



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

January 11, 2023

Honourable Don McMorris
Minister of Government Relations
Minister Responsible for First Nations and Metis Relations, and Northern Affairs
Room 306
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina SK S4S 0B3

RE: Amendments to the Cities Act, Ward Boundary Population Variances

Dear Minister McMorris,

On behalf of Saskatoon City Council, I am writing you today seeking amendments to The Cities Act (the "Act") to raise the population variance thresholds for ward boundaries in Saskatchewan cities that use a ward system. Specifically, we are seeking amendments to the relevant sections of the Act that raises the ward boundary from the current 10% variance to a more discretionary population variance range of +/- 15 to 25%. In fact, our preference would be to follow other Canadian jurisdictions and let the City determine the size of the population variance based on the principle of effective representation.

By way of background, sections 57-62 of the Act contain the rules for creating wards, as well as the requirement to maintain a uniform population in each ward where established. As such, the Act requires that the population of each ward must not vary by more than 10% from the figure that is obtained by dividing the total population of the city by the number of wards into which the city is divided. Should a variance more than 10% be determined a Municipal Wards Commission is required to review the ward boundaries.

As you may know, Saskatoon is one of three cities who use a ward system for municipal elections. In our case, ward boundary reviews have been conducted for each of the last three elections, in 2012, 2016, and 2020. Past reports from our Municipal Wards Commission have noted the projected growth in several neighbourhoods and anticipated that further ward modifications would be required prior future municipal elections.

While it is important to maintain a level of consistency in ward populations to ensure equal representation, a recent view of leading practices by our City Clerk found that Saskatchewan has more restrictive variance allowances than all other jurisdictions in Canada, where such rules are prescribed. In fact, several provinces, such as Alberta, Ontario, and Manitoba either let municipalities choose their own ward boundary population variances or have established much larger variances (such as Winnipeg at +/- 25%).

Frequent changes in ward boundaries can have a negative effect on the electoral process, as it can generate voter confusion by lack of continuity. They can also generate unnecessary fiscal costs as the review process itself and resulting system changes require budgetary allocations.

For these reasons, Saskatoon City Council believes it would be beneficial to both the City and the electorate to have additional flexibility in ward population variances, while still maintaining a requirement for regular review to ensure effective representation and fair population distributions by electoral ward. With that in mind, we do propose either raising the thresholds in the Act, giving the cities the discretion to set their own variances, and/or moving the relevant provisions to regulations so that future changes can be made more expediently if necessary.

If you have any questions and/or require additional clarity about this request, I would be pleased to discuss the matter with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Clark', written in a cursive style.

Charlie Clark
Mayor

cc: Adam Tittlemore, City of Saskatoon, City Clerk
Cindy Yelland, City of Saskatoon, City Solicitor
Mike Jordan, City of Saskatoon, Chief Public Policy and Government Relations Officer