



**Municipality of Arran-Elderslie**

# **Community Engagement Strategy – Wards or At-Large Representation**

**Final Report**

**May 12, 2025**

# Agenda

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2. Project Overview and Objectives
3. Guiding Principles
4. Community Engagement – What is it?
5. Existing Council Structure
6. Legislative Framework
7. Representation Models – Wards or At-Large
8. Community Consultation Process
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# About Us

- Clerks on Call is a municipal management consulting team, offering a range of specialized municipal governance and administration services, including:
  - virtual and onsite facilitator-led training for Councils and Staff
  - community engagement
  - policy and by-law reviews
  - mentoring/coaching for municipal Clerks and CAOs
- Consultant Team:
  - Michelle Smibert
  - Michelle Casavecchia-Somers



# Project Overview & Objectives

# Project Overview

- Undertook a community engagement strategy to enable the Council to make decisions about whether to maintain the existing ward structure or to adopt an alternative at-large structure.
- Developed and conducted a public consultation process in accordance with the municipality's existing public engagement practices.
- Allowed the public to offer their perspectives on the present ward system and the alternative at-large system.

# Project Objectives

## Objective:

- To engage the community in determining their 'preferred' electoral structure -- wards or at-large elections.

## Key Question:

- *Should future municipal elections be conducted using a ward-based or at-large system?*

## Importance:

- Ensures community support for the project outcome.
- Ensures future representation aligns with community needs and values.
- Promotes transparency and trust in the electoral structure.

# Community Engagement Guiding Principles

# Community Consultation – Principles

## **Inclusivity/Accessibility**

- Ensuring consultation processes are easy to access for everyone, regardless of physical, economic, or social barriers; and that all voices are heard.

## **Transparency/Clarity of Purpose**

- Clearly define the objectives of the consultation and ensure participants understand what is being asked of them.

## **Respect**

- Value all contributions and create a safe environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions.

## **Accountability**

- Demonstrate how community input has been considered and incorporated into the final report.

## **Collaboration**

- Working together with the community to co-create solutions.

# Community Engagement – What is it?

# Community Engagement

- Community engagement is the process of involving individuals, organizations, and groups from a specific community in dialogue, decision-making, and action to address shared challenges, goals, or interests.

# Why Engage the Community?

- Community engagement is fundamental to creating inclusive and effective strategies.
- It helps ensure that initiatives are tailored to the needs and wants of the people they serve.

# Community Engagement - Benefits

- Builds trust and transparency and strengthens relationships between stakeholders.
- Encourages informed decision-making by incorporating diverse perspectives.
- Increases the relevance and effectiveness of policies, programs, or projects.
- Fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility within the community.
- Promotes sustainable and long-lasting outcomes.

# Stakeholder Identification

## Who to Engage:

- Residents
- Community organizations
- Advocacy groups
- Business leaders
- Council Members

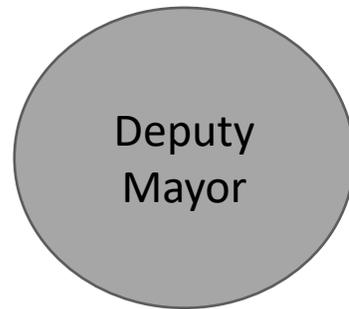
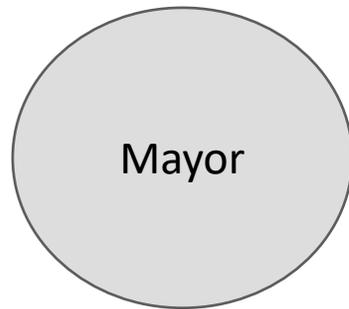
## Why:

- Tailored outreach ensures diverse perspectives are included.

# Existing Council Structure

# Existing Council Structure

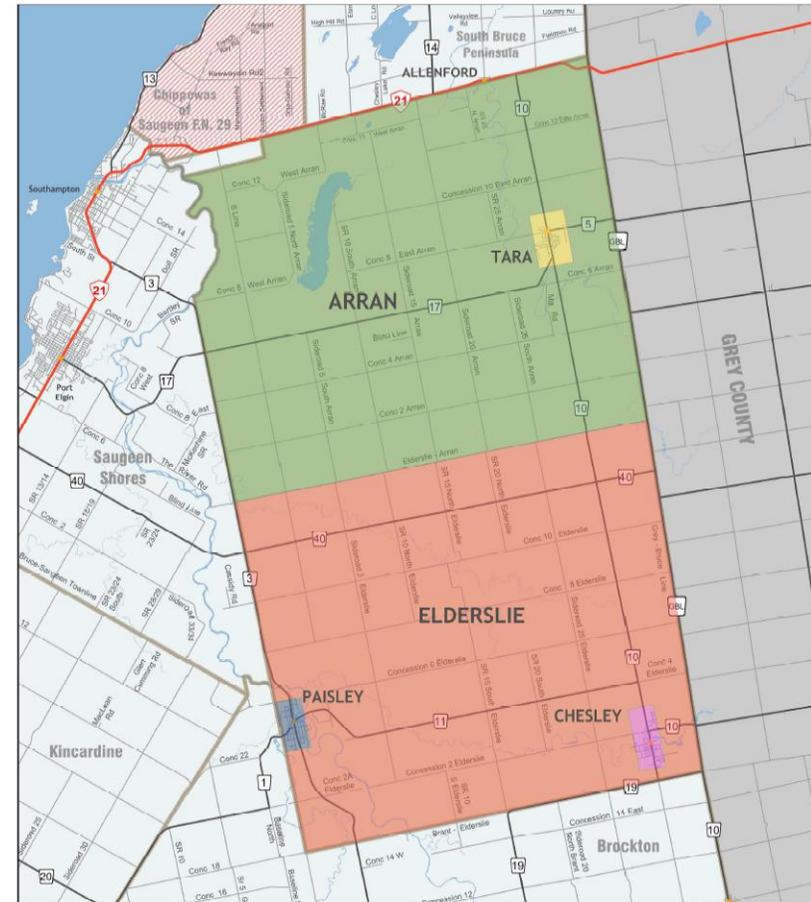
## 7 Council Members



- Mayor and Deputy are elected at large
- 5 Councillors are elected by ward

# Existing Ward Configuration

- 5 ward structure
- based on historical municipal boundaries



# Existing Council Structure of Other Area Municipalities

- Understanding how similar communities ensure fair and effective representation can help assess whether a ward-based or at-large system would be best
  - Grey County – all municipalities have at-large systems
  - Bruce County – mix of ward-based and at-large systems

# Legislative Framework

# Legislative Framework

**Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001* authorizes a lower-tier municipality to:**

- define the size of the Council
- determine how Council (other than the Mayor) will be elected – wards or general vote (at-large)
- “divide or re-divide the municipality into wards or dissolve the existing wards”

# Legislative Framework

**No stipulated schedule, standardized process or established criteria exist for electoral reviews in Ontario**

- Each municipality must set its own terms, parameters, guiding principles, etc. to establish an electoral system appropriate for the community.
- Any changes must be made before the end of 2025 to be in effect for the 2026 municipal election

# Representation Models - Wards/At-large

# Representation Models

## **Ward-based Representation:**

Council members are elected to specific geographic districts, representing the interests of the people in that ward.

## **At-Large Representation:**

Council members are elected by all voters in the municipality, representing the community as a whole.

# Benefits and Challenges of Ward-based Representation

## Benefits:

1. **Local Representation**
  - It may ensure that each community or geographical area has a voice in decision-making.
  - Representatives may have a better understanding and advocate for local issues and priorities.
2. **Accountability**
  - Elected representatives are directly accountable to their ward residents, promoting transparency and responsiveness.
  - It may foster closer relationships and communication between residents and ward representative as there is a direct point of contact.
3. **Inclusivity & Fair Distribution**
  - Helps prevent the domination of decision-making by larger or more affluent areas.
  - Helps to ensure that diverse communities have representation.
4. **Encourages Political Participation**
  - Residents may feel more involved in governance since they elect someone from their own area.

## Challenges:

1. **Unequal Resource Distribution**
  - Some wards may be wealthier or more influential which may lead to disparities in development and service delivery.
  - Limited budgets may lead to competition among wards.
2. **Risk of Parochialism**
  - Representatives may focus only on their wards rather than the broader interests of the entire municipality or organization.
  - Can lead to conflicts between wards rather than fostering collaboration.
3. **Quality of Leadership**
  - Small wards may struggle to attract qualified candidates which could lead to ineffective leadership.
4. **Administrative Complexity**
  - Managing multiple representatives and balancing competing local interests can slow down decision-making.

# Benefits and Challenges of At-Large Representation

## Benefits:

1. **Broader Representation**
  - Representatives serve the entire community rather than a single ward, which may promote a more holistic approach to decision-making.
  - Encourages Council members to consider the needs of all residents rather than just those of a specific district.
2. **Reduces Parochialism**
  - Minimizes the risk of representatives prioritizing only their districts, leading to more balanced policymaking.
  - Encourages unity and cooperation rather than competition among different areas.
3. **Encourages Stronger Candidates**
  - Elections are typically more competitive, leading to the selection of highly qualified and experienced candidates.
  - Any qualified individual from the community can run for office, expanding the candidate pool.
4. **Equal Voting Power**
  - Every voter has an equal say in electing all representatives rather than being limited to voting for a single local representative.

## Challenges:

1. **Underrepresentation of Local Interests**
  - Specific communities or neighborhoods may struggle to have their unique concerns addressed.
  - Representatives may be disconnected from local, neighborhood-specific issues.
2. **Disproportionate Influence of Majority Groups**
  - Can disadvantage rural or less populated areas if urban areas have more voting power.
3. **Higher Campaign Costs**
  - Running a campaign across an entire municipality requires more resources, favoring candidates with greater financial backing or name recognition.
4. **Less Accountability**
  - With multiple representatives elected by the entire jurisdiction, voters may find it harder to hold individuals accountable for decisions.
  - No single representative is directly responsible for addressing specific community concerns.

# Community Consultation Process

# Consultation Goals

- Educate the public about the differences between ward and at-large systems.
- Collect data to understand public preferences through surveys, open houses, and discussions.
- Ensure equitable participation from all community segments.
- Build consensus on the most suitable electoral structure.

# Methods of Engagement

## ➤ *Councillor Interviews*

## ➤ *Public Survey*

- Online & Paper formats
- Sent to taxpayers in Interim Tax Bills
- Distributed at municipal facilities

## ➤ *Facilitated Open Houses*

- Paisley Community Centre
- Tara Community Centre
- Council Chambers (Chesley)

# Methods of Engagement

- *Information shared via Municipality's website and social media channels, including:*
  - a promotional flyer
  - access to the online survey
  - a listing of locations where the paper survey could be acquired and completed surveys dropped off
  - an information video prepared by Clerks on Call
  - Clerks on Call's Council Briefing presentation video and slide deck
  - existing ward structure/map.
- *Information shared via Council Members & Staff existing networks and contacts*

# Public Engagement/ Feedback

# Council Member Interviews

- Clerks on Call conducted one-on one interviews with each member of Council.
- Feedback determined that the Council is divided on which representation structure (ward-based or at-large) would be best for the community.

# Facilitated Open Houses

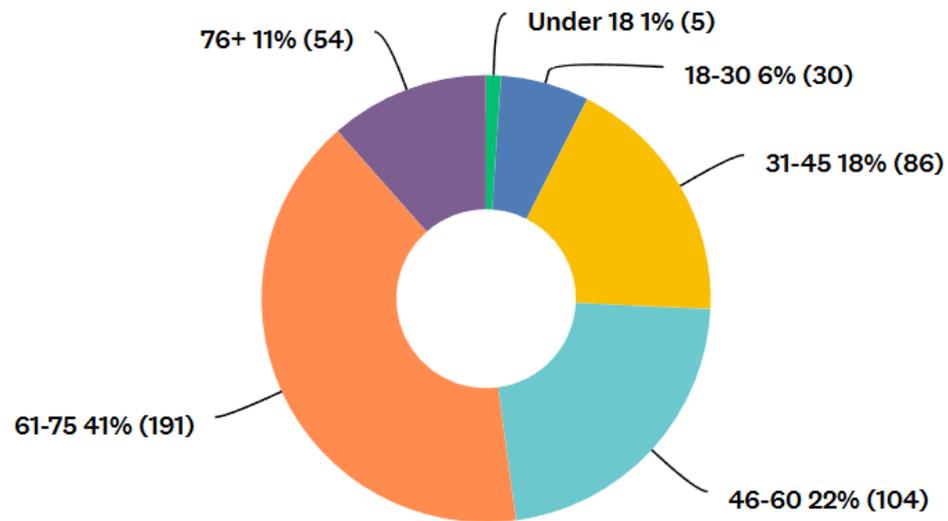
- 3 community open houses held, one each in Paisley, Tara & Chesley
- Not well attended (about 30 residents), but good dialogue and questions answered
- Feedback indicated that public better understood representation models after having attended open houses

# Public Survey

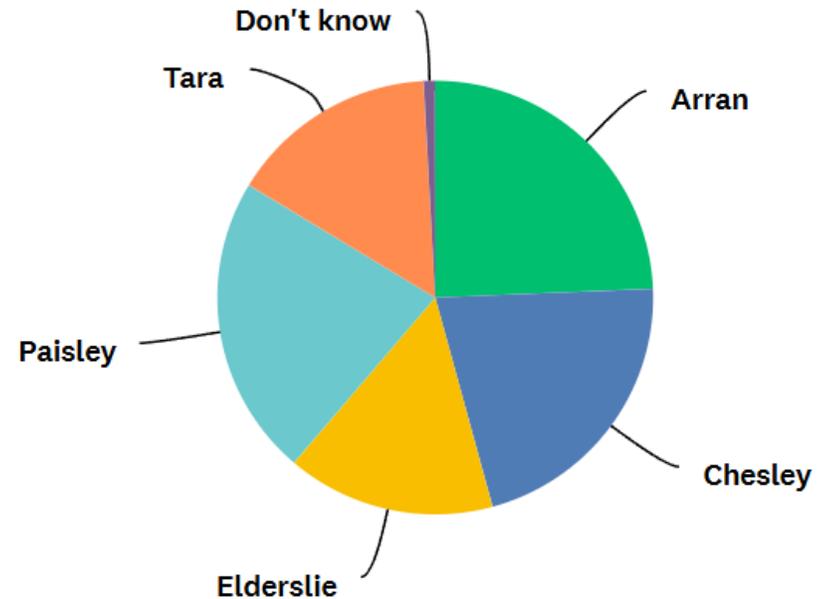
- Developed to gather:
  - demographic information
  - determine respondent's awareness of the two representation models
  - respondent's opinions on both models
  - whether they had a preference for either one.
- Also asked:
  - if they were satisfied with the current ward-based model used in AE
  - if they feel that the current council represents their interests.
- **484 survey respondents** (but may not represent the views of the entire community).

# Demographic Information

- More than 74% of respondents were between the ages of 46 and 75



- Respondents were fairly equally spread amongst all wards



# Opinions on Ward-based Representation

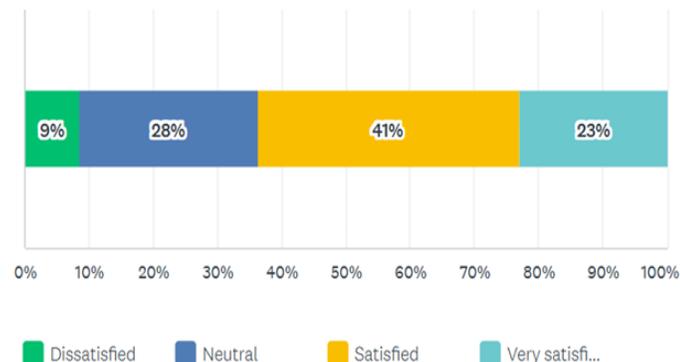
- 82% of respondents believed that ward councillors were better at addressing local issues and felt more connected to them
- 88% felt that having a ward-based representation model ensures that local issues are addressed
- More than 70% believe that ward-based representation provides more focused representation

# Opinions on At-Large Representation

- Majority of respondents did not believe (45%) or were unsure (20%) whether council members elected At-Large would be more likely to prioritize the interests of entire municipality over local interests.
- More than 80% of respondents did not believe that At-Large would provide sufficient attention to issues affecting specific wards.
- The most cited benefits of At-Large representation were:
  - any qualified person can run for office, expanding the candidate pool (50%);
  - every voter has a say in electing all Council members, promoting a unified community voice (45%).

# Current Council Preferences

- 64% of respondents indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the current ward-based representation model used in Arran-Elderslie.



- However, only 56% responded that they were either satisfied or very satisfied that the current Council represents their interests.

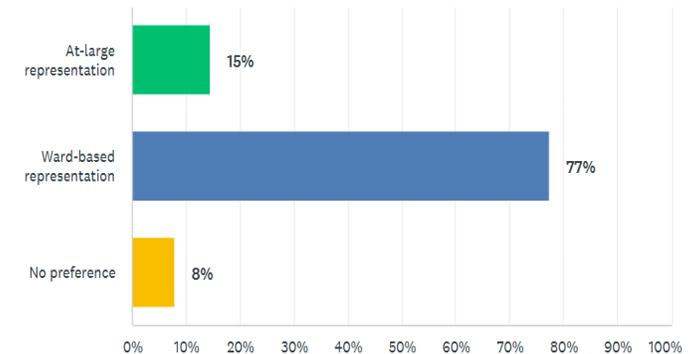
# Preferred Electoral Structure for Arran-Elderslie

# Preferred Representation Model

15% preferred the *at-large* model.

77% preferred the *ward-based* model

8% indicated they had *no preference*.



- Most frequently cited reason for preferring the *ward-based* model was that it ensures fair representation for their ward.
- Most frequently cited reason for preferring the *at-large* model was that it promotes the interests of the entire community.

# Preferred Electoral Structure for Arran-Elderslie

- A broad community engagement strategy was completed at arms-length from the Municipality in order to provide an unbiased analysis of the public's feedback.
- The key question was: -- *Should future municipal elections in Arran-Elderslie be conducted using a ward-based or at-large system?*

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***The majority (77%) of the Arran-Elderslie community that participated in the community consultation do prefer that the existing ward-based electoral system be maintained.***

# Thank You

## Questions/Comments