

The Composition of the Municipal Council – Ward Elections and “At Large” Elections

This is the first in what will be a series of articles. Your Council is looking for feedback on the composition of Council. Council is interested in community feedback on both the numbers of council members and the way the members are elected.

At present, Neebing’s municipal Council is comprised of 7 people – the Mayor and one councillor who are both elected “at large”, and 5 ward councillors.

When a seat at the council table is elected “at large”, that means that every voter has the right to cast a vote for one of the candidates for that seat. Legislation in Ontario requires every head of council position – for Neebing, that’s the Mayor - to be elected “at large”.

When a seat at the council table is elected “by ward”, that means that not all voters in the municipality can vote for one of the candidates for that seat – only the voters within the ward have the right to vote for those candidates. Neebing has 5 wards, made up of our 5 geographic townships: Blake, Crooks, Pardee, Pearson & Scoble. Persons can choose to run in any one of the 5 wards – they do not necessarily have to live in the ward.

In the past two elections (2014 and 2018), most of the council seats were “acclaimed”, meaning that only one person ran for the seat, and no election was required. In 2014, all of the seats were acclaimed except the Blake Ward Council seat. An election was held – only for the taxpayers of that ward – to choose between two candidates. (Roger Shott was re-elected that year.) In 2018, all of the council seats were acclaimed except for the Mayoral seat. An election was held – open to all of the electors throughout Neebing, in all 5 wards – to choose between two candidates for the position. (Erwin Butikofer was elected.)

Some municipal wards are determined by land area. In Neebing’s case, the largest ward is Blake. The land areas of Crooks, Pardee and Pearson are roughly the same size, and Scoble is, geographically the smallest. Both Pardee and Blake have large undeveloped areas without road access. In Blake, the undeveloped land is protected watershed and is not accessible by road (from Neebing). In Pardee, much of the area has no hydro, land phone line or cell phone line services.

Some municipalities that are divided into electoral wards made the ward boundary decisions on the basis of population, so that each ward has (roughly) the same number of people. The theory is that each elected official for a ward would have about the same workload in terms of the number of people that they represent.

The population between Neebing’s wards as they currently exist is not evenly distributed. As per the voters’ list for the 2018 election, from largest to smallest, there are:

822 people in Blake (Ward 1);
744 people in Scoble (Ward 5);
635 people in Crooks (Ward 2);
324 people in Pearson (Ward 4); and
160 people in Pardee (Ward 3).

Keep in mind these counts include only persons who are over 18 and who are Canadian citizens. With children and non-citizens, the numbers would change, but the general distribution is fairly accurate. Also, the voters' list counts persons who own property here, but don't live here year round – so permanent resident counts would be lower than these. Seasonal residents are typically at the inland lakes (Scoble and Crooks – with a few at Lake Lenore in Pardee) and also along the Lake Superior coastline (Blake and Crooks).

At present, each Neebing elector has three votes: one for the candidates running in his/her ward, one for one of the “at large” candidates and one for one of the candidates for the Mayor's seat. If all of the members of council were elected “at large”, each Neebing elector would have 7 votes.

Is it important to you to have a “ward councillor”, elected to represent your geographic township's interests? Or would you be comfortable having all council members elected “at large”? If you are a fan of the “ward councillor” system, are you comfortable with the way the wards are drawn up? Or do you think the distribution of people per ward should be determined differently?

These are some of the first questions, of many, that Council would like its constituents to answer. Please email answers to clerk@neebing.org – or write or call the office – or drop by and speak to us in person. We'd love to see you!