

Executive Summary to the Board of Trustees

Rocky View Schools

Ward Boundary Review

Community Engagement

September 19, 2024

As directed by the Board of Trustees the consultant was asked to conduct a ward boundary review as anticipated in the Education Act as a result of population growth with the corporate boundaries of the division. Using the methodology as is followed by provincial, federal and municipal governments in determining representation by population the first phase of the assignment included gathering population data from available provincial sources namely the “2023 Municipal Affairs Population List” which is available through the Alberta Government website. Population data was confirmed by in person conversations with the municipal authorities with the division.

The data indicated that since the last ward boundary review in 2016 the population with RVS had increased from 145,363 to 192,299. It is evident that the growth is not uniform across the communities but has centered in the urban areas which replicates a provincial trend.

Using the statistical model below the consultant prepared scenarios that would potentially address the mathematical guidelines.

“The standard variance applicable to an assessment of ‘fair representation’ is the standard used in municipal, provincial and federal elections, which is a variance of +/- 25%. Therefore, if this rule is applied to the test under Section 76 (3), it follows that trustees should be represented in wards as per Section (3) and should represent approximately (+/- 25%) the same number of population as other trustees in the division.”

*RVS Policy 29 Section 4.1

What is before you in this Executive Summary is a synopsis of the comments gathered during the community in person engagements and the online responses that were submitted via the division’s portal which was open to the public from April 1 to June 17th. The portal received 80 responses.

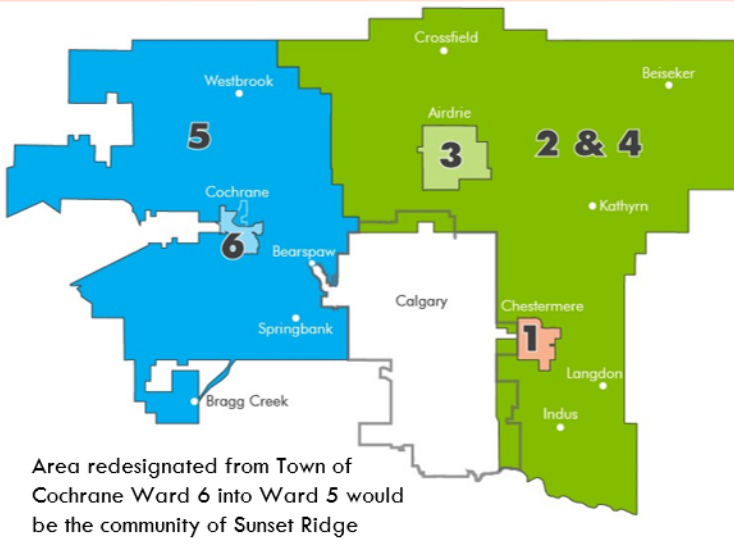
The consultant was present at Chestermere May 14 with 5 attendees: Cochrane on May 15th with 1 attendee; Airdrie May 21st with 20 attendees. It is believed that many were there to primary share their views on the Airdrie Student Balancing topic. May 27 Online with 3 attendees.

In addition to the input on the portal the Board received three letters from constituents:

The scenarios that follow served as the bases of the community engagement conversations and responses.

Q1. Option A: What do you see as the benefits of this option? (N=43/D2)

Option A - Representation by Population with 7 Trustees



Ward	# Trustees
Ward 1 Chestermere	1
Combined Ward 2 SE Rural & Ward 4 NE Rural	1
Ward 3 Airdrie	3
Ward 5 W Rural plus 5,600 Cochrane residents	1
Ward 6 Cochrane less 5,600 Cochrane residents	1

7 trustee option combining ward 2 (Langdon, Indus and Chestermere rural areas) and ward 4 (Crossfield, Beiseker, Irricana, Kathyrn, and Airdrie rural areas) and redistributing 5,600 residents from ward 6 (Cochrane: Sunset Ridge) into ward 5 (Bragg Creek, Springbank, Bears paw, Westbrook and Cochrane rural areas).

Synopsis

While the overall representation by population satisfies the numeric model the recurrent comments focus the reduction of the number trustees as being of an economic interest by way of a reduction in trustees' cost. A few comments were related to the diminishment of rural voice and the prospect of shifting of some current urban residents into a more rural based ward was seen as undesirable.

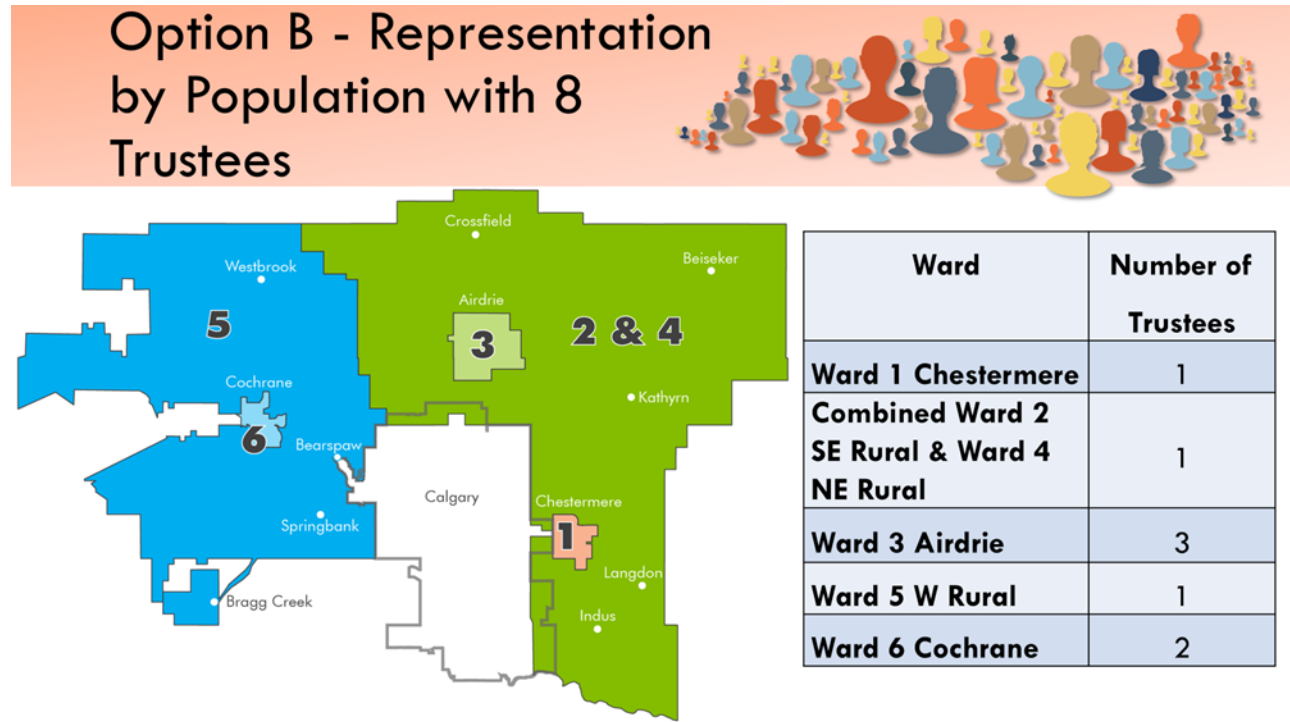
Q2. Options A: What do you see as the drawbacks for this option? (N=70/D8)

Synopsis

The main themes seen as drawbacks were related to the urban/rural redistribution or blending of population groups who many not share comment interests. Another observation was that of decreased rural representation in general and the creation of a large rural ward. Some respondents may not have a clear understanding of issues

related to transportation and class size which may relate to current challenges for RVS.

Q3. Option B: What do you see as the benefits of this option?(N=55/D2)



8 trustee option adding a trustee to ward 6 (Cochrane would now have two trustees) and combining ward 2 (Langdon, Indus and Chestermere rural areas) and ward 4 (Crossfield, Beiseker, Irricana, Kathryn, and Airdrie rural areas).

Synopsis

Most respondents expressed their support for Cochrane representation to increase to two trustees. Some observed that they favoured the notion of keeping the size of the Board the same as it is and maintaining current financial obligations to board governance. Furthermore additional comments supported the idea of leaving the current urban populations unfragmented.

In a letter submitted by the Mayor of the Town of Crossfield it expressed its opposition to both options A and B as they would combine Wards 2 and 4 thus creating a large geographic area. This larger ward would encompass 8 communities as well as have 10 schools and 4 civic governments.

Option C was seen as problematic citing the addition of 8,600 urban voters from north Airdrie as a benefit and expressed a concern about the voter imbalance between the two entities of the new ward.

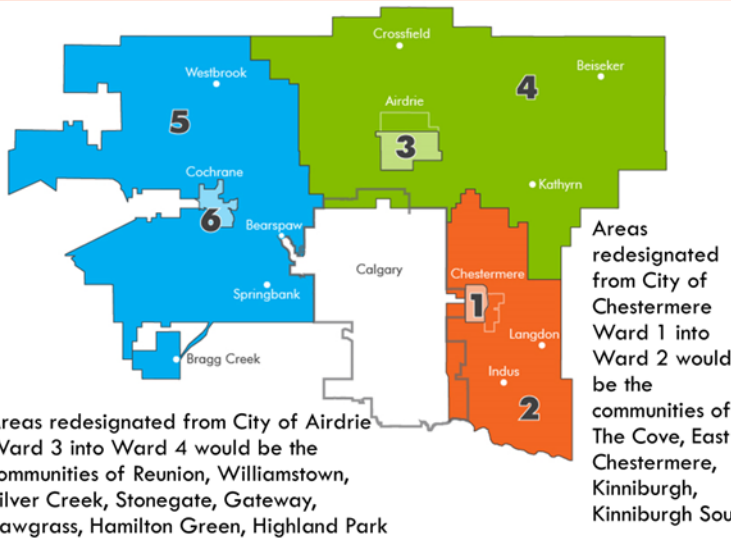
Q4. Option B: What do you see as the drawbacks for this option? (N=49/D2)

Synopsis

The majority of respondents in this section cited their concern that the eastern ward would be a very large geographical area for one trustee to represent resulting in a reduced presence in the schools and communities in this expanded ward area. Electoral issues related to where the voter populations reside may have an adverse impact at the ballot box in relation to the larger voting population centers and a perception of differences between urban and rural life-views and interests.

Q5. Option C: What do you see as the benefits of this option?(N=55)

Option C - Representation by Population with 9 Trustees



Ward	# Trustees
Ward 1 Chestermere less 5,100 residents	1
Ward 2 SE Rural plus 5,100 residents	1
Ward 3 Airdrie less 8,600 residents	3
Ward 4 NE Rural plus 8,600 residents	1
Ward 5 W Rural	1
Ward 6 Cochrane	2

9 trustee option adding a trustee to ward 6 (Cochrane would now have two trustees), and redistributing 8,600 residents from ward 3 (Airdrie: North of Veterans Blvd) into ward 4 (Crossfield, Beiseker, Irricana, Kathryn, and Airdrie rural areas) and redistributing 5,100 residents from ward 1 (Chestermere: East side of the Lake and East of Range Road 282 on the south end of the lake) into ward 2 (Langdon, Indus and Chestermere rural areas).

Synopsis

Mixed responses in favour of mixing rural and urban populations and those expressing their concerns with the idea. Again, some respondents support the growth in the size of the Board to reduce the number of citizens presented while others did not support growth and increased cost. Benefits also noted were the redistribution of trustee workload and increased personal presence.

Q6. Option C: What do you see as the drawbacks for this option?(N=58)

Synopsis

The majority of respondents focused their attention on the issues of blending populations as being problematic. The supporting view was that these populations are distinct and that electoral turnout may have unintended consequences for rural voice. Another view expressed was that the increased cost of an additional trustee was unnecessary.

Q7. Is there another option you think should be considered in line with Board Policy 29 Ward Structures ? (N=21)

Synopsis

The range of opinions covers the ideas that the Board should have an odd number of Trustees. This is counterbalanced by the notion that costs should not increase.

It was also stated by a few that it may be time to have Airdrie become its own district as an urban centre and the rural areas be aligned with neighbouring districts. One thought was to have the rural Trustees elected at large (3) and the remainder allocated in the urban centers.

Q8. Is there anything else you want us to know? (N=29)

Synopsis

There is no central theme in this section. Some respondents voiced their frustration across a broad range of concerns. Rural voice being diminished resonated for some. Others had fiscal concerns about cost of representation and the allocation of funds by the province.. For some the issue of overcrowded schools and the shifting of students was seen as upsetting.

Letter from Kathryn School Council

“The three Ward Boundary options presented do not allow for proper representation of the Rural areas of RVS. Combining our Ward 4, which is included in all three options, makes no sense geographically, nor, would it fulfill the unique needs of our Rural Schools.”... In place of a ward boundary review, my community would like to see a feasibility study occur to test the feasibility of moving the rural school communities into the surrounding rural school divisions like Golden Hills, Chinook’s Edge, and Canadian Rockies. As well, Airdrie, being the fifth largest city in Alberta, yet not having its own school division, needs to be reviewed. Kathryn School Council

Letter from Beiseker School Council

Our key points for your consideration:

“1. Underrepresentation of Rural Schools: Rural schools play a vital role in our community. However, the proposed changes may lead to inadequate representation for our schools. Trustees must be accessible and responsive to the unique needs of rural students, parents, and educators.

2. Fundamental Right to Education: Every student, regardless of their location, deserves a quality education.

Rural students have the same fundamental right to education as their urban counterparts. The ward boundary review should prioritize equitable representation to ensure that rural schools receive the attention they deserve.

3. Balancing Urban and Rural Needs: While urban schools face their own challenges, we must not overlook the unique needs of our rural schools. The review process should consider the distinct requirements of both settings and strike a fair balance. Urban growth should not come at the expense of rural education.”



June 18, 2024

Rocky View Schools
Attention: Fiona Gilbert, Board Chair
2651 Chinook Winds Dr, SW
Airdrie, AB
T4B 0B4

Re: Rocky View Schools Ward Boundary Review

Dear Rocky View Schools Board Chair, Fiona Gilbert,

The Town of Crossfield has reviewed the proposed Ward boundary changes for Rocky View Schools and would like to express our concerns with the options that have been put forward.

Although representation by population is important, we feel that other factors must also be considered, including geographic size, number of schools, number of communities and number of governing bodies within a ward. The proposed options seem to overlook these important factors along with the different needs of smaller, rural communities.

Proposed options A and B create a very large geographic area for one trustee to cover by combining Wards 2 and 4. Further, this large area has 10 different schools (including 3 schools at Hutterite colonies), 8 distinct communities (Crossfield, Beiseker, Irricana, Kathryn, Langdon, Indus, Rocky View County, and the Hutterite community), and 4 governing bodies (Crossfield, Rocky View County, Beiseker, and Irricana). The vast area, along with the number of different schools, communities, and governing bodies will put a large strain on this single trustee's capacity to effectively represent the population within its boundaries. This will result in decreased trustee availability to support students and parents in the Town of Crossfield.

Proposed option C appears to maintain the existing boundaries for Ward 4 while adding 8,600 residents from the north end of the City of Airdrie. The concern with this option is this larger concentrated urban population could favour candidates from Airdrie over other candidates from the rural areas. This could lead to a further imbalance between urban and rural representation within the school division.

Although still relatively small, according to the government of Alberta, Crossfield is the tenth fastest growing community in the province. Therefore, we will need to maintain strong representation with the school division to ensure our growing population of students are

afforded the best opportunities for their education. As such, we question whether the boundaries for our Ward need to change?

The Town of Crossfield is opposed to the options proposed for the new Ward boundaries as they will reduce the capacity of the trustee for our area to be available for the parents and students in our community. Further, adding population from the City of Airdrie to our Ward could likely result in a decrease in rural representation on the Rocky View Schools Board.

The Town of Crossfield would like to request a meeting with Rocky View Schools to discuss these potential Ward boundary changes.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Respectfully,



Mayor Kim Harris
Town of Crossfield

c.c. Crossfield Town Council
Kinza Barney, Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Crossfield
Rocky View Schools Board of Trustees
Greg Luterbach, Superintendent of Schools, Rocky View Schools
Honourable Nathan Cooper, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills