

Ward subdivisions

I believe that single-member wards are most appropriate for the City of Boroondara. This system has served the community well for over 20 years.

There have been some good arguments presented in the VEC Preliminary Report in favour of moving to a multi-member ward system. However, I still believe that the single-member system is the best way for the system to serve the interest of Boroondara's citizens for the reasons outlined below.

Among the principal reasons for the current single-member system are:

- **Boroondara is different to many other councils:** unlike many other municipalities, Boroondara has many neighbourhood centres (or 'villages'). Small but relatively cohesive local communities form around these nodes, which provide retail, recreational and other facilities to nearby residents. These have been around for hundreds of years and are highly valued. Having smaller wards means that these communities of interest are more accurately represented at a political level. Multi-member wards would cover much larger areas and pull together areas that have little in common.
- **Local representation:** smaller electoral units mean closer contact with a local councillor, who is more likely to live locally. Boroondara has a strong history of councillors living in their own wards – something that cannot be said for many others in Melbourne. Arguments presented in some submissions that multi-member wards would offer "greater diversity of representation" are without evidence. Since its creation, Boroondara has not been any more or less diverse than any other municipality in Melbourne overall. For example, I was elected as one of the youngest councillors in Australia in 2012 under the current single-member system. Boroondara has had other councillors under the age of 30, has had many councillors born overseas and currently has an equal number of male and female members. There has been no evidence presented that Boroondara is not a representative council, nor that multi-member wards would address any apparent problem.
- **Greater accountability:** together with local representation, having a single representative responsible for a defined geographic area achieves several aims. It is easier for voters to identify their local councillor, establishes a single point of contact for voters and eliminates confusion over councillor responsibilities over the same area.
- **Argumentum ad Populum is not a reason to change:** many previous submissions cite the fact that many other councils in Melbourne have multi-member wards in place. This in itself is not a reason to change Boroondara. Not only is Boroondara fundamentally different to other municipalities (as outlined in previous points), but just because other people have something does not mean that others should have it too.

I would note that during my four years serving as a councillor, not one constituent ever expressed a desire to abolish the present single-member system. Indeed, there were several who showed support for this arrangement for the reasons outlined above.

Comment at public hearing

I would like to present at a public hearing only if one is held. If I am the only one requesting to speak, I would not want a hearing to be held just for myself.

Summary

The VEC's Preliminary Report is well-written and considered. The discussion of the relative merits and drawbacks of each option shows that a lot of thought has been put into this process. However, as outlined above, I still disagree with the overall direction of the report, which seems to be leaning towards multi-member wards.

As a former councillor of Boroondara and a resident of North Balwyn for over 19 years, I feel that I have relevant experience and knowledge in the functional and spatial characteristics of the municipality.

It is vital that local government presents the most effective representation. Being the level of government 'closest to the people', changing a system that has operated well for over 20 years should require a strong and unequivocal case for change. I don't believe that this bar has been met.

There has not been any significant change since the 2008 VEC report that presents a compelling case to move to a multi-member, unsubdivided or other ward system.

As a result, I still support the status quo. If one of the options presented in the Preliminary Report must be chosen, I support Option C. I do not support either Options A or B.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours faithfully,

Philip Mallis