

Presentation to the City of Ottawa Ward Boundary Review

My name is Alex Cullen. I am currently President of the Belltown Neighbours Association, in Bay Ward, and Vice-President of the Federation of Citizens Associations, but I am here in my personal capacity, not theirs.

I am also a former member of the Regional Council of Ottawa-Carleton, which moved to direct election by regional ward in 1994. I was elected then as Regional Councillor for Bay Ward. I was also elected to the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa in 2000, representing Bay Ward again. In 2006, following a ward boundary review, I was re-elected as City Councillor for Bay Ward. I bring to this table my experience having gone through 3 ward boundary reviews in Ottawa.

I am very familiar with the concept of “effective representation”, as espoused by the Supreme Court of Canada. The foundation is the democratic principle of one-person one-vote, but qualified by recognizing geography, communities of interest, capacity to represent, and future population growth. These are important factors, but must have compelling justification to impinge on the foundation principle of one-person one-vote.

You are here because there is an imbalance of representation on the current City Council. Based on 2018 population figures Ottawa City Council has wards that vary from 61,528 people (Barrhaven Ward) to 25,644 people (West Carleton-March Ward). The overall ward average is 43,106 for Ottawa’s 23 wards. Currently Council has 3 wards that exceed 20% of that average (Barrhaven, Gloucester-South Nepean, College Wards) and 4 wards that are below the 20% threshold (West Carleton-March, Osgoode, Rideau-Goulbourn, Beacon Hill-Cyrville). That’s 7 wards out of 23 – nearly one-third of City Council. Clearly adjustments in ward boundaries need to be made.

Your document speaks of permitting adjustments to ward boundaries of between 10% and 15% to recognize geography, communities of interest, capacity to serve and future population growth. If you are here today because 7 wards out of 23 are over- and-under 20% of the ward average, then 15% must be your maximum, or else why engage in this exercise? And that 15% flex factor must have clear, defensible reasons to justify infringing on the principle of one-person one-vote.

And that leads us to the problem of rural representation. Of the 4 rural wards in the City of Ottawa, one (Cumberland) has clearly graduated to a suburban ward with its current population of 50,424 – some 17% above the city ward average. However, the other 3 (West Carleton-March, Osgoode and Rideau-Carleton Wards), with a combined population of 88,573, warrant at best 2 wards, based on the current city ward average of 43,106.

I realize that the issue of rural representation will be the sticky point in this exercise. In 1994, with the creation of 18 regional wards for the then Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, those wards varied little from the average, and the rural portion of the Region was represented then by one ward (Western Townships Ward). However, the size of that ward was enormous, stretching from Navan to Constance Bay. Capacity to represent was clearly an issue here.

However, the creation of the amalgamated City of Ottawa by the Province of Ontario in 2000 led to initially 20 wards based on 16 former regional wards representing Ottawa's urban and suburban communities, plus 4 rural wards, then expanded to 5 rural wards (one each for the rural townships of Cumberland, West Carleton, Goulbourn, Rideau and Osgoode), for a total of 21 wards. The rural community, with less than 15% of the city's population, had one-quarter of the seats on City Council.

In 2005 City Council initiated another ward boundary review, in response to the population growth in Kanata and Barrhaven, which led to the creation of 2 new suburban wards, to a total of the 23 wards that we have today.

The creation of much smaller rural wards in 2000 by the Provincial Government of the day was based on the issue of capacity of representation given the wide rural area under consideration, but clearly the pendulum swung too far then. If we are here today because 7 city wards – nearly one-third of Council – are too imbalanced to respect the principles of democratic representation, then something must give.

Rural residents deserve their voice, and, based on population, that works out to 2 Council seats, as mentioned before. I do not favour grafting rural communities to suburban communities, because the greater number of suburban residents will dominate the fewer number of rural residents. But there is no inherent characteristic of rural residents that would warrant them greater representation on City Council compared to other residents.

Your other option is to create more urban/suburban wards, in order to reduce the discrepancy in ward populations. That may be one of your options to present to City Council, but brings into play other issues such as optimal Council size for decision-making, particularly when we have the example of the radical reduction in the size of Toronto's City Council by the current Provincial Government.

In sum, in my view for fair democratic representation the principle of one-person one-vote should be honoured as much as possible, using a flex factor for ward populations of no more than 15% (less, if possible) in order to accommodate geography and communities of interest. The consequence is two instead of three rural wards, which more fairly represents that community while accommodating the capacity to represent the rural community on Ottawa's City Council.

City of Ottawa Wards (2018)

Ward #	Ward Name	Population 2018	% Variance from Average
1	Orléans	48,315	112.1%
2	Innes	42,166	97.8
3	Barrhaven	61,528	142.7
4	Kanata North	37,929	88.0
5	West Carleton-March	25,644	59.5
6	Stittsville	37,365	86.7
7	Bay	45,662	105.6
8	College	51,829	120.2
9	Knoxdale-Merivale	39,485	91.6
10	Gloucester-Southgate	47,517	110.2
11	Beacon Hill-Cyrville	33,504	77.7
12	Rideau-Vanier	49,632	115.1
13	Rideau-Rockcliffe	39,801	92.3
14	Somerset	41,996	97.4
15	Kitchissippi	44,594	103.5
16	River	48,566	112.7
17	Capital	38,322	88.9
18	Alta Vista	44,939	104.3
19	Cumberland	50,424	117.0
20	Osgoode	28,279	65.6
21	Rideau-Goulbourn	30,650	71.1
22	Gloucester-South Nepean	53,175	123.4
23	Kanata South	50,111	116.3

Total Population (2018): 991,433

Average Ward Size: 43,106 (Wards marked in **bold** are +/- 20% of average)