

What are your boundaries?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Boundaries are important, sometimes inflammatory and occasionally ill-defined. They also fluctuate, changing over time, as a result of either conflict or careful consideration. This applies to both personal boundaries and geo-political boundaries and today I'm focussing on the latter because Caledon has spent these past many months undergoing an exhaustive review of its ward boundaries.

This comes at a particularly important time, given the rate at which Caledon is currently experiencing growth. Where you live might soon be changing, not as the result of a physical move but instead, the culmination of some work done towards the reconsideration of our ward system.

What are your boundaries?

Conducted by the firm Watson and Associates Economists Ltd. and presented in Council over two separate meetings, the new ward system realigns borders based on a series of guiding principles the study took into consideration including: representation by population, communities of interest, future population changes, physical and natural boundaries and effective representation. Also considered was the fact that our representation at the regional level has also changed. Such work has not been done since 1994 and with our current population of 75,500 projected to grow to over 113,000 by 2031 it is overdue, yet also timely. As 2022 is an election year, a realignment of ward boundaries that will carry us through these years of dynamic change is necessary.

Caledon has always been unique in having to balance the concerns of both rural and urban interests and with significant growth projected particularly in areas including Mayfield West any disparities without adequately addressing representation will only be heightened. The report specifically highlights this concern stating: "the tension is clearly between ensuring that Caledon's extensive and treasured rural areas are adequately represented and the reality that the two more urban settlement areas (Bolton and Mayfield West) are together home to more than half the Town's 2021 population and will grow to approximately two-thirds of the population by 2031."

The new ward boundaries approved at Council, (option 1B should anyone wish to review the consultants report/presentation and/or staff reports) will consist of six wards, an increase of one over the existing five.

Keeping all of the five principles in mind, it attempts to address the growing dispirit needs of the current Wards Two (projected to grow by 62%) and Four (growth projected at 29%) against our "treasured rural areas." This option "maintains the existing Council composition at nine, with six Area Councillors, two Regional Councillors and one Mayor."

Looking strictly at the population numbers for each ward however, I'm not entirely sure the end result meets the objective. As an example, the proposed new Ward Three (Mayfield West) will see a current population of 15,335 grow to 38,525 while Ward One will actually decrease slightly. Wards 5 & 6 will experience significant growth. Bolton will receive an additional Councillor under this new scenario and this is needed given its growth projections. But one Councillor for 38,000+ residents vs. one for just over 9,000 people (Ward 2) seems like a heavier workload for one over the other. That said, the other four guiding principles must be taken into serious consideration and again, ensuring an equal representation for both urban and rural interests at the Council table must remain an important consideration. In other words, numbers don't always tell the whole story.

When boundaries change, there will always be some discomfort. Folks who always say, "Yes" may face pushback when they finally say "No." Kids testing the boundaries of their parent's patience often don't take kindly to when those parents stand their ground and discipline is the result. COVID-19 has tested all of us in terms of our boundaries. Comfort levels differ even now with many people double vaccinated, some feel comfortable being out and about town while others are still approaching our re-opening cautiously. It's largely the same when it comes to geo-political boundaries. Some Caledon residents may not be happy with the new system, while others will agree it was a necessary and timely exercise. Given our current population and our projected growth, I believe these

boundary changes are an important step toward realigning the Town and positioning it well to manage future growth. Boundaries fluctuate ? no doubt they will do so again and each time will be as a result of careful consideration ? while no doubt causing conflict. That's the nature of boundaries.