

Town of Stellarton

Municipal Electoral Boundary Review – 2022



May 15, 2022

Introduction and Background

Legislative Requirements

The following report will form the basis for the Town Council of Stellarton to undertake a review of its current municipal electoral boundaries and size of municipal council for 2022. The review is required under Section 369 of the *Municipal Government Act* of Nova Scotia (MGA), which states:

Study of Polling Districts Required

369 (1) *In the year 1999, and in the years 2006 and every eight years thereafter the municipal council shall conduct a study of the number and boundaries of polling districts in the municipality, their fairness and reasonableness and the number of councillors.*

(2) *After such a study is completed, and before the end of the year in which the study was conducted, the Council shall apply to the (Nova Scotia Utility and Review) Board to confirm or to alter the number and boundaries of polling districts and the number of councillors. 1998, c. 18, s. 369*

The following section of the Municipal Government Act is critical:

Government of Municipality

10 (1) *A municipality is governed by a council consisting of at least three members;*

(2) *One councillor shall be elected for each polling district in a county or district municipality and in a regional municipality (not applicable to towns);*

(3) *No more than two councillors shall be elected for each polling district in a town.*

1998, c. 18, s. 10, 2000, c. 9, s. 33

Process

The review process is outlined under recommendations provided by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Following the completion of the study, and a public consultation process, each town council must apply to the NS Utility and Review Board (NSURB) to either confirm or alter the number of councillors, and/or the boundaries of the polling districts. This may require a public hearing by the Board. The submission can also ask for confirmation as to whether a town is to alter its electoral boundaries from a “ward” system to an “at large” one, or vice versa. The NSURB will require at least two (2) options to be presented, one of which may be to maintain the status quo.

Public Consultation

As outlined in the information package provided by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, public consultation is a critical element of this review. It suggests two approaches that municipalities may utilize for public consultation:

1. *The municipality could present two or more options and request the public's feedback on each one, or*
2. *The municipality could provide two or more options recommending a preferred option and seek the public's feedback on whether they agree with the Council's preference.*

Either approach may be used by Council, and this report may be used as a background for either suggested process.

A public meeting, duly advertised, is a preferred process for public consultation, although a town could use social media, web-based information gathering, or other means to undertake public consultation. In 2022, Council should keep all options in kind given the unpredictability of how COVID-19 and its variants may play a role in potential public gatherings.

Review

Using the suggested review process provided by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, this report has collected data and analyzed it for Council's consideration. Specifically, the following data has been gathered:

- Population
- Number of electors (per ward/at large – depending on case)
- Variation of voters
- Comparative analysis of Nova Scotia's towns
- Current electoral boundary mapping

It is important to remember that councillors should use more than just statistical analysis to conduct their review in order to base their decision. This requires some thought as to whether the current size of council is warranted, and whether population growth or decline, and distribution within the town supports the council's ultimate recommendation(s).

Democratic Principles

It is often said that municipal government is the closest level of democratic decision making to any given populace. The decisions made, the policies established, and the services rendered by municipalities have a direct impact on its citizenry. The ability of citizens to choose their decision makers should be based on a fair and equitable distribution for representation, balanced against the need for an effective and efficient decision-making body suitable for such a purpose. In other words, equity, effectiveness and efficiency should be the primary factors, albeit properly balanced, for councillors to keep in mind during this process.

Review

The current composition of the Town Council and population distribution is outlined in the table below:

Number of Councillors	Number of Polling Districts (Wards)	Population (2016 Census)	Population (2021 Census)	Percentage Population Change from 2016 to 2021	Geographic Size (in square kilometers)	Population Density per Square Kilometre in 2021
4	2	4,208	4,007	-4.8%	8.99	445.7

The municipal elections of 2020 resulted in the following:

Number of Total Electors	Number of Electors in Ward One	Number of Electors in Ward Two	Percentage Variation Between Wards	Percentage Electors of Total Populations	
3,265	1,661	1,604	0.8% from the mean (1,633)	81.5%	

The 2021 Census and an estimate of population by ward reveals:

Population	Estimate of Total Population – Ward One	Estimate of Total Population – Ward Two	Percentage of Variation Between Wards	
4,007	1,895	2,112	2.7 % from mean (2,003)	

Note: Because Statistics Canada's census subdivisions (CSD) and related dissemination areas (DA) do not directly correspond to current ward boundaries, these figures are estimates, based on a methodology of subtracting/adding the geographic areas in DAs that fall outside of the ward boundary. This paper conducted a windshield survey to count dwelling units, then applied an average household size of 2.2 persons per household, as outlined in the 2021 Census.

The percentage variation is of critical importance as the NSURB will base its final decision largely on this figure.

A Comparison of Nova Scotia's Towns

This report also undertook a comparative analysis of towns across Nova Scotia to provide decision-makers with additional information. Due to the nature of the provinces towns vis-à-vis regional municipalities and rural county municipalities (which have different representation and electoral requirements under the MGA and HRM Charter), this report only looked at towns. The following table outlines the findings:

Town	Population (2016)	Population (2021)	Population Change (2016 – 2021)	Population Density (per m2)	Number of Councilors	Ratio of Representation (population per councilor)
Amherst	9,413	9,404	-0.1%	779.4	6	1,567
Annapolis Royal	490	530	+7.9%	268.0	4	132
Antigonish	4,363	4,656	+6.7%	934.5	6	776
Berwick	2,509	2,455	-2.2%	375.8	6	409
Bridgewater	8,532	8,790	+3.0	644.9	6	1,465
Clark's Harbour	758	725	-4.4%	257.3	4	181
Digby	2,060	2,001	-2.9%	634.0	4	500
Kentville	6,271	6,630	+5.7%	338.2	6	1,105
Lockeport	531	476	-10.4%	205.4	4	119
Lunenburg	2,263	2,396	+5.9%	593.3	6	399
Mahone Bay	1,036	1,064	+2.7%	331.4	6	177
Middleton	1,832	1,873	+2.2%	337.3	6	312
Mulgrave	772	627	-13.2%	35.2	4	157
New Glasgow	9,074	9,471	+4.4%	951.3	6	1,579
Oxford	1,190	1,170	-1.7%	109.6	6	195
Pictou	3,186	3,107	-2.5%	388.7	4	519
Port Hawksbury	3,214	3,210	-1.1%	396.3	4	803
Shelburne	1,743	1,644	-5.7	187.9	4	411
Stellarton	4,208	4,007	-4.8%	445.6	4	1,002
Stewiacke	1,373	1,557	+13.4%	88.4	6	260
Trenton	2,474	2,407	-2.7%	396.7	4	602
Truro	12,261	12,954	+5.7%	345.3	6	2,159
Westville	3,628	3,540	-2.4%	248.6	4	885
Wolfville	4,195	5,057	+20.5	783.3	6	843
Yarmouth	6,518	6,829	+4.8%	646.3	6	1,138

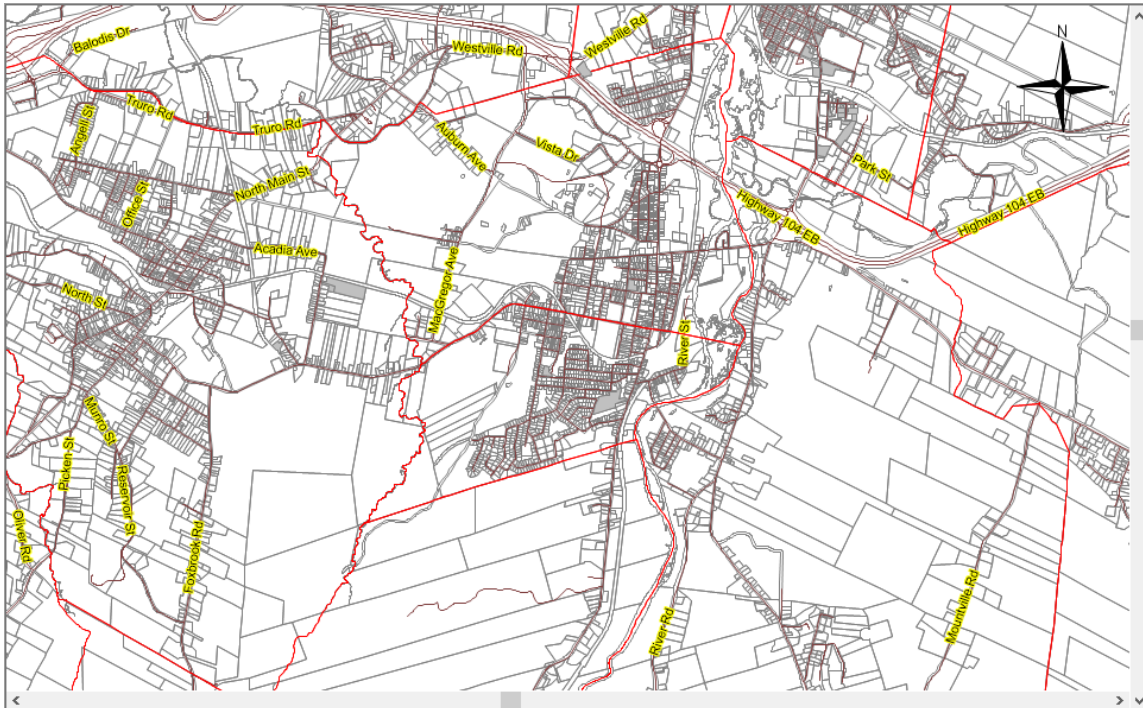
The preceding comparative table outlines the following with respect to the Town of Stellarton:

- Based on the current (2021) population, the town is not overrepresented when compared to other towns throughout Nova Scotia. Based on a low ratio of representation in Truro (2,159 citizens per councilor) and a high in Lockeport (119 citizens per Councilor), the representation ratio of population per councilor in Town of Stellarton, with 1,002, falls nicely between these extremes.
- Each town in Nova Scotia has either 4 or 6 elected councilors (in addition to the mayor). The Town of Stellarton has 4 (in addition to the mayor). Many smaller towns have 6 councilors (Berwick, Lunenburg, Mahone Bay, Middleton, Oxford, Stewiacke and Wolfville). Consequently, Stellarton is not considered as overrepresented based on the number of elected officials. In fact, Stellarton did have 6 councilors before, but elected to reduce the number to four.
- Most importantly, in both total estimated population per ward (2.7% from the mean), and number of electors per ward (0.8% from the mean), the Town of Stellarton is well within the +/- 10% guideline for voter and population variance. In fact, the 0.8% variance for electors is so close to enable this current alignment of polling districts to be considered “virtually” even.
- The Town of Stellarton has experienced population loss over the last census period (in fact, over the past 40 years or so). Consequently, the need to increase the number of elected councilors is not recommended as warranted.
- The Town of Stellarton does not vary greatly from the average with regards to population density.

It is noted that these findings only represent the current situation in Stellarton compared to other towns in Nova Scotia. It is not an indication of whether towns in general (or all forms of municipalities) are adequately represented as a whole. That kind of comparison is beyond the scope of this report.

Current Stellarton Municipal Polling District (Ward) Boundary

The current polling district (ward) boundaries are indicated by the red line on the map below. The two wards in Stellarton are separated by a boundary running along Acadia Avenue from the municipal boundary with the Town of Westville in the west at Bear Brook, generally eastward to King Street, then following the same general trajectory further eastward to its municipal boundary with the Municipality of the County of Pictou at a point in the East River of Pictou in the east.



- Population counts below are based on 2021 Census data, with Dissemination Areas 12120095, 12120098 and 12120101 based on estimates for population as these DA's cross the electoral boundary line, estimated on a median household size of 2.2 persons, and a windshield survey to determine the number of households.

Census Dissemination Area	Population	Electoral District
12120092	403	2
12120093	316	2
12120094	325	2
12120095	336	1 and 2
12120096	407	2
12120097	475	1
12120098	417	1 and 2
12120099	420	1
12120100	499	1
12120101	409	1 and 2
Stellarton Total	4,007	

Possible Options:

The following three options are posited for consideration by Town Council:

1. ***Reduce the Number of Councilors from Four (4) to Two (2), Plus the Mayor:***
Although this is possible under Section 10 (1) of the *Municipal Government Act*, which states, “A municipality is governed by a council consisting of at least three members.”, this would, in all likelihood, be impractical. Due to the strong potential of not meeting a quorum for meetings (based on just the inability for one councilor not to be present), or the quality of decisions being suspect (due to the low number of decision makers), this option is not recommended.
2. ***Increase the Number of Councilors from Four (4) to Six (6), Plus the Mayor:***
This is possible only if the number of polling districts (wards) were increased in the Town, as Section 10(3) of the *Municipal Government Act* states, “No more than two councilors shall be elected for each polling district in a town.” The need to increase the number of polling districts is not warranted, given the current population of the Town of Stellarton, the level of councilor to citizen ratio by polling district vis-à-vis other towns in Nova Scotia at this time, and the fact that the current polling district boundary falls rather well within the ten (10) percent variance between polling districts. The current boundary also provides an easily recognizable boundary for citizens of the Town, as Acadia Avenue is a main artery that clearly dissects the Town of Stellarton into northern and southern polling districts.
3. ***Revise the Existing Polling District Boundary Between Wards One and Two***
This is possible, but not recommended given the existing boundary provides an easily recognizable boundary for citizens of the Town, as noted above. Again, Acadia Avenue is a main artery that provides a clear boundary between the two polling districts.
4. ***Maintain the Status Quo***
Given the reasons outlined above, it is not recommended that any changes be made to the current polling district boundaries in the Town of Stellarton, nor to the number of councilors. Consequently, the status quo is recommended.

Upon reaching a decision as to which option Town Council wishes to recommend to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board, a public consultation process must be initiated (outlined earlier). Following public consultation, Town Council may change its recommendation, or maintain it when making application to the NSURB for a public hearing. I await Town Council’s direction on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Roland Burek, MCIP, LPP
Acting Planner/Development Officer