

Attachment 1



YARRA CITY COUNCIL PRELIMINARY SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION REVIEW OF THE CITY OF YARRA

Major Issues

- Number of wards.
- Increasing the total number of councillors.
- Other factors to be considered when deciding ward boundaries.

Recommendations

1. The municipality should be divided into a number of wards.
2. Wards must be multi-councillor wards.
3. It would be desirable to have each ward represented by at least three councillors.
4. Regardless of the number of wards, all wards should be represented by an equal number of councillors.
5. If the total number of councillors remains at nine, there should be three wards, each represented by three councillors.
6. Ideally, the total number of councillors should be increased to twelve.
7. If the total number of councillors is increased to twelve, there should be either:
 - (a) three wards, each represented by four councillors; or
 - (b) four wards, each represented by three councillors.
8. Consideration be given to constructing wards on the basis of common ward characteristics and commonality of issues which may include:
 - (a) geographical and communities of interest;
 - (b) spreading public housing estates across the wards;
 - (c) common physical environments and streetscapes; and
 - (d) an appropriate mix of unity and diversity in each ward.

1. Number of wards

1.1 The concept of proportional representation vs the concept of “local ward councillors”

Council considered and accepted two extreme concepts:

- (a) the proportional representation (PR) voting system is now available to be used in local government elections. The benefits of PR is maximised by increasing the number of councillors per ward to three or more councillors. The extreme case is where all councillors are elected in an unsubdivided municipality.
- (b) Council is of the view that the community supports the notion of a ‘local ward councillor’ and the smaller the wards, the more local the ward councillors can be. The extreme case is where there are single-councillor wards only and therefore, exhaustive preferential voting system would be used instead of PR. However, single member wards places constraints on the ability of sharing constituent representations and generally makes representation difficult when a councillor is absent because of illness, holiday or the like.

In conclusion, Council accepts that both extreme cases maximise the benefits that can be gained by addressing that particular concept, but only at the expense of eliminating the other concept.

Recommendation

That Council supports an electoral structure that incorporates PR and promotes local ward councillor representation. Consequently, a number of multi-councillor wards would be the most desirable scenario for the City of Yarra.

1.2 Should wards boundaries ensure that there are an equal number of councillors in every ward?

Council considered whether the most important thing was to lump particular geographic communities regardless of population and have different numbers of councillors per ward, depending upon the voter distribution.

For example, North Carlton might constitute a ward represented by one councillor, Richmond a ward represented by three councillors; Collingwood and Abbotsford by two councillors; Fitzroy and North Fitzroy by two councillors; Clifton Hill and Alphington by one councillor.

Alternatively, the municipality could be divided into two wards, one ward covering the southern part of the City and represented by four councillors and the other ward covering the northern part of the City and represented by five councillors.

In conclusion, Council is of the view that having an electoral structure comprising a different numbers of councillors in wards may result in uneven ward representation for the community. Additionally, the application of two different voting systems in a municipality is not supported.

Recommendation

That Council endorse an electoral structure comprising an equal numbers of councillors in every ward, regardless of the number of wards. Should, the total number of councillors remain at nine, then the municipality would be divided into three wards, comprising three councillors per ward.

2. Total number of councillors

2.1 Benefits of increasing the number of councillors

Council is of the view that increasing the total number of councillors would be of benefit to Council and Yarra's constituents because the an increase in the number of councillor representatives would help share the workload more effectively. This may enhance the ability of a councillor to work more effectively for their constituents.

2.2 How many councillors?

Section 5 B of the *Local Government Act* 1989 provides that a Council must consist of not fewer than five councillors and not more than 12 councillors. Council does not believe that a reduction from nine councillors would be a reasonable proposition for the City of Yarra. Extensive consultation with the Yarra community was undertaken prior to the establishment of the present electoral structure in 1995, in which a nine councillor representative model was widely supported.

The number of councillors could be increased from the present nine councillors to 10, 11 or 12 councillors. The principle of having each ward represented by the same number of councillors cannot be reconciled under a scenario of 11 councillors.

In relation to a 10 councillor scenario, there are only two options available: either two wards comprising five councillors per ward, or five wards comprising two councillors per ward.

Council is of the view that an electoral structure comprising two wards was not appropriate for the City of Yarra.

Council's preference for three or more councillors per ward would be sacrificed if an electoral structure of five wards were introduced. Having only two councillors per ward was considered to be too similar to Yarra's current electoral structure.

If the municipality was to comprise 12 councillors, an electoral structure of three wards comprising four councillors per ward or four wards comprising three councillors per ward could be achieved.

Council accepts that the dynamic between 12 councillors might be different from the dynamic between 9 councillors, but is of the view that neither is a positive or negative difference, just a difference.

Recommendation

That Council supports an increase in the number of councillors from nine to 12 councillors.

3. Other factors to be taken into consideration when deciding ward boundaries

Essentially, Council believes it desirable that wards be formed around communities (geographical and communities of interest), but not to the degree of making them completely different from one another. It would be desirable that each ward had some characteristics in common with each other.

For example, if there were to be three wards in the municipality, there would be basically two scenarios.

One scenario would have three wards more or less matching the former municipalities of Richmond, Collingwood [plus Alphington] and Fitzroy [including North Carlton]. Arguments for this model included that these are both historical and current communities of interest; and facilities are spread around the former municipalities. One argument against this model was that it might look a little like moving backwards rather than forwards.

The other scenario would be to have a north, a central and a southern ward, where the southern ward essentially comprises the former municipality of Richmond, while the dividing line between the other two wards is open to debate (but roughly along Alexandra Parade). One argument against this model was that the northern ward, with comparatively little public housing and no high-rise estates would be significantly different from the other two wards.

Consistent with the proposition of common ward characteristics and commonality of issues, the possibility of all wards being constructed in such a way that councillors could appreciate the concerns of councillors in other wards would be a desirable outcome.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to constructing wards on the basis of common ward characteristics and commonality of issues which may include:

- (a) geographical and communities of interest;
- (b) spreading public housing estates across the wards;
- (c) common physical environments such as streetscapes; and
- (d) an appropriate mix of unity and diversity in each ward.