planning
- Ontario Works, Housing and Child care and Day care services
- Administration services
- Parks and forestry, recreation facilities and programming
- Parking and Crossing Guard Services (contracted)
- Municipal property and buildings
- Animal Control services (contracted)
- Operation of a municipal airport
- Operation of a municipal cemetery

The above list does not include mandated and discretionary services operated by outside boards and entities but for which the municipal corporation is the shareholder or major funding source: electrical utility, policing, library, economic development, tourism, public health, long-term care, paramedics, provincial offenses, museum and archives.

Considerations:

There is no definitive technique of determining the appropriate composition or size of Council.

There is also no definitive answer to the question of how many councillors are appropriate to govern the municipal corporation, participate in meetings, attend city advisory committee meetings and attend outside committee and board meetings as City Council representatives. Lastly, there is no optimal number regarding how many residents each councillor should represent in a ward system, if a change from at-large is made.

By means of this Pre-election Report, Council is asked to consider whether they wish to change the composition/size of Council in time for the 2026 election.

The following options are identified:

- Maintain the current composition of City Council
- Reduce the current composition of City Council
- Increase the current composition of City Council

As outlined in a separate Pre-election report, Council may also consider changing the method of how the Deputy Mayor position is selected. This would further impact on the composition/size of Council.

If City Council is interested in changing the composition/size of City Council, parameters for the review could include:

- Population
- Whether or not ward representation or continue with at-large
- Parameters used by other municipalities

There have been no requests made to the City Clerk to consider changing the composition or size of Council.

If there is no interest in changing the composition/size of Council, no decision is required, and this Pre-election report may be received as information.

If Council would like to consider changing the size and composition, then direction is required and there will be public notice requirements. The City's Notice Policy requires

the following notice to be given when considering a change to the composition of Council:

"Before passing a By-law to change the composition of Council, Notice of Intent to be given:

Content of Notice:

- A general description of the subject matter;
- Purpose of the Public Meeting at which the subject matter will be considered, including date, time and location of the Public Meeting;
- General provisions guiding the submission of information before or at the Public Meeting of which notice is being given;
- Instructions on obtaining any additional information which may be made available by the City or submitting comments or making a presentation at the Public Meeting;
- The name and title of the person to whom written comments are to be sent, together with the address of the official and the deadline for receipt of such submissions.

Manner of Notice:

- Notice of Public Meeting to be published once at least 10 calendar days prior to the scheduled public meeting in a newspaper, Municipal website, and City Hall Bulletin Board."

There is no appeal mechanism for a by-law adopted under section 217 of the Municipal Act changing the composition/size of Council.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

Implementing a change in the composition/size of City Council will have 2025 budget implications. The cost will depend on the extent of the review and level of public consultation. Public consultation could range from a public meeting with website feedback to a full consultant and on-line engagement process.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

With respect to the 2026 election budget, there would be increased costs for adding additional races to the voting system and in counting additional races on the ballot. The financial impact has not been estimated at this time.

Neither the cost savings from a reduced composition of City Council, nor the cost increases from an increased composition of City Council have been considered at this time. Remuneration for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and ten Councillors are included in the annual budget.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Not applicable: This report does not align with one of the Strategic Priorities as the purpose is to consider the size of council.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Not applicable: This report does not align with one of the One Planet Principles as the purpose is to consider the size of council.

Staff Recommendation: THAT direction be provided if City Council is interested in initiating notice of intent to change the composition of City Council in time for the 2026 municipal election and that City Council identify the proposed change(s) to the composition and/or size of Council.

Prepared by: Tatiana Dafoe, City Clerk

Recommended by: Karmen Krueger, CPA, CA, Director of Corporate Services
Adam Betteridge, Interim Chief Administrative Officer