

PRELIMINARY
SUBMISSION TO LOCAL COUNCIL REPRESENTATION REVIEW
BOROONDARA CITY COUNCIL

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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the VEC's Local Council Representation Review for the Boroondara City Council, its structure, number of councillors, electoral structures and communities of interest. I note that the scope of the review does not include external boundaries of the Council or the vote counting system (ie preferential or proportional) that is used in the preferred structure. I further note that in the Submission Guide, the following statement occurs "the Victorian Electoral Commission is committed to the principle of **one vote, one value** which is enshrined in the *Local Government Act 1989*", yet that principle is outside the scope of the review.

This submission is in six parts

1. Background

Boroondara City Council in its present form emanated from the amalgamation of a number of former cities in 1994. Geographically, it has many natural resources including the Yarra River, Gardiners Creek. Notable features of the City include its plethora of parklands, sporting facilities, schools, communities of interest and tree lined streets. The City has a diverse population with a high proportion of residents born overseas.

2. Current Structure of the City Council

Currently the City Council consists of ten single wards each with its own elected Councillor. What appears to be unique in the City structure is that each ward has a mix of independent and state schools, open space, sporting facilities and good access to transport links, both east-west and north-south. Strong communities of interest exist in many of the wards. These appear to result from the demographics within the individual wards and currently are supported and fostered by the individual Councillors.

3. Number of Councillors

The current number of **ten councillors** for Boroondara City Councils works well and in my view should be retained into the future. I note that there is no cost benefit analysis relating to either increasing or decreasing the numbers of councillors or changing the structure of the existing City Council.

4. Single or Multi-Member Wards

It is my view as a resident and home owner in Boroondara that **single-member wards** are the most effective means of local government. The VEC Local Council Submission Guide (The Guide) quotes from the 2015 subdivision review and states "that single councillor wards are less able to absorb population change than other electoral structures, particularly where growth within a local council area is uneven and ward enrolments are changing at different rates". The Guide only states that "three of Boroondara City Council Wards have enrolments deviating outside the acceptable tolerance." An argument supporting this statement is lacking. Where is the evidence for this statement? The Guide does not present a compelling case for to shift from the single-member ward system. The natural boundaries of the wards, the different demographics in each of the wards has led to an effective structure for the complex Boroondara City Council.

The Guide presents a shallow case for single councillor wards. There are many advantages that have not been delineated in the document. These include but are not limited to

- i. Local councillors have an increased knowledge and understanding of the local issues of their ward and the needs of its people, facilities and communities of interest;
- ii. Local councillors in single-member wards are more accessible;
- iii. Local councillors provide one primary point of contact for residents in the ward;

- iv. Local councillors in single member wards are more accountable than their counterparts in non-sub-divided municipalities or cities;
- v. There is less likelihood of gaps or duplication occurring through poor or sectional communication in multi-councillor wards;
- vi. Single-member wards provide a better representation for residents than multi Councillor wards. Sectional interests and voting groups are less likely to occur in single Councillor wards structures.
- vii. Different wards by virtue of their different demographics have differing needs. A local councillor in a single ward ensures that these differences are recognised and supported.

5. Preferred Structure

It is my view that the preferred structure for Boroondara City Council is a 10 ward system with a single elected Councillor for each ward.

The current electoral requirements for a single Councillor ward structure is preferential voting. While a discussion of the merits and faults of this system is outside the scope of this review, preferential voting has been used at Local Government level, state and federal lower house levels for many years.

The Guide notes that according to the Local Government Act 1989 the method of vote counting ie preferential or proportional is determined by the structure of the Council. It is noted also that the Guide suggests that proportional voting "assists the election of candidates from large minorities". Therefore, the structure of the Boroondara City Council that is adopted determines the voting system. Is it the role of the VEC to promote one type of voting system over another and by this means recommend a specific structure? Proportional voting at both State and Federal levels have resulted in candidates being elected who represent issues with little support and who have received very few votes.

6. Conclusion

I believe that the current structure of Boroondara City Council serves the residents and the community well.

I support a 10 ward single councillor system for Boroondara City Council.

