

County of Antigonish Electoral Boundaries Review

COUNCIL SIZE REPORT

PREPARED FOR: MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF ANTIGONISH
PREPARED BY: STANTEC CONSULTING LTD.
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ANTIGONISH COUNTY
ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW
Council Size Report

November 10, 2023

Prepared for:
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Project Number:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Previous boundary reviews for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish were completed pursuant to the current legislation in 2000, 2007 and 2015. In all three cases the County applied to maintain its Council at ten members and obtained approval from the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB), although the Municipality's initial application in 2007 was returned by the Board because it did not satisfy the Board's specified criteria.

This report addresses the first phase of Stantec's review Antigonish Council arrangements approved in 2015. It summarizes consultation with County Council and residents to date and presents options for future boundaries to be considered in Phase 2 of this project.

CURRENT GOVERNANCE

Antigonish is tied with Kings County with the seventh largest council among Nova Scotia's 20 rural municipalities. The Municipality ranks ninth in terms of constituents per council member, 17th by land area per district, and 16th in terms of total municipal expenditure per council member. Population in the county has historically grown steadily but moderately, including an increase of 3.7%. We anticipate stronger growth in the immediate future with 923 additional residents by 2031 and another 770 by 2036.

Council members interviewed generally expressed positive attitudes concerning interaction among members, although most acknowledged that the issue of consolidation with the Town of Antigonish has been divisive. While Council members did not directly criticize the current number of members, most expressed a willingness to consider a smaller Council.

While Council members did not directly criticize the current number of members, six Councillors said that a reduction of Council size could be considered with five suggesting eight or nine members in light of information provided to them by Stantec that indicated the average rural municipal council in Nova Scotia has an average of 8.6 members. Most feel the number of members makes no difference. The remaining four feel ten continues to be workable, although one qualified that they felt staying with the status quo was only advisable until the consolidation issue is resolved.

Respondents to our online survey strongly favoured the current Council of ten (59.5% of 190 respondents to the question). The next two choices were an enlarged Council of 12 and a moderately reduced Council of eight, both of which were supported by 6.8% of respondents to the question. The minimum option of three ranked fourth with the support of 5.9%. The average response was 9.1 Council members.



PAST BOUNDARY REVIEWS

The three boundary review processes conducted in Antigonish County since 1999, have not been entirely smooth. In 2000, the Councillor representing District 1 objected to an adjustment to the boundary of her district approved by Council and submitted to the NSUARB for approval. The Board accepted her position and the boundary of her district was maintained and the Board made alternative boundary adjustments. In 2007, the County applied for approval of its Council size and confirmation of the electoral district boundaries approved in 2000. While the Board accepted the size of Council, it returned the application because the proposed boundaries did not meet the $\pm 10\%$ voter parity criterion. The County's most recent application in 2015, however, was approved as submitted by the Board.

BOUNDARY DELINEATION

Section 368 (4) of the MGA sets criteria that the NSUARB must consider in establishing the boundaries of polling or electoral districts within municipalities:

In determining the number and boundaries of polling districts the Board shall consider number of electors, relative parity of voting power, population density, community of interest and geographic size.

The leading criteria are voter parity, which is reflected in the requirement of the NSUARB that the number of electors in each district be within $\pm 10\%$ of the average number of electors in all districts, and community of interest.

For discussion with Council, we have developed scenarios for eight, nine, and ten districts, reflecting two of the three council sizes that received the most support from respondents to the Council Size Survey with nine added at the request of municipal staff. Given the overwhelming support expressed through our survey for continuing with ten members, we developed three scenarios for ten districts. The first, Scenario 1, minimizes variance in the numbers of electors in each district. Scenario 2 provides an alternative to the first scenario by bringing the Acadian communities of Pomquet and Tracadie together in a single district. Scenario 3 adjusts the current boundaries minimally to meet the $\pm 10\%$ parity standard for all districts. Scenarios 4, 5, and 6, respectively, provide arrangements for eight, nine, and twelve districts with minimum variance.

We recommend taking Scenario 3 for ten districts along with Scenario 4 for eight districts to the public for consideration in Phase 2 of this Electoral Boundary Review.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Mandate

Pursuant to Section 369(1) of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA), all Nova Scotia municipalities must “conduct a study of the number and boundaries of polling districts in the municipality, their fairness and reasonableness and the number of councillors” ... “in the years 2006 and every eighth year thereafter.” The current year, 2022, starts the fourth cycle since the adoption of the Act.

Previous boundary reviews for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish were completed pursuant to the current legislation in 2000, 2007 and 2015. In all three cases the County applied to maintain its Council at ten members and obtained approval from the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB), although the Municipality’s initial application in 2007 was returned by the Board because it did not satisfy the Board’s specified criteria.

The current study will assess the Council size and boundaries approved by the NSUARB in 2015. It includes comparison of Antigonish County’s current Council size to similar Nova Scotia municipalities, a summary of consultation with County Council members, and the results of consultation with Antigonish residents through a public meeting and online survey. Applying the process recommended by the Utility and Review Board, Stantec in this report has assessed options for the size of Antigonish County Council and developed electoral district boundary options for Council to consider putting forward for assessment by the public.

1.2 Study Process

Having completed many boundary review studies, Stantec staff are very familiar with the specifications of the MGA as well as the NSUARB guidelines and priorities concerning the determination of municipal council size and delineation of related boundaries. The NSUARB User Guide for boundary reviews has prescribed a two-step process for the conduct of polling district boundary reviews. The phases and their scope, as outlined in the Board’s user guide, are as follows:

- **Phase 1 – Number of Councillors** – ... the desired style of Council, the governance structure of Council, and a determination of an effective and efficient number of councillors. The style of government is a question which should not be decided by council until adequate public consultation has occurred respecting the expectation of its constituents. The size of council and its governance structure is a matter which can then be determined by Council in an informed debate.
- **Phase 2 – Boundaries and Polling Districts** – ... the task becomes one of distributing the polling districts to satisfy the objectives listed in s. 368(4) of the Act (number of electors, relative



parity of voting power, population density, community of interest and geographic size). Just as with determining the desired number of polling districts, public consultation is essential to a successful process of setting boundaries.¹

Our proposal submitted to the Municipality of the County of Antigonish on July 14, 2023, committed to adhere to these specifications. This Council Size Report completes Phase 1 as set out above, identifying and recommending boundary options to be considered in Phase 2 of this project.

1.3 Study Conduct

Antigonish County notified Stantec of our selection to conduct an electoral boundary review via email on August 9, 2023. Stantec formally began work on the project with a Start-up Meeting on August 12, 2023. At that time, we assembled and began to assess information, including past decisions concerning Antigonish County and related map files, and information comparing Nova Scotia municipal councils that we have assembled through other projects. At the Start-up Meeting we decided to hold a group meeting with Council members before proceeding with individual interviews with Councillors. The group meeting with Council took place on September 12, after which we interviewed all ten Council members and the Municipality's CAO between September 20 and October 5. In the meantime, we conducted our first phase consultation process, which consisted of a public meeting on September 25, 2023, and an online public survey that was open from September 18 to October 11.

As noted, this council size assessment leads into Phase 2 of the project in which we will determine the preferred electoral boundary scenario for consideration by District Council. Consultation in Phase 2 will include review of boundary scenarios with County Council, a second online survey for district residents, and additional public meetings. Our current intention is to conduct three meetings in distributed locations within the county. A final decision concerning the number of meetings and their locations will be made with County Council and staff at the conclusion of this first phase of the project. On completion of Phase 2 consultations, we expect to prepare a final report incorporating key content from this report, a summary of Phase 2 consultation, and a recommendation concerning the preferred electoral boundary for the district.

¹ NSUARB, "Municipal Boundary User Guide," no date, p. 2,
https://nsuarb.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/nsuarb-222634-v1-user_guide_-_mb_reviews_.pdf



2 CURRENT GOVERNANCE

There are no hard and fast rules for determining the number of members a municipal council should have. People who favour larger councils usually cite improved service from councillors who have fewer constituents and, therefore, more time to deal with individual constituent concerns as a key benefit. Many will also argue for more council members where a large geographic territory must be covered and will often add that more voices in council provide more scope for the expression of diverse interests, particularly interests associated with specific geographies. The arguments for smaller councils, by contrast, usually centre on efficiency. Excessive numbers of council members can extend council debates as each member seeks to have his or her say. Additional members also usually require more direct compensation and more municipal staff support, increasing municipal costs that taxpayers must cover.

2.1 Council Size

Under Nova Scotia's *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) councils must have a minimum of three members, exclusive of a mayor but inclusive of a warden. Towns and regional municipalities must elect a mayor. Rural municipalities have traditionally been led by wardens; however, the MGA in 1999 introduced the option of electing a mayor instead. Among 20 rural municipalities, the Counties of Colchester and Kings, and the Municipal District of Lunenburg are now led by mayors. If a rural municipality chooses to move from a warden to a mayor, the Act provides no means to return to a warden if the municipality later desires to do so. Although towns may elect council members at large or from wards, rural and regional municipalities are required to elect councillors from districts, with only one councillor permitted per district. The decision to change from a warden to mayor is not within the scope of this boundary review.

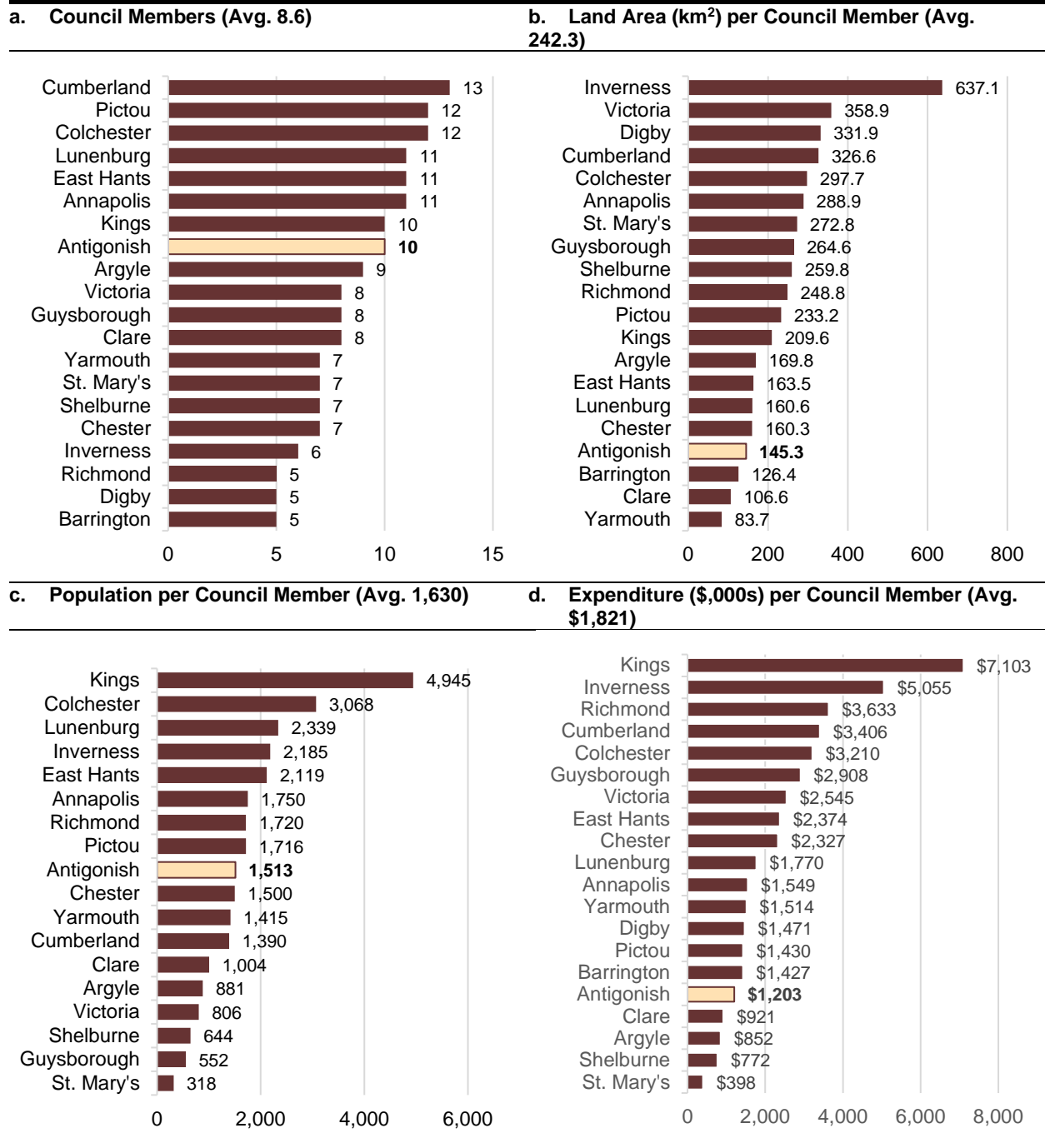
2.1.1 NOVA SCOTIA BENCHMARKING

As our brief discussion of the pros and cons of larger and smaller councils suggests, key parameters against which council sizes are typically judged are the ratios of constituents and land area to councillors, and the cost of council. While there are no accepted benchmarks against which a council can be judged to have too many or too few members, comparison to other similar municipalities at least gives a measure of where Antigonish County stands.

Antigonish currently has ten councillors, which is tied with Kings County for the seventh most council members among Nova Scotia's 20 rural municipalities and moderately above the average for the group (8.6 members). (**Figure 2-1a**). The land area of Antigonish County is relatively small among the 20 rural municipalities, which combined with a relatively large Council puts the County in 17th when measured by the land area represented by each Councillor with an average area of 146.3 km² per Councillor or in area ranking tenth among the 20 or roughly 60% of the 238.8 km² served by the average rural municipal councillor (**Figure 2-1b**). The most heavily emphasized measure, however, is constituents per council member by which Antigonish with 1,513 residents per councillor ranks ninth (**Figure 2-1c**) with 7.2% fewer constituents per representative than the average of 1,630 for all Nova Scotia rural municipalities.



Figure 2-1 Council Size and Measures of Council Size, Nova Scotia Rural Municipalities, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting Limited



By the final measure shown, expenditure divided by council representatives, the County ranks close to the bottom. At \$1,202,692 per representative or 51.4% of the average (\$2,339,283) Antigonish Councillors ranks 16th suggesting County Council members are responsible for significantly less annual expenditure than their counterparts in other Nova Scotia rural municipalities (**Figure 2-1d**).

Comparative information on direct compensation of council members is not readily available. CBC did a study in 2018 and compiled the salaries paid to council members in all Nova Scotia municipalities. The average salary paid to Antigonish County Council member at the time was recorded as \$23,472,² which ranked tenth among Nova Scotia rural municipalities in absolute terms and per capita. It was 99.1% of the average for all rural municipal council members (\$23,677) across the province.

2.1.2 CURRENT AND FUTURE POPULATION

Whereas many rural municipalities in Nova Scotia have experienced significant population losses, Antigonish County has been more stable. As shown in **Figure 2-2**, the county's population rose from 14,565 in 2006 to 15,105 in 2011 or by 3.7%, based Census of Canada counts. The County, however, lost 1.1% of that population in the following five years, recording a population of 14,935 in 2016, before once again adding 3.7% between 2016 and 2021 as Nova Scotia's population generally surged.

Predictions to 2036 prepared by Stantec based on the age structure of the population and the recent positive population trend suggest the County's recent population growth should strengthen in the coming census period. In the longer run, however, we expect the rate of growth to gradually diminish.

Notwithstanding the gain achieved from 2016 to 2021, population in the county continued to age with the proportion under 18 declining from 20.8 to 19.2% and those in child-bearing years from 18 to 44 also decreasing from 29.4% to 28.2%. With further decline in both groups, natural increase in the population can be expected to fall requiring continued immigration to support continued growth.

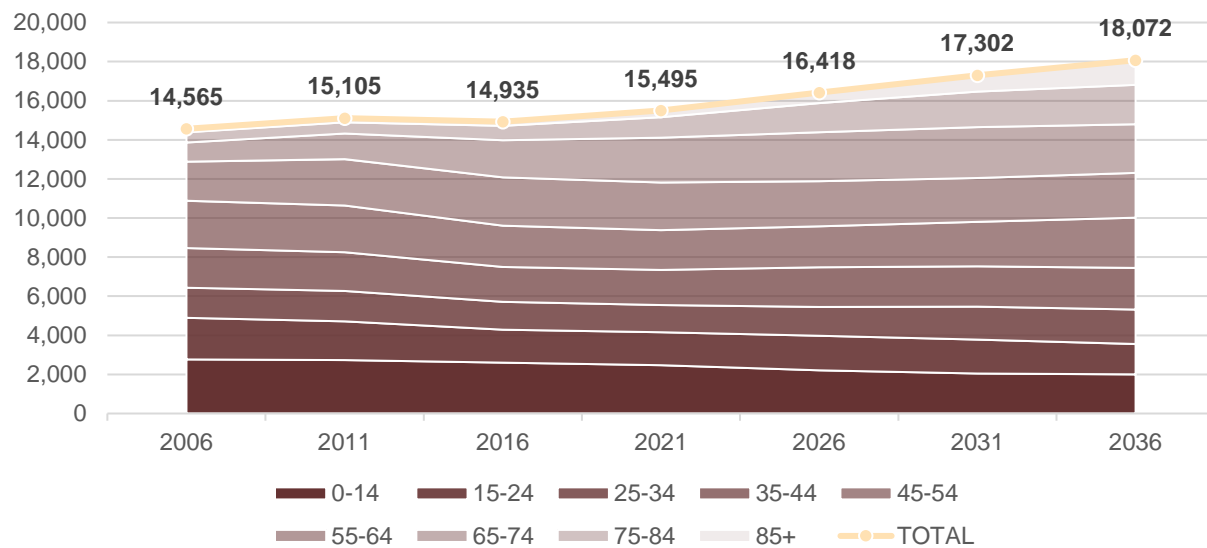
While we anticipate continued substantial increases in the county's population, we expect the rate of increase to decline as local population continues to age. We have also noted from associated assessment of the two Census Subdivisions within Antigonish that growth is most likely to occur in the western part of the municipality (Antigonish Census Subdivision A). In the east (Antigonish Census Subdivision B), our calculations suggest the number of residents, which has decreased in every Census period since 2001, will continue to decline despite strong growth in the Paqtnkek Reserve. In the west, we expect growth to exceed 10% in each five-year census interval to 2031 and still be over 9% between 2031 and 2036 growing from 15,495 to 18,072 or by 2,577 people (16.6%), while we expect the east

² CBC News, "Search the salaries and costs of Nova Scotia's municipal councils," January 3, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/search-the-salaries-and-costs-of-nova-scotia-s-municipal-councils-1.4470447>. Salaries apply to wardens, deputy wardens, and mayors as well as regular council members and are therefore higher than typical council members received at the time. Average compensation ranged from \$33,100 in Kings County to just \$14,267 in the District of St. Mary's.



despite the presence of Paqtnekek to lose roughly 5% of its residents every five years dropping from 6,505 to 5,567 (-938 or -14.4%).

Figure 2-2 Population by Age Group, Municipality of the County of Antigonish, 2006-2031



Cohort	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036
0-14	2,770	2,735	2,605	2,475	2,210	2,048	2,004
15-24	2,125	1,975	1,680	1,680	1,773	1,734	1,553
25-34	1,545	1,565	1,425	1,395	1,466	1,693	1,761
35-44	2,025	1,970	1,785	1,795	2,033	2,054	2,126
45-54	2,415	2,395	2,110	2,035	2,097	2,281	2,568
55-64	1,995	2,365	2,470	2,435	2,297	2,245	2,301
65-74	985	1,325	1,905	2,290	2,515	2,588	2,481
75-84	520	570	730	1,050	1,480	1,825	2,018
85+	185	205	225	340	547	834	1,258
TOTAL	14,565	15,105	14,935	15,495	16,418	17,302	18,072
<i>Change</i>		3.7%	-1.1%	3.7%	6.0%	5.4%	4.4%

Proportions of Total Population

0-17	23.4%	22.0%	20.8%	19.2%	16.7%	14.8%	13.7%
18-44	34.7%	32.6%	29.4%	28.2%	28.9%	28.7%	27.5%
45-64	30.3%	31.5%	30.7%	28.8%	26.8%	26.2%	26.9%
65+	11.6%	13.9%	19.1%	23.7%	27.7%	30.3%	31.9%

Source: Stantec Consulting Limited



2.2 Council Consultation

Council consultation for the Boundary Review took place in two stages. As noted, Stantec agreed to conduct a meeting with Council as a group to explain the study process before interviewing Councillors individually. During the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 12, Stantec staff provided a presentation on the study process and background information collected to that point, which included a review of past governance and boundary applications and the benchmarking of Antigonish Council membership against other rural municipalities in Nova Scotia summarized in **Subsection 2.1.1**, above.

Stantec arranged interviews with the County CAO and all ten Council members afterwards and conducted interviews between September 20 and October 5, 2023.

The current County Council is very experienced. Seven of the current ten Councillors have served 18 or more years, with three having won six elections over roughly 30 years each. On average, current Council members have served 18 to 19 years. Acclamation is common. Most contested their first election, but several have subsequently been acclaimed on one or more occasions. Some, however, have always faced some level of opposition. Seven were acclaimed in 2020, when the most candidates in a single district was four. Of the remaining three candidates who participated in contested elections, two faced a single opponent and the other ran against two.

Most Council members gave current Council operations and interactions a high rating. On a scale of 1 to 5 suggested by Stantec's interviewer, five of nine who provided a number rated Council as a 5 or excellent, while others gave rating from 3.5 to 4, except for one who gave a rating of two. Most Councillors who rated Council less than 5 noted that differing views on consolidation with the Town of Antigonish has been divisive and has caused some tension among members. Even among those who rated Council at the top of the scale, several said differing views on consolidation had negatively changed the atmosphere of Antigonish County Council.

The consolidation issue aside, Councillors said they get along well. They say they benefit from their experience and the support of capable municipal staff. Several complimented the Warden's leadership. Other than tensions caused by the consolidation process, the only other council issue mentioned by more than one member was the unfortunate health concerns among some Council members, which all added is an issue no one can control.

While Council members did not directly criticize the current number of members, six Councillors said that a reduction of Council size could be considered with five suggesting eight or nine members in light of information provided to them by Stantec that indicated the average rural municipal council in Nova Scotia has an average of 8.6 members (see **Figure 2-1**, above). Most feel the number of members makes no difference. The remaining four feel ten continues to be workable, although one qualified that they felt staying with the status quo was only advisable until the consolidation issue is resolved.



Several councillors said current boundaries are strong and recognizable but most acknowledged shifts in numbers among districts, which Stantec had outlined in our presentation to Council, would necessitate changes. Several had noted the importance of recognizing Acadian communities such as Pomquet and Tracadie following our presentation to the Council group and reinforced that consideration when interviews. Several councillors also noted the importance of keeping Paq'tnkek First Nation within one district. Some also noted growth in communities around the Town of Antigonish, particularly in the Mount Cameron Estates area would be a major factor in determining necessary boundary adjustments.

2.3 Community Consultation

Public consultation in the first phase of the study has included a public meeting to obtain the views of the public concerning the appropriate size for Antigonish County Council and an online survey exploring the same issues. The results of both initiatives were disappointing.

2.3.1 COUNCIL SIZE PUBLIC MEETING

Stantec with assistance from Antigonish County staff scheduled a meeting at the Antigonish County Municipal Office on Beech Hill Road from 6:00 to 9:00 pm on September 25, 2023. The meeting was promoted on the County's website and through radio notifications that promoted the Council Size Survey. Nine people attended the session from Districts 2, 6, 8, and 9 as well as Councillors John Dunbar (District 7), Gary Mattie (District 8), Harris McNamara (District 9), and Bill MacFarlane (District 10), as well as Warden Owen McCarron (District 6).

Stantec's consultant talked with residents and Council members in attendance and then made a presentation explaining the Electoral Boundary Review process and background concerning Council size. Questions from the audience concerned the effect of consolidation on the process, promotion of the online survey and the availability of hardcopy questionnaires, the influence of growth on the requirement to change boundaries, and the project schedule. With respect to consolidation, Stantec has agreed that work on the boundary review can be re-applied to determination of boundaries for the consolidated municipality, although work like the Council Size online survey would have to be repeated. The survey was promoted on the local radio stations XFM and the Hawk; growth and its distribution in the county is a critical consideration in the boundary review process; and we expect the boundary review project to be completed early in 2024.

2.3.2 ONLINE COUNCIL SIZE SURVEY

Stantec also posted a Council Size Survey to obtain public opinions on the size of County Council. The survey was conducted from September 18 to through October 11, 2023. In addition, the County also made 100 hardcopy surveys available to interested members of the public. Notification of the survey was prominently provided on the home page of the County's website, which allowed visitors to the site to link easily to the survey. Municipal staff also arranged public service announcements on local radio stations to promote the survey along with the Council Size Public Meeting. We have used Facebook advertising very



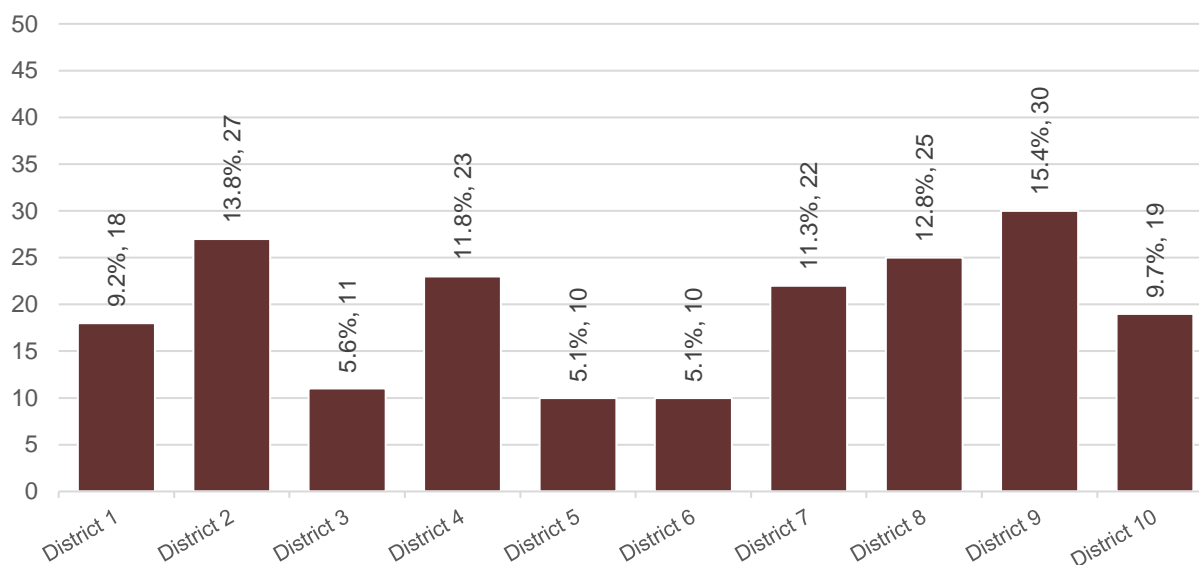
effectively in the past to promote similar surveys, but we were not able to find a means to work around Facebook’s current restrictions on advertising related to elections.

During the period the survey was open, exactly 200 people responded, 29 (14.5%) providing their response on a hardcopy questionnaire. Although we would have appreciated more responses, the number is a reasonable guide public views concerning council size in Antigonish County. Relative to other municipalities where we have recently had to promote similar questionnaire surveys for electoral boundary reviews with access to Facebook advertising, the response was similar, probably because of the radio ads arranged by County staff.

Appendix A to this report provides all survey questions with tables and charts summarizing the responses to each. Respondents, as we typically find with council size surveys we conduct, are generally engaged with municipal politics. Most participate in municipal elections with more than half stating they voted in the last three in Antigonish (52.5%) and another 25.5% voting in at least the most recent election in 2020. In all, 81.8% said they voted in at least one of the past three Antigonish elections.

Responses came from residents of all ten current electoral districts. although respondents from Districts 2, 8, and 9 were best represented with 13.8%, 12.8%, and 15.4% of respondents (**Figure 2-3**). Districts 3, 5, and 6, on the other hand, were under-represented with 5.6%, 5.1%, and 5.1% of respondents, respectively. Respondents were predominantly middle aged and seniors with nearly one-third (30.9%) between 65 and 74 years and a quarter (24.7%) between 55 and 64 years, and 85.9% accounted for between 35 and 74. Female respondents (55.0% v. 45.0% male). Women accounted for 59.7% of respondents who identified their gender with males constituting 36.5% and 9.5% preferring not to share their gender identity.

Figure 2-3 Council Size Survey Respondents by District, Antigonish County, 2023

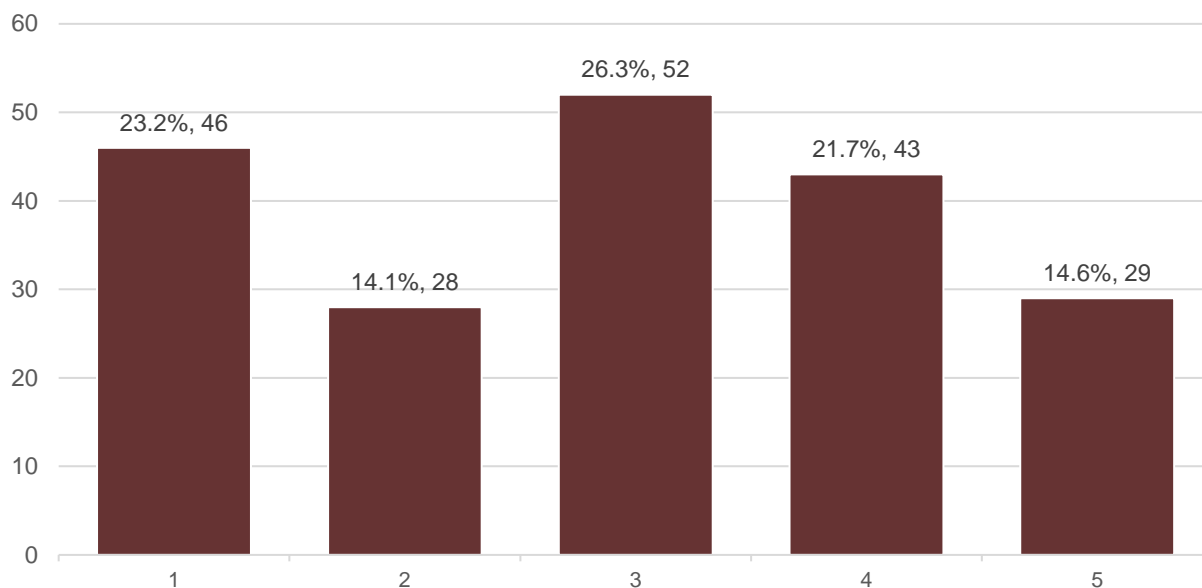


Source: Stantec Consulting Limited



Respondents generally rated Council moderately on a scale from 1 to 5 on which 1 denoted poor performance during Council's current term and 5 represented excellent performance. The most frequent response was 3 (26.3%), which suggests neither good nor bad performance, but it was followed closely by 1 representing poor performance (23.2%) (**Figure 2-4**). The overall average score was 2.9 suggesting a middling rating slightly skewed to poor, which is similar to most municipalities we have surveyed for governance and boundary review studies.

Figure 2-4 Ratings of Council Performance, Antigonish County, 2023



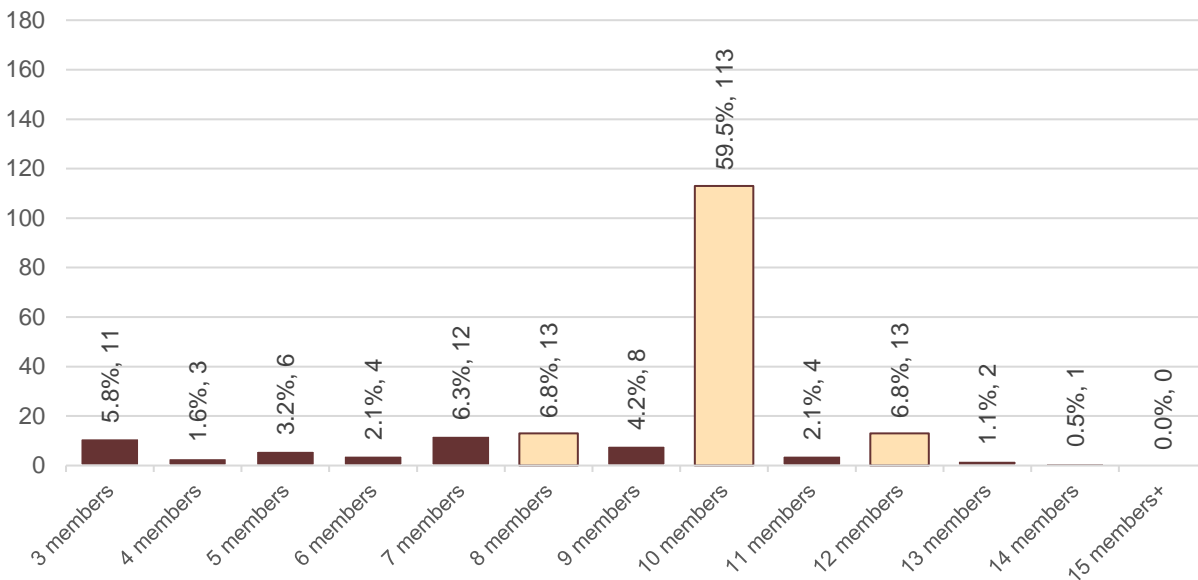
Source: Stantec Consulting Limited

Of 143 respondents who offered an opinion in response to Question 6, 82.2% considered council size relevant to Council or municipal operations. The key survey question was following Question 7, which asked directly how many representatives the respondent would like to have on Antigonish County Council. Responses strongly favoured the current Council of ten (59.5% of 190 respondents to the question). No other option was chosen by more than 7%. The next two choices were an enlarged Council of 12 and a moderately reduced Council of eight, both of which were supported by 6.8% of respondents to the question. The minimum option of three ranked fourth with the support of 5.9% (**Figure 2-5**). The average response was 9.1 Council members.

It is worth noting that the result represents the strongest support for the status quo in response to any of the multiple surveys we have conducted for governance and boundary reviews. It is, in fact, the largest support for a specific council size that we have seen, indicating that regardless of views concerning Council or municipal performance, the public endorses the size of the current Council that serves them.



Figure 2-5 Council Size Preferences, Antigonish County, 2023



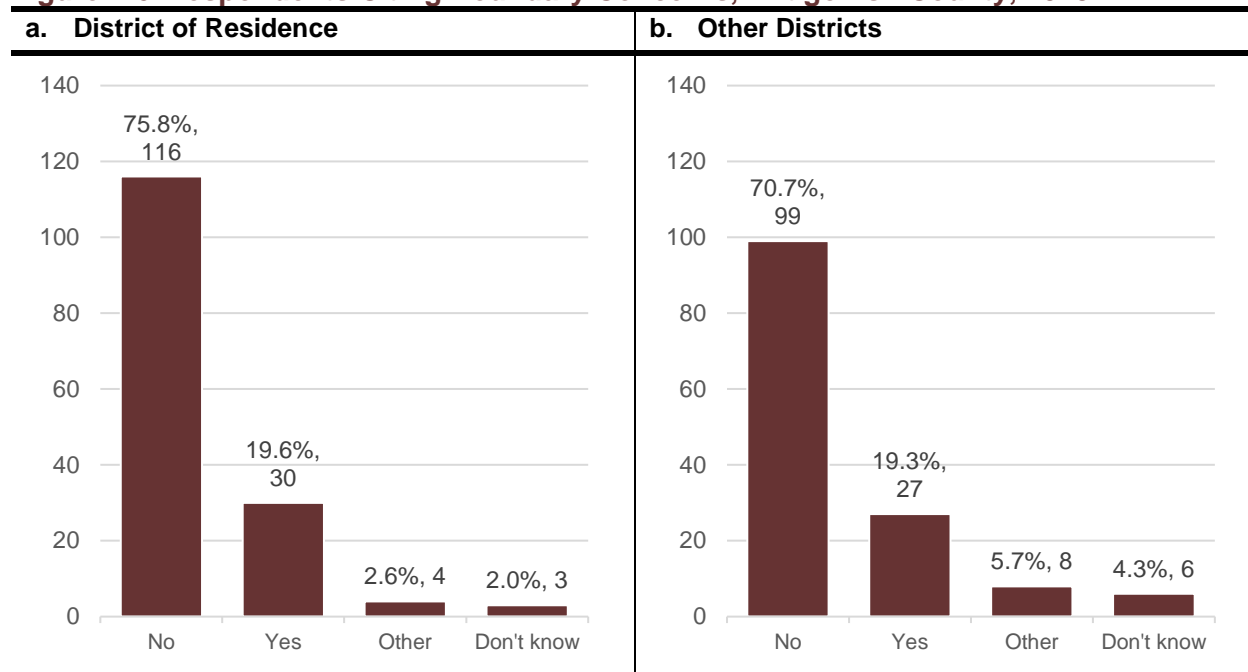
Source: Stantec Consulting Limited

In response to Questions 8, 9, and 10 respectively asking why each respondent supported decreasing, maintaining, or enlarging Council, the small number of respondents preferring a Council with fewer than ten cited the size of the municipality and comparison to other municipalities. Some noted that Council members in favour of consolidation have argued that a benefit will be to reduce the number of municipal politicians. Those in favour of keeping Council at ten, expressed satisfaction with the current Council and the importance of representing residents and diverse opinions. Those favouring an increase from ten, suggested expressed very similar opinions to those preferring the status quo, noting the benefits of more representatives to serve the public and represent varied interests.

The final two opinion questions in the survey asked if respondents had any concerns with the boundaries of their district (Question 11) or with other districts (Question 12). Only 32 respondents (20.8%) expressed concerns with the boundaries of their districts (**Figure 2-6a**) and, as we have typically found when asking about boundary issues in similar surveys for other municipalities, answers lacked specifics. Several respondents, for example, stated that their district is "too big," but none suggested how size could be reduced. Two residents, however, expressed a clear concern with the portion of District 1 that juts between Districts 2 and 4 and includes areas of Pleasant Valley, North Grant, and Clydesdale. They noted that the area has much more in common with the adjacent community of Briery Brook than most District 1 residents located on the shore from McArras Brook to Cape George. Five residents of what some called the "fringe area" around the Town of Antigonish expressed similar but less specific complaints that their communities were included in districts with rural areas where servicing and other priorities are very different.



Figure 2-6 Respondents Citing Boundary Concerns, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting Limited

Comments from 27 respondents (19.3%) concerning issues with the boundaries of districts in which respondents do not reside were even less specific (**Figure 2-6b**). One resident of District 4 suggested shifting area from District 1 to District 2 and four noted that the fringe area was problematic without making any suggestions concerning how the issue might be addressed.

2.3.3 COUNCIL SIZE CONSIDERATIONS

While the goal of the first phase of a governance and boundary review is to determine the most suitable size of the council to serve the municipality in question, there is no clear consensus as to the optimum size. The appropriate size of a council depends on several issues that at times compete. Certainly, a smaller council will eliminate the costs in salaries, expenses, and overheads that would otherwise be incurred by eliminated council members. On the other hand, the compensation to Nova Scotia municipal representatives, as discussed in **Section 2.1.1**, above, is moderate and the CBC's 2018 study found Antigonish County was very close to the average for the province's rural municipalities. Some argue, in any case, that if the number of Council members is decreased, the increased job demands for remaining members will justify higher salaries. Examination of the CBC's data suggests that while there is some justification for this belief, compensation is also influenced by the size of the municipality and smaller councils tend to be found in municipalities with smaller populations.



The impact on the workload of council members is nevertheless relevant. More councillors mean more resources available to respond to resident concerns. Many residents feel councillors are more responsive if they must deal with fewer constituents, although some analysts will point out that councillors simply adjust their approach if their responsibilities increase. Council members in larger jurisdictions like HRM, CBRM, and Kings County deal with many more constituents than their counterparts in equivalent municipal classifications and appear to do so reasonably well, although detailed examination would be necessary to evaluate the situation fully. Some observers suggest that dealing with more constituents keeps councillors from micromanaging municipal affairs, although citizens who want their specific concerns addressed may differ.

Councils are decision-making bodies and studies have assessed the influence of group-size on decision-making. A review of readily available sources suggests that it is desirable to have fewer than 12 people in a decision-making group with most observers favouring numbers between three and eight, based on the “table rule,” which suggests that with numbers greater than eight it is difficult to maintain a single conversation within a group. We have found additional sources that state groups of five to seven are the most effective.³ In addition to being manageable numbers, five and seven are odd numbers, which avoids ties, although we have noted that several rural councils in Nova Scotia including Antigonish County have even numbers of members and we are not aware of any situation where it has deadlocked council.

It is also noteworthy that municipal councils do not conduct debate and discussion in the same manner as an independent discussion group. The mayor or warden acts as chair and enforces strict rules of order. A concern in less structured decision-making bodies is that dominant voices tend to “steam-roll” more reserved participants. While the phenomenon is not unknown in municipal councils, the process of giving members opportunities to speak individually and limiting the number of times a specific issue can be addressed mitigates this influence. We would hypothesize that such procedures allow a larger group to be managed, although it does not invalidate the benefits of having a membership in the five to seven range.

Proponents favouring more rather than fewer members usually contend more members allow for the expression of diverse perspectives, which is important to ensuring full debate. It is also argued that as decision-making bodies like councils grow, they usually self-organize into groups like political parties that express shared views on most topics. In a relatively small municipality like Antigonish, though, others might counter that five or seven individuals can adequately represent differing perspectives and many would consider that a much larger council in which groups might form around specific issues would be unwieldy and costly for a relatively small number of taxpayers.

³ Sheila Margolis, “What Is the Optimal Group Size for Decision-making?,” Workplace Culture Institute, LLC, <https://sheilamargolis.com/2011/01/what-is-the-optimal-group-size-for-decision-making/>. Although the summary is a brief popular summary of the issue, the author does cite a Harvard Business Review article, which she says advocates seven as “the optimal size.” She then advances her own rationale for favouring five. Another online source that touts “5-7” is Ebrary, “Group Size and Decision Making,” https://ebrary.net/2836/management/group_sie_decision_making.



One area, however, where we regularly hear concerns from council members in municipalities across the province is the distribution of council members to boards, committees, and community events. Antigonish County Council members, however, hardly mentioned this factor in our interview process. With only the Town of Antigonish within the County, it may be that Antigonish County Council members do not have to deal with as many boards and collaborative arrangements as Council members in counties divided into districts and/or with several towns within their boundaries. It is also likely that the relatively large number of Council members in Antigonish reduces the burden of committee participation relative to other municipal units where fewer council members must cover more inter-municipal arrangements – and have frequently complained to Stantec through interviews for governance and boundary studies about the time requirements. While some critics may see this as proof that the workload for Antigonish Council members is moderate, we consider it positive that most County Council members appear to find demands on their time reasonable and did not express the common concern of many Nova Scotia municipal council members that they are overworked.

Ultimately, the primary issue in determining the appropriate council size for each municipality is public opinion. Determining the appropriate council size involves trading off service to constituents with efficiency and cost effectiveness. The trade-off itself is however subject to judgement by the public of what service they expect and how they expect it to be provided. While some constituents may, for example, prioritize attention to their personal concerns or the needs of their neighbourhood, others may prefer to see council emphasize high-level issues and broader municipal priorities. Each person, furthermore, likely has a unique take on how the size of council will influence the priorities of council members.

2.3.4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

We take several additional considerations into account in drawing boundaries that are not explicitly identified in the MGA. To begin, it is desirable to have readily identifiable boundaries and avoid significant geographic barriers within districts. Distinct boundaries can be difficult to find. Roads, particularly limited access highways like the TransCanada/Highway 104 through Antigonish, often make excellent boundaries because they tend to be well known and very visible. On the other hand, lower order roads, particularly in undeveloped areas are useful, as are rivers, lakes, and inlets, which often separate communities, especially where there are no crossing links (e.g., bridges across water features, which are equivalent to interchanges on highways). Where dividing physical features are lacking, it is usually effective to draw boundaries in areas where population is sparse, and separation of communities can be avoided. In such situations, boundaries defined by topographic features such as ridges or, in the absence of such landmarks, by straight lines, serve well.

Electoral districts are also generally contiguous; that is, their territory is continuous and uninterrupted. District 2 in the Municipal District of Guysborough is the only exception we are familiar with in Nova Scotia. Its configuration is justified by the objective of ensuring representation for the separated African-Nova Scotian communities in Lincolnville, Sunnyville, and Upper Big Tracadie. We are not aware of



another similar example among rural or regional municipalities in the province and consider contiguity to be an absolute objective for typical electoral districts.

Finally, although it is also not directly expressed in the legislation, we consider it beneficial for electoral districts to be internally connected. Roadways and equivalent transportation connections that join communities directly within a district (i.e., without departing to another district) are desirable because they promote communities of interest and facilitate the work of councillors who must travel among constituents in their district. They are also likely to be more convenient for electors when they travel to the polling station within their district on election days.



3 PAST BOUNDARY REVIEWS

The County of Antigonish has a ten-member Council. Councillors are elected from ten districts shown on the map to the right. As in most rural municipalities in Nova Scotia, Council is chaired by a Warden who is chosen by the Councillors from among themselves. In three Council and boundary reviews completed since the adoption of the current legislation in 1999, Antigonish County has maintained ten members on Council.

The boundaries of the polling or electoral districts from which Councillors are elected have, however, been gradually adjusted to recognize shifts in population within the County. The primary criterion guiding boundary changes is the parity standard set by the NSUARB, which currently specifies that the number of electors in all districts should be within $\pm 10\%$ of the average number of electors in all districts in the municipality.

The three boundary review processes conducted in Antigonish County since 1999, have not been entirely smooth. In 2000, the Councillor representing District 1 objected to an adjustment to the boundary of her district approved by Council and submitted to the NSUARB for approval. The Board accepted her position and the boundary of her district was maintained and the Board made alternative boundary adjustments. In 2007, the County applied for approval of its Council size and confirmation of the electoral district boundaries approved in 2000. While the Board accepted the size of Council, it returned the application because the proposed boundaries did not meet the $\pm 10\%$ voter parity criterion. The County's most recent application in 2015, however, was approved as submitted by the Board.

3.1 1999 Boundary Review

In 1999, the County engaged Dawn Sutherland to study its Council and electoral district boundaries. Ms. Sutherland determined the 10-member Council was appropriate based on a review of Antigonish County with "neighbouring" rural municipalities of Guysborough, Inverness, Richmond, Saint Mary's, and Pictou, which found that Antigonish that the number of constituents served by Antigonish Councillors at the time (1,470) was the closest of the six units to the overall average of 1,390 per council member. She also noted that Antigonish was the only municipality in the group that had seen its population grow in the preceding complete census period.⁴

Ms. Sutherland then created five boundary scenarios labelled with colours to assess potential adjustments in consideration of the voter parity criterion, which then only specified that districts should be within $\pm 25\%$ of the average. The blue, red, green, yellow, and purple options did not assess boundaries within the municipality as a whole like our scenarios presented in following **Chapter 4**. They were, instead, proposals to correct variances in specific districts that exceeded the parity criterion. The Blue

⁴ Dawn Sutherland, "Report to the Municipal Boundary Review Committee – Municipality of the County of Antigonish," October 19, 1998, pp. 6-16



Option, for example, adjusted the boundary between Districts 3 and 4, and the Red Option dealt with Districts 7 and 8. The Yellow, Green, and Purple Options were developed to balance Districts 1, 2, and 3. The choice apparently came down to the yellow and purple choices and a dispute arose when Council selected the Yellow Option over a modified version of the Purple Option recommended by Ms. Sutherland.

At the hearing, Councillor Mary MacLellen, the Councillor for District 1, objected to the Yellow Option and advocated for Ms. Sutherland's recommendation. After considering representations from the County's solicitor, other County Councillors, and residents favouring the Yellow Option who generally argued that it better reflected communities of interest, the Board decided in favour of the modified Purple Option.

An important consideration appeared to be evidence that while District 1 barely satisfied the parity criterion at 24.7% below the average of all districts (**Table 3-1**), it had increased its population more than District 2

and appeared to have more potential for further growth. Interestingly, the voter numbers in **Table 3-1** do not sum to 10,530. The correct total is 10,584, which averages 1,58. With 793 eligible voters, District 1 was, in fact, very slightly outside the parity criterion at 25.04%.

Table 3-1 Voters by Polling District, Antigonish County, Modified Purple Option, 2000

Polling District	Eligible Voters, 1997	Variation from Average	
		Number	%
1 Arisaig/Cape George	793	-260	-24.7%
2 Cloverville/Lakeville	1,050	-119	-0.3%
3 St. Joseph's	924	-129	-12.3%
4 Fringe West Area	1,180	87	12.1%
5 Pomquet	1,047	-6	-0.6%
6 St. Andrew's	1,093	40	3.8%
7 Heatherton	791	-262	-24.9%
8 Tracadie/Monastery	1,134	81	7.7%
9 Havre Boucher	1,332	279	26.5%
10 Fringe South Area	1,240	187	17.8%
TOTALS	10,530		
Average	1,053		

Source Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board 2000 (Totals and average from original)

3.2 2006 Boundary Review

By the time of the 2008 boundary review elector numbers had shifted sufficiently that three districts were outside the $\pm 25\%$ parity standard to which they all adhered when their boundaries were approved in 2000. The NSUARB had, furthermore, decided in 2004 that the voter parity criterion would in future be $\pm 10\%$ putting two more districts beyond the standard (**Table 3-2**). As with **Table 3-1**, we have noted an error in the total in **Table 3-2**. The correct total is 1,161 but the difference of two people is not enough to change the average per district.

Interestingly, District 1 did not grow as the Board anticipated in its 2000 decision. In the context of an overall increase in the number of electors by more than 600, District 1 added only one voter and fell behind the average of all districts to 28.8% below average. District 7, which was also close to -25% in 2000, also dropped to -28.8%. District 10, on the other hand, grew from 17.8% to 30.1% above average.



Districts 4 and 6 grew more modestly but moved more moderately outside the new $\pm 10\%$ criterion at 13.5% and 10.9% above the average. When the County applied to maintain its Council size and boundaries in 2007, the Board rejected the application because too many districts were clearly outside

the parity criterion and growth trends suggested the discrepancies would increase in future.⁵

Although the Board returned the application to the Municipality “for reconsideration of the polling district boundaries,” we have not identified a subsequent study by the Municipality to create new boundaries nor have we found any mapping or other documentation of the boundaries employed for the 2008 or 2012 municipal elections. A subsequent NSUARB decision dated August 18, 2008, however, indicates County Council approved alterations to the boundaries of Districts 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8 and the Board approved the changes. The decision does not indicate the number of eligible voters moved by the adjustments listed nor does it contain a table summarizing the variances of electors in the resulting districts from the average of all districts.⁶ Presumably, the changes reduced variances significantly to satisfy the requirements of the Board

Table 3-2 Voters by Polling District, Antigonish County, 2007

Polling District	Eligible Voters, 2004	Variation from Average	
		Number	%
1 Arisaig/Cape George	794	-322	-28.8%
2 Cloverville/Lakeville	1,205	89	8.0%
3 St. Joseph's	1,065	-51	-4.5%
4 Fringe West Area	1,270	154	13.5%
5 Pomquet	1,007	-109	-9.8%
6 St. Andrew's	1,238	122	10.9%
7 Heatherton	794	-322	-28.8%
8 Tracadie/Monastery	1,137	21	1.8%
9 Havre Boucher	1,198	82	7.3%
10 Fringe South Area	1,453	319	30.1%
TOTALS	11,163		
Average	1,116		

Source: Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board 2007 (Totals and average from original)

3.3 2014 Boundary Review

While we have not been able to find any documentation concerning the electoral boundaries used by Antigonish County in 2008 or 2012, it appears changes were made. The 2015 Board decision concerning the County's 2014 application includes a summary of variances based on the County's 2012 enumeration that shows considerably reduced variances among the districts relative to the discrepancies that prevailed in 2007 (Table 3-2, above). Although six of the ten districts fell outside the $\pm 10\%$ parity criterion, all were

⁵ NSUARB, “In the matter of the *Municipal Government Act* and in the matter of an application by the Municipality of The County of Antigonish to confirm the number of councillors and to retain the present boundaries of the polling districts,” September 25, 2007.

⁶ NSUARB, “In the matter of the *Municipal Government Act* and in the matter of an application by the Municipality of The County of Antigonish to confirm the number of councillors and to retain the present boundaries of the polling districts,” August 18, 2008.



Antigonish County Electoral Boundary Review
3 Past Boundary Reviews

within $\pm 10\%$ and $\pm 20\%$ of the average of all districts (**Table 3-3**). None approached the more than 25% discrepancies documented for Districts 1, 7, and 10 in 2007.

The County applied to maintain its Council size and adopt new boundaries that satisfied the $\pm 10\%$ criterion for all districts. The Board once again accepted the Council size proposed based on a similar comparison to neighbouring municipalities as the County presented in the preceding two applications. It also approved the proposed boundary arrangement based on the counts of electors and related variances shown in the last three columns of **Table 3-3**.

Table 3-3 Voters by Polling District, Antigonish County, 2012

District	Eligible Voters 2012	Variance		Voters With Proposed Adjustments	Variance	
		Number	%		Number	%
1 Arisaig/Cape George	928	-187	-16.0%	997	-118	-9.8%
2 Cloverville/Lakeville	1,258	143	13.9%	1,189	74	7.6%
3 St. Joseph's	1,146	31	3.6%	1,146	31	3.6%
4 Fringe West Area	1,089	-26	-1.5%	1,207	92	9.2%
5 Pomquet	1,207	92	9.2%	1,207	92	9.2%
6 St. Andrew's	1,269	154	14.8%	1,164	49	5.3%
7 Heatherton	920	-195	-16.7%	1,038	-77	-6.1%
8 Tracadie/Monastery	939	-176	-15.0%	1,006	-109	-9.0%
9 Havre Boucher	1,090	-25	-1.4%	1,010	-105	-8.6%
10 Fringe South Area	1,308	193	18.4%	1,190	75	7.7%
TOTALS	11,154			11,154		
Average	1,115			1,115		

Source: Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board 2015

3.4 Summary

Although Antigonish County has maintained its Council of ten members without much debate, the determination of district boundaries has been controversial. In 2000, Councillor disputed the boundaries among themselves. In 2007, the NSUARB rejected the County's application because it did not satisfy the parity criterion, which had been significantly tightened between the 2000 and 2007 reviews.

The 2007 outcome reinforced the priority the Board places on voter parity. In 2014, the County gave the issue appropriate attention and ensured all districts satisfied the $\pm 10\%$ standard resulting in acceptance of its application without significant debate. The boundaries adopted at that time have since been employed for the 2016 and 2020 municipal elections.



4 BOUNDARY DELINEATION

Section 10 of the Nova Scotia *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) establishes the key governance parameters for municipalities in the province. The section requires that a municipal council have at least three members and that only “[o]ne councillor shall be elected for each polling district in a county [like the Municipality of the County of Antigonish] or district municipality and in a regional municipality.” In other words, councillors in Antigonish County must be elected from defined geographic districts. Two councillors cannot be elected to represent a single district, nor can councillors be elected at large, both of which are permitted for Nova Scotia towns under the same section of the Act.

4.1 Boundary Criteria

Section 368 (4) of the MGA sets criteria that the NSUARB must consider in establishing the boundaries of polling or electoral districts within municipalities:

In determining the number and boundaries of polling districts the Board shall consider number of electors, relative parity of voting power, population density, community of interest and geographic size.

Following is a summary of Stantec’s interpretation of each criterion and the relative importance we have observed that the NSUARB places on each. Our interpretation is based on our review of past Board decisions and our direct experiences before the Board.

4.1.1 NUMBER OF ELECTORS

The number of electors or eligible voters in individual districts is intertwined with following criteria, particularly voter parity. Certainly, the number of constituents needs to be sufficient to justify the creation of a district and should not be so large that it would be beyond the capacity of a councillor to deal with constituent concerns. The latter issue is however highly debatable given the wide disparity in the number of constituents served by councillors in Nova Scotia. Councillors in Kings County, for example, currently serve an average of 4,951 constituents and Halifax Regional Municipality councillors serve 28,746. Four Kings Councillors or a single HRM Councillor, in other words, serve more population than currently resides in Antigonish County

4.1.2 RELATIVE PARITY OF VOTING POWER

Past NSUARB decisions have typically emphasized “voter parity,” which is easily quantified and assessed. The standard is applied to reflect the basic democratic principle that representation should be in proportion to population, commonly referred to as “rep by pop.” The Board currently requires the number of voters in each polling district to be within $\pm 10\%$ of the average for all polling districts.



Since the early 1990s, the Board has gradually tightened this standard to the present level. At one time, it was only necessary for districts to be within $\pm 33\%$ of the average and, until 2004, $\pm 25\%$ was considered sufficient as discussed in our summary of past decisions concerning Antigonish County in previous **Chapter 4**. The $\pm 10\%$ criterion has been applied in boundary reviews since the 2006 round. Nearly all boundary applications to the NSUARB that we have reviewed contain a table documenting the number of electors in each district within the municipality in question with the variance of each from the average. The Board is usually sympathetic to small variations above or below its criterion but requires a written justification to consider any significant discrepancy, with a larger proposed variance being viewed as a greater burden on the municipal unit to justify. As our discussion of the Board's decisions concerning applications in 2007 and 2008 in **Section 3.2**, above, demonstrates, the Board will reject applications that do not satisfactorily address its parity standard.

4.1.3 POPULATION DENSITY

The NSUARB is also mindful of population density and geographic area of each polling district. In sparsely populated areas, the Board recognizes that it may be difficult to achieve relative voter parity (i.e., to keep the number of electors in each district within $\pm 10\%$ of the average of districts) without creating an extensive area in which disparate interests may be combined and which may be unreasonable for a councillor to serve. In many rural municipalities, for example, it is necessary to have at least one larger district to encompass lightly populated areas and the Board has tended to accept lower populations in such districts recognizing that meeting the parity standard would require coverage of an excessive land area as discussed further under **Subsection 4.1.5**, below.

4.1.4 COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

The second most cited reason after geographic size, in our experience, for allowing districts to vary beyond the Board standard is community of interest, as it is usually desirable to represent communities of interest within a single district. Communities of interest may be racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic, or geographic groups. We use communities defined for the Nova Scotia Civic Address File (NSCAF) as the basic building blocks for the creation of municipal electoral districts. We feel the NSCAF communities are well-recognized by the public as identifiers of community geographies and build our initial boundary proposals from undivided NSCAF communities to respect geographically defined interests.

Districts do not, however, normally represent a specific community of interest. They usually contain several. It is nevertheless considered desirable to keep identifiable, geographically defined interests together in a single district and not divide them among two or more districts where their influence may be diluted or distorted. Larger communities that have significantly more electors than the average district may have to be divided to maintain voter parity. Smaller communities may also have to be divided to achieve parity or address other criteria, but it is a necessary trade-off rather than a desirable outcome.



4.1.5 GEOGRAPHIC SIZE

The main issue in considering the geographic size or land area of a district is ensuring a cohesive territory and a manageable area for the serving councillor. As noted, in relation to population density, above, the NSUARB has been willing to approve electoral districts that fall short of the -10% voter parity standard where sparse populations require the excessive area to capture the necessary number of electors. The situation is common in many rural municipalities where population is concentrated on a coastline or along a highway corridor and only small numbers are found in residual inland or interior areas.

No area existing electoral district in Antigonish County, however, is particularly extensive relative to other districts in the County. District 1 is presently the largest district with an area of 314 km² or 7.6% larger than the next largest district, District 3, which has 290 km². District 6 is also close with 263 km² or 16.2% smaller than District 1. Elsewhere in the province we have observed many districts with land areas that exceed 500 km². In Inverness County, for example, the average district is more than twice the size of Antigonish County's District 1 and Victoria County, the District of Digby, and Cumberland County all have average district sizes that are greater than the 314 km² area of District 1 (see **Figure 2-1a**, above).

4.2 Preliminary Boundary Scenarios

For discussion with Council, we have developed scenarios for eight, nine, and ten districts, which are two of the three council sizes that received the most support in responses to Question 7 of the Council Size Survey. Councillor interviews also appeared to support continuing with ten districts or reducing Council to eight districts.

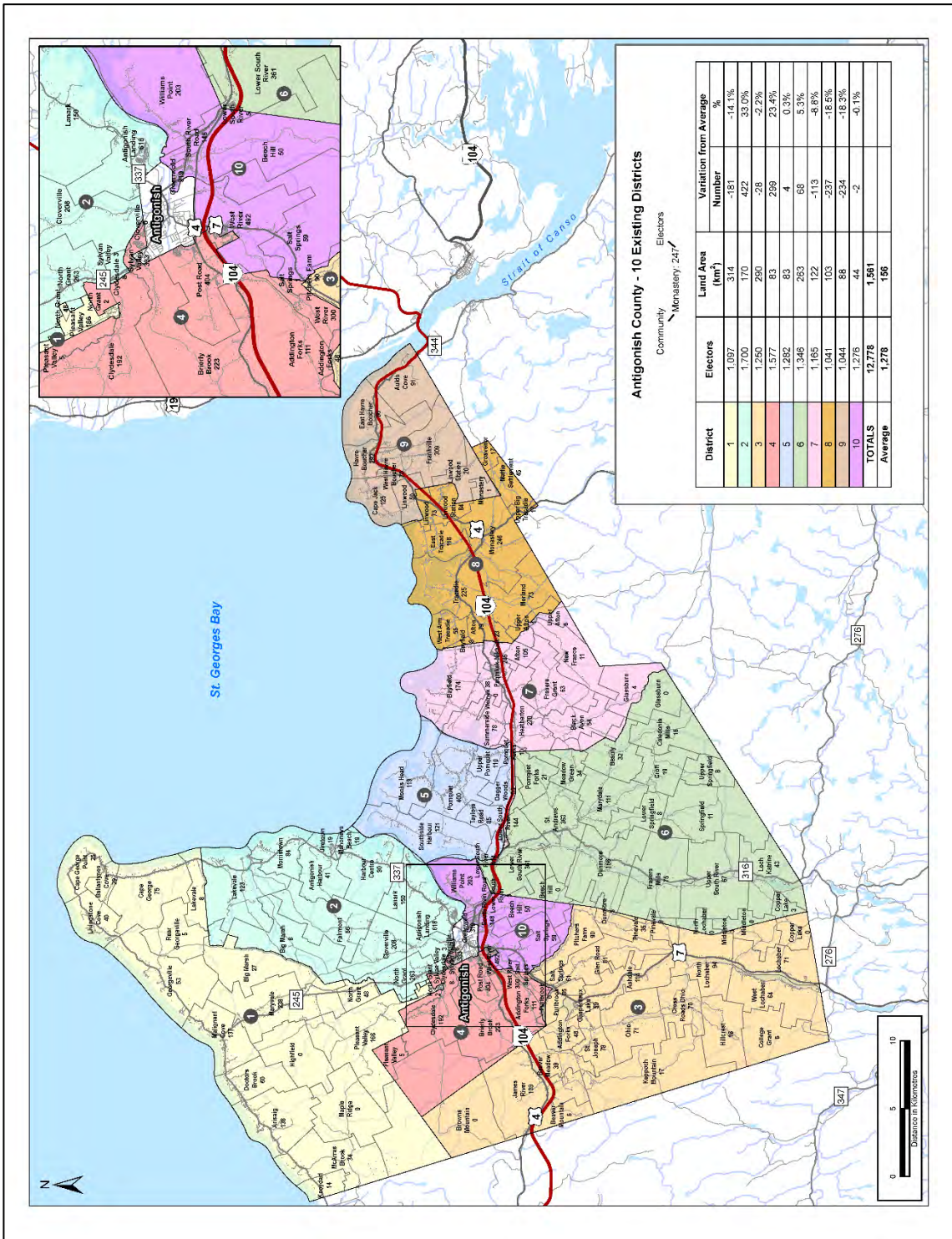
Stantec used ArcGIS Pro's Build Balanced Zones tool to create the potential boundary configurations. The districts are comprised of communities defined by the Province for the Nova Scotia Civic Address File (NSCAF) without dividing any of those communities and have been designed to satisfy NSUARB criteria, particularly the requirement that the number of electors in each district should be within $\pm 10\%$ of the average of all districts.

We have provided geographic names for each proposed district. The names are either names historically and currently used to label electoral districts in Antigonish County as shown in **Figure 4-1** depicting and listing the County's current ten districts or, in the preliminary scenarios presented below, adaptations of those identifiers where proposed changes make alternative labels more appropriate. They are provided to help readers locate each district and would not have an official importance. Refinement of the boundaries to account for geographic features will be undertaken in Phase 2 of the Review process as necessary.

Figure 4-1 illustrates the current district arrangement. The average area of each district is 156 square kilometres and the average number of electors is 1,278 per district. Current Districts 1, 2, 4, 8 and 9 are outside the $\pm 10\%$ parity criterion. Districts 2 and 4, which both abut the northern limits of the Town of Antigonish, have the largest variances from the average at 33.0% and 23.4% above the average, respectively.



Figure 4-1 Current Electoral Districts and NSCAF Communities, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting

4.2.1 TEN-DISTRICT SCENARIOS

Continuation with ten council members was strongly favoured by survey respondents. With ten council members, the average district will cover 156 km² and have an average of 1,278 electors per district.

Given the clear majority support for a 10-member Council, we have developed three scenarios for ten districts that Council may wish to consider. The first option, portrayed in **Figure 4-2**, was generated by the Build Balanced Zones tool using NSCAF communities with the objective of minimizing variance among the districts. The largest district by area is District 10, which is 379 km². All districts satisfy the $\pm 10\%$ parity criterion. District 10 has the largest variance at 7.7% below the average of all districts. All remaining districts are within $\pm 5\%$.

Stantec GIS staff created two further variations with ten electoral districts. The first alternative addressed the issue raised by some Councillors of keeping Acadian communities together. Discussions with municipal staff led us to understand that Pomquet is the primary Acadian centre in the county, so we sought to create a district in which Pomquet was combined with Tracadie and, if possible, Havre Boucher. We quickly determined that it was not feasible to put all three communities together. While their combined population of 1,356 would be suitable for a district, it is impossible to create a contiguous Acadian area without including intervening non-Acadian communities such as Bayfield (182 electors) Cape Jack (125 electors), which would push the population of the district well past 10% more than the 1,278 average number of electors per district.

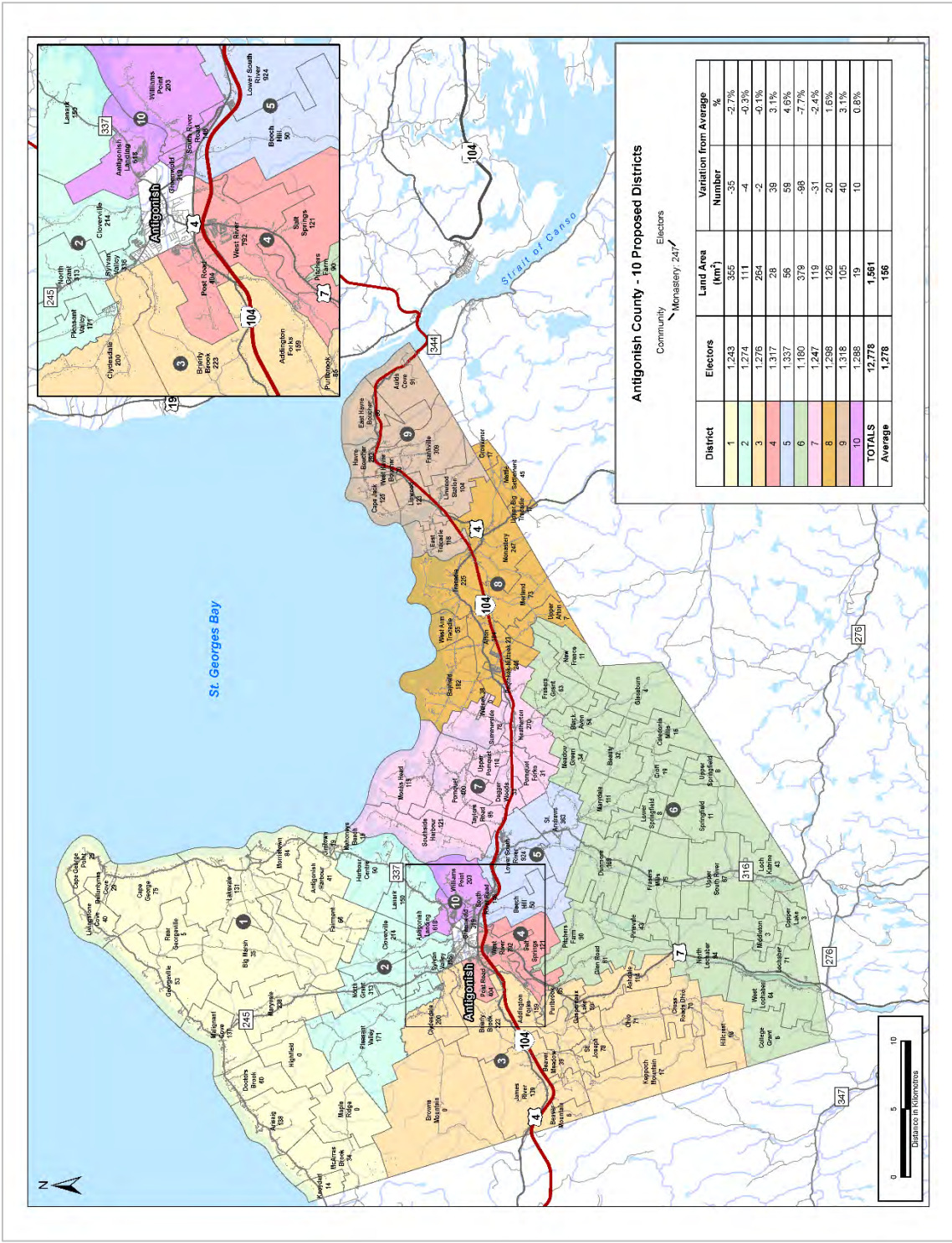
We consequently focused on combining only Pomquet and Tracadie and created the scenario portrayed in **Figure 4-3**. The approach puts Pomquet and Tracadie together in proposed District 7 on the north side of Highway 104. Havre Boucher is the dominant community in proposed District 8, which incorporates most of the communities in current District 9. The arrangement works very well in terms of parity with no district more than 4.0% from the average number of electors for all districts.

The third scenario considered, as shown in **Figure 4-4**, involved setting the goal of meeting the parity standard while shifting as few communities as possible from the County's current electoral boundary arrangement. The arrangement maintains the east-west division between Districts 1 and 2 on Cape George but could not avoid the creation of an essentially new and separate District 10 featuring Antigonish Landing and Williams Point immediately to the north and east of the Town of Antigonish or a similarly new District 5 containing South River Road, Beech Hill, and Lower South River to the south and east. Current District 7 is also substantially different with communities currently in District 5 combined with communities from the northern half of current District 7 including Summerside, the Paqtnkek-Niktuek 23 Reserve, and Heatherton. Bayfield from current District 7 is added to District 8 and communities farther south in District 7 are proposed to augment proposed District 10. Remaining districts, nevertheless, have recognizable equivalents with proposed District 3 strongly resembling existing District 3, proposed District 6 similar to current District 6, and Districts 8 and 9 only moderately changed.



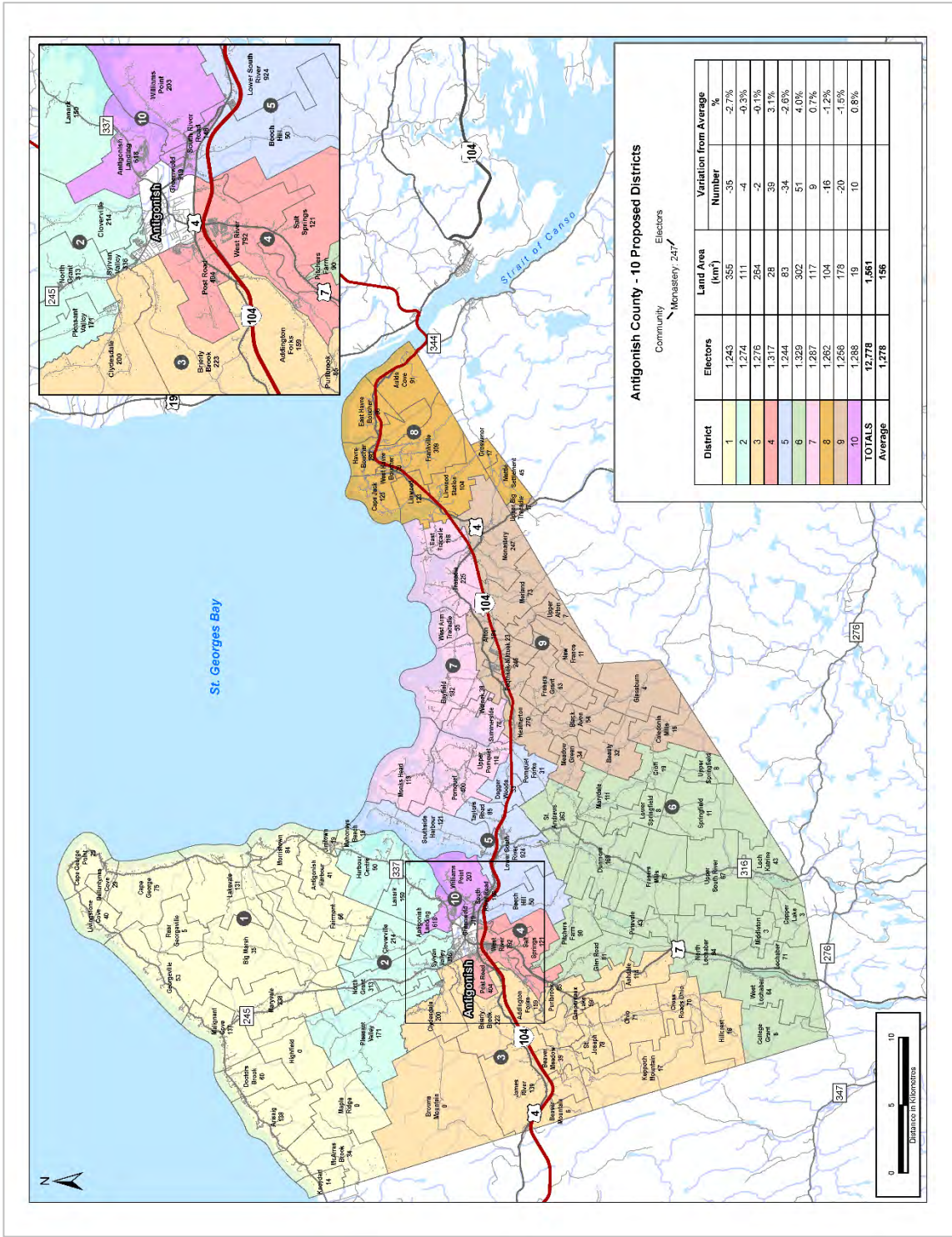
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4 Boundary Delineation

Figure 4-2 Proposed Ten Electoral Districts, Antigonish County, 2023



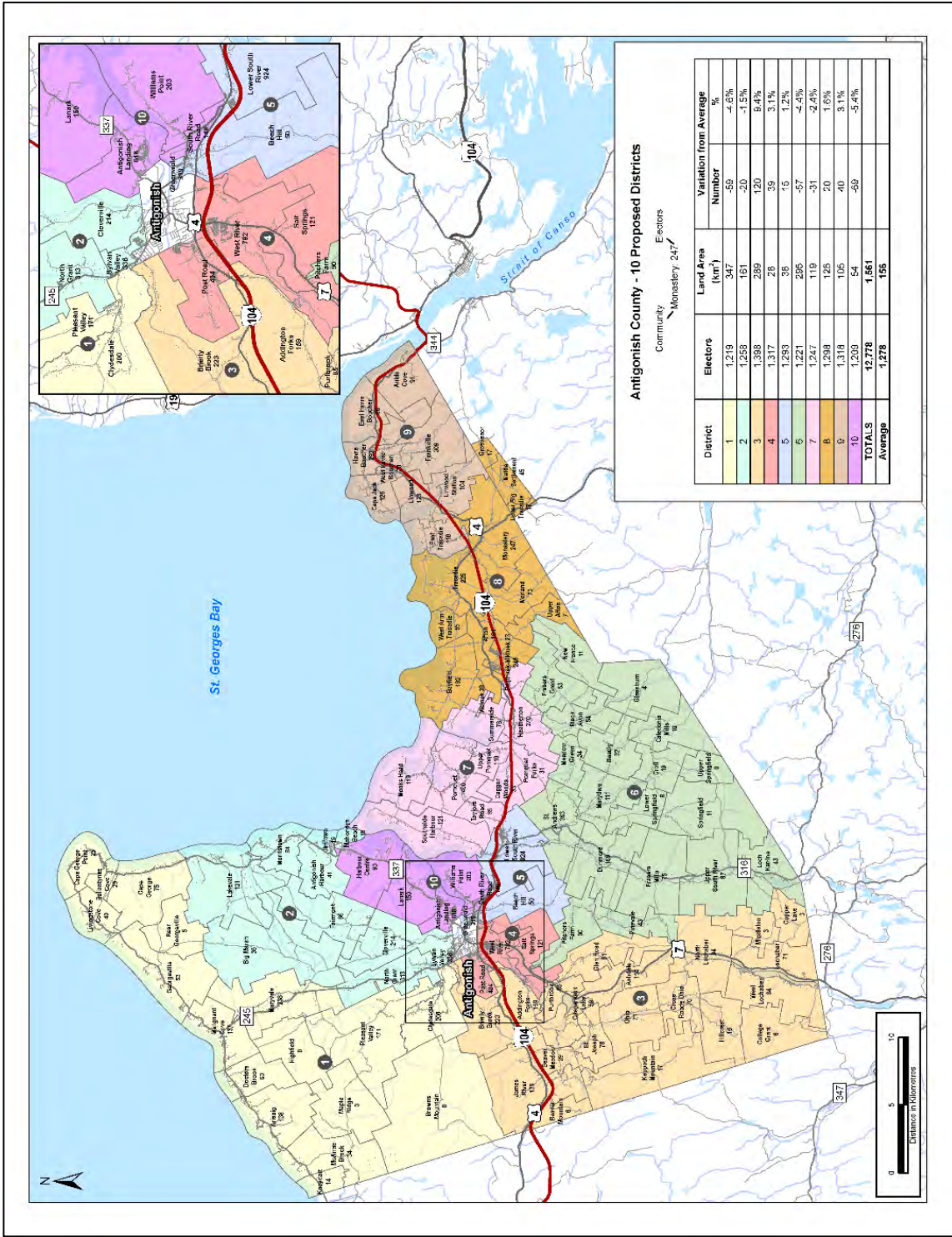
Source: Stantec Consulting

Figure 4-3 Proposed Ten Electoral Districts, Adjusted for Acadian Communities, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting

Figure 4-4 Proposed Ten Electoral Districts, Minimum Adjustment, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting



All districts in the proposed arrangement meet the $\pm 10\%$ parity criterion, although the total absolute value of all variances increases from 26.0 percentage points to 36.7 percentage points.

4.2.2 EIGHT-DISTRICT SCENARIO

Many Council members suggested that reducing Council to eight might be considered, recognizing that eight is roughly the average for rural municipal councils in the province. The number was also tied with twelve as the second preferred Council size among respondents to our online survey.

With eight districts, the average district size will increase to 195 km². Proposed District 1 is the largest area among the eight districts we have defined (**Figure 4-5**). At 439 km², the District is two and a quarter times the size of the average district and more than 70% larger than proposed District 3, the second largest district created in the eight-district scenario.

Like all three ten-district options, the eight-district arrangement fits comfortably within $\pm 10\%$ of the average number of electors per district (1,597). The largest variation from the average is for proposed District 7, which is -9.1% from the average. Remaining districts range from -6.0% to 6.3%.

Proposed Districts 1, 2, and 3 to the west of Antigonish are similar to current Districts 1, 2, and 3. Districts 7 and 8 are largely formed from current Districts 7, 8, and 9, with proposed District 8 taking communities from the eastern portion of existing District 8 and proposed District 7 combining the balance of current District 8 with current District 7. Substantial changes are necessary for Districts 4, 5, and 6 in the central part of the County. District 4 combines areas from the east of current District 3 and the west of current District 6; District 5 is comprised of Lower South River at the northern end of current District 6 with Beech Hill and Williams Point in existing District 10; and proposed District 6 combines the central area of current District 6 with all communities comprising current District 5.

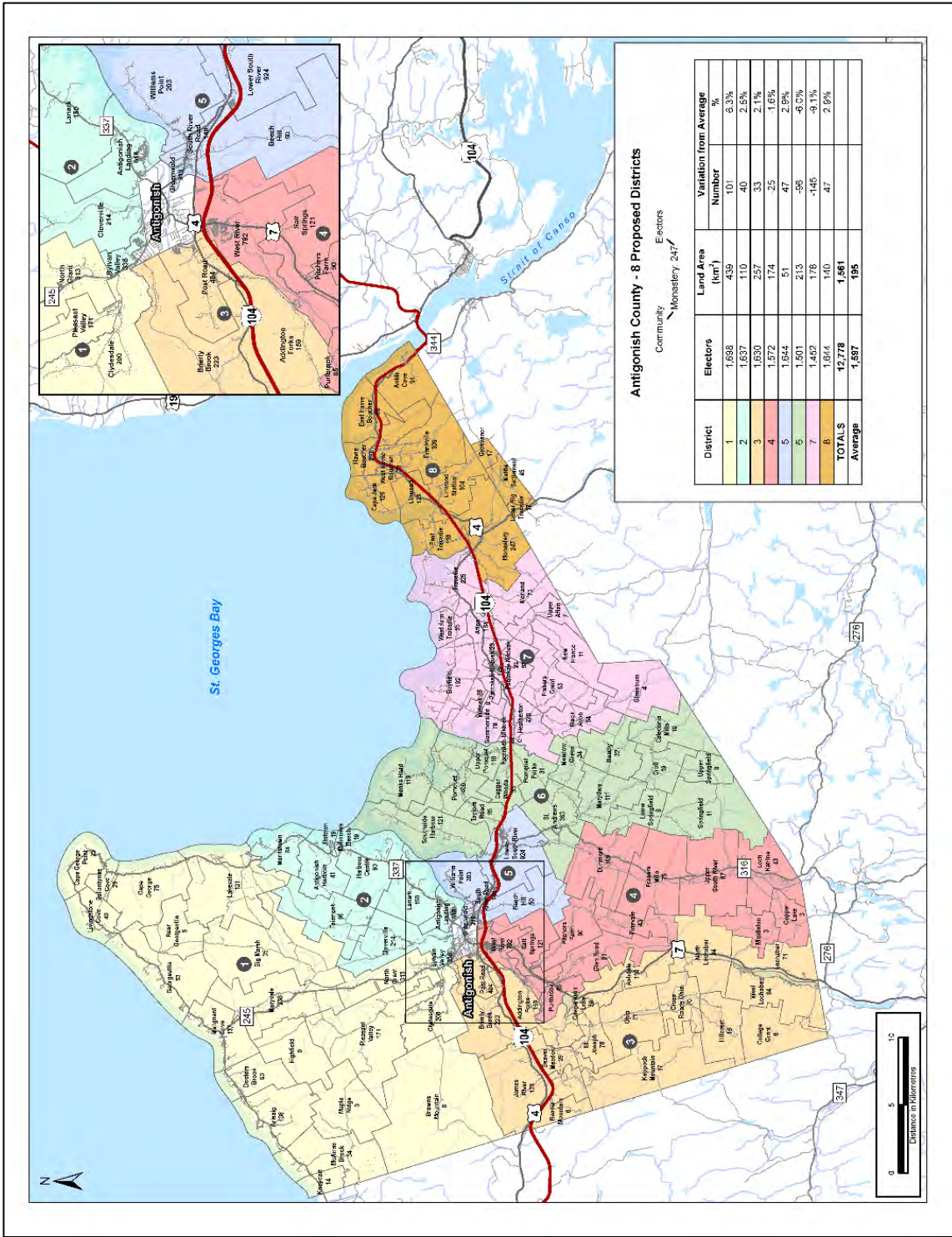
4.2.3 NINE-DISTRICT SCENARIO

The nine-district arrangement was developed at the request of municipal staff to assess a more modest reduction in Council size than eight. Nine districts received the sixth highest level of support from respondents to the Council Size Survey with 4.2% of respondents favouring it. The configuration generated for nine districts (**Figure 4-6**) varies considerably from the ten and eight district arrangements shown in **Figures 4-2, 4-4, and 4-5**, above. Its proposed District 4 is similar to the proposed Acadian district encompassing Pomquet and Tracadie in the Acadian arrangement (**Figure 4-3**, above), although it excludes East Tracadie. In general, the districts east of Antigonish are similar to the Acadian arrangement, but, other than proposed District 1, there are also substantial differences to the west.

The arrangement, again, satisfies the parity standard with the largest variation from the average number of electors being in District 7, which has 7.1% more electors than the average. Proposed Districts 1 and 6 have the largest areas at 373 and 376 km², respectively, both roughly 85% bigger than District 9, which is the third largest at 203 km².

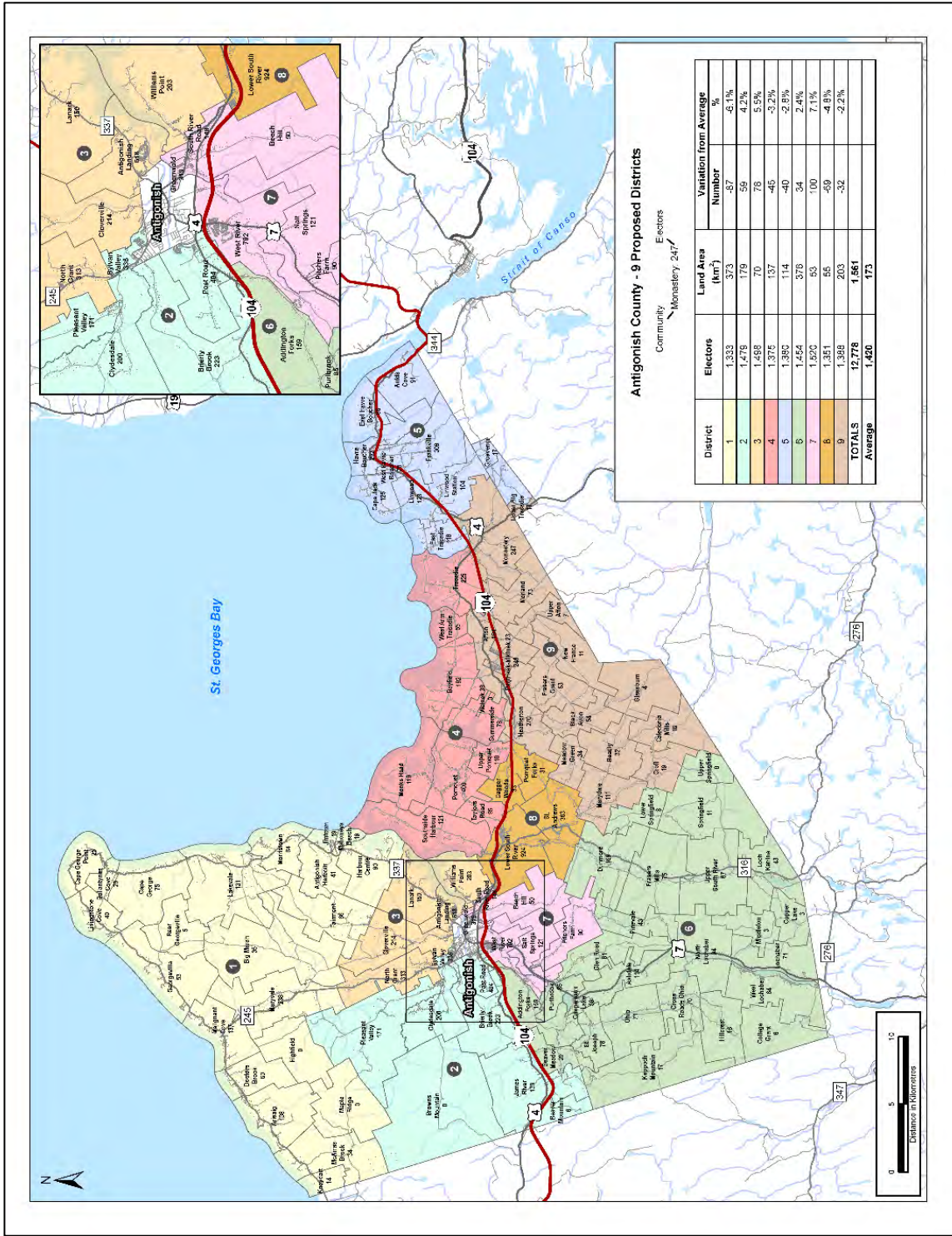


Figure 4-5 Proposed Eight Electoral Districts, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting

Figure 4-6 Proposed Nine Electoral Districts, Antigonish County, 2023



Source: Stantec Consulting



4.3 Summary and Recommendation

For Phase 2 of the Electoral Boundary Review, we are required to take appropriate boundary options to the public for review and feedback. To focus public discussion, scenarios presented should be reduced to realistic and representative options. If a boundary feature in a potentially desirable option can be improved at this time, it would also be advisable to explore potential adjustments.

4.3.1 SUMMARY

The foregoing scenarios address potential boundary arrangements for two of the three council sizes that received the most support from respondents to the Council Size Survey as well as for a nine-district arrangement. As noted above, the $\pm 10\%$ parity standard was a leading consideration in creating the proposed arrangements. The standard is met by all districts in all the scenarios presented above.

For convenience in our remaining discussion, we have designated the five scenarios as follows:

- **Scenario 1** – Initial Ten-District Option
- **Scenario 2** – Acadian Adjusted Ten-District Option
- **Scenario 3** – Minimum Adjusted Ten-District Option
- **Scenario 4** – Eight-District Option
- **Scenario 5** – Nine-district Option

In considering these options, it is impossible to ignore the very strong endorsement of ten districts by respondents to our Council Size Survey. Among the three ten-district options, we favour Scenario 3, given it comfortably meets the parity criterion and there is definite merit in minimizing the movement of communities between districts. A secondary issue, depending on the views of Council members is the importance attached to consolidating the Acadian communities of Pomquet and Tracadie in the same district as we have done in Scenario 2.

A more critical consideration, in our opinion, is whether to offer the public options for three different council sizes (i.e., Scenarios 4, 5, and 6 and one of Scenarios 1, 2, and 3) or a choice among options that vary boundaries for ten districts. Assessing the choice in consideration of input to date, we would note that only 13 survey respondents favoured eight Council members and another 13 favoured twelve, while just eight supported nine, in comparison to 113 who preferred ten.

We believe at least two options should be presented to the public but no more than three. Our first choice would be Scenario 3 for ten districts, which will involve the least change to the current electoral boundary framework. Our second choice would be the eight-district arrangement in Scenario 4, which would align the County's Council size with the average for Nova Scotia rural municipalities. Our third pick would be to Scenario 3 if Council feels there would be benefits in bringing the Acadian communities together in a



single district. In our opinion, Scenario 1 provides no benefits relative to Scenario 3, other than a reduction in the variation of electors among districts that is not critical considering all five scenarios meet the NSUARB's parity standard. The twelve-district arrangement has the same public support as Scenario 4; however, it was not referenced by Council members during our interviews and would move the County away from the Provincial average for rural municipal councils.

4.3.2 RECOMMENDATION

While all the scenarios presented in the preceding section meet the parity standard, we believe the options should be narrowed to two or three for presentation to the public. Scenarios for ten Council members are strongly favoured by the public. Councillors interviewed raised no issues with the functioning of the current Council, although most acknowledged eight or nine members would be closer to the provincial average and expressed a willingness to consider a moderate reduction in council size on that basis.

As we have stated, we consider Scenario 3 the most appropriate arrangement for ten districts and the eight-district arrangement in Scenario 4 the best alternative. Scenario 2 bringing Pomquet and Tracadie together in the same district offers an alternative for ten districts if Council believes it will bring benefits to the Acadian population. We would like to note, however, that a concern with presenting boundary options for the same council size is the potential to split support for that size and confuse decision-making.

In the interest of focusing further discussion, **we recommend, therefore, taking Scenario 3 for ten districts along with Scenario 4 for eight districts as depicted above, to the public for consideration in Phase 2 of this Electoral Boundary Review.**

4.3.3 NEXT STEPS

In the second phase of the Electoral Boundaries Review, we will conduct a second online survey that will ask respondents for their preference between the scenarios approved by Council, and provide an opportunity for respondents to identify any concerns with the boundaries of the proposed districts. We will also hold three public meetings as described in **Section 1.3, above**, subject to discussions with municipal staff and Council. At the meetings, we will present information on the review process, including survey responses and solicit feedback from attendees.

Following the second round of public consultation, Stantec will make any adjustments to the scenarios justified by input through the survey and/or the public meetings. We will then prepare a Council Size and Boundaries Report summarizing the Phase 2 consultation processes and recommending a preferred Council size with the related district boundaries arrangement. As with all recommendations to a municipal council, Antigonish County Council may accept or reject Stantec's recommendation or modify the recommendation. Whatever course of action County Council selects, the Municipality is obliged to apply to the NSUARB by year's end confirming or altering its Council size and boundary arrangements. The Board will then consider Antigonish's application and either approve it, modify it, or reject it.



APPENDIX A COUNCIL SIZE SURVEY RESULTS



Antigonish County Electoral Boundary Review

<p>1</p>	<p>How many of the last three Antigonish County elections have you voted in?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Elections</th> <th>Number</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2012</td> <td>3</td> <td>1.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>4</td> <td>1.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>29</td> <td>14.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016, 2012</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020, 2012</td> <td>3</td> <td>1.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020, 2016</td> <td>18</td> <td>9.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020, 2016, 2012</td> <td>101</td> <td>52.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>None</td> <td>22</td> <td>9.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unsure</td> <td>17</td> <td>8.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>198</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No response</td> <td>3</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Elections	Number	%	2012	3	1.7%	2016	4	1.7%	2020	29	14.4%	2016, 2012	1	0.6%	2020, 2012	3	1.7%	2020, 2016	18	9.4%	2020, 2016, 2012	101	52.5%	None	22	9.4%	Unsure	17	8.8%	TOTAL	198	100.0%	No response	3					
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Antigonish County Electoral Boundary Review

<p>6</p>	<p>Do you think the number of elected representatives influences Council or municipal operations in any way?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Number</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>107</td> <td>81.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>25</td> <td>18.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prefer not to answer</td> <td>0</td> <td>0.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>132</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No response</td> <td>51</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Number	%	Yes	107	81.1%	No	25	18.9%	Prefer not to answer	0	0.0%	TOTAL	132	100.0%	No response	51		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Number</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>115</td> <td>80.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>28</td> <td>19.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prefer not to answer</td> <td>0</td> <td>0.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Number	%	Yes	115	80.4%	No	28	19.6%	Prefer not to answer	0	0.0%																																																															
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<p>11</p>	<p>Do you have any concerns with the boundaries of the electoral district in which you currently live?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Number</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>116</td> <td>75.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>30</td> <td>19.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>4</td> <td>2.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Don't know</td> <td>3</td> <td>2.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>153</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No response</td> <td>47</td> <td>30.7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Number	%	No	116	75.8%	Yes	30	19.6%	Other	4	2.6%	Don't know	3	2.0%	TOTAL	153	100.0%	No response	47	30.7%	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Number</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>116</td> <td>75.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>30</td> <td>19.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>4</td> <td>2.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Don't know</td> <td>3</td> <td>2.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Number	%	No	116	75.8%	Yes	30	19.6%	Other	4	2.6%	Don't know	3	2.0%																														
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