Final Report
2015 Whittlesea City Council
Subdivision Review

Wednesday 11 November 2015
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1 Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends adjustments to the boundaries of the following wards within Whittlesea City Council:

- North Ward
- South East Ward

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Local Government Act 1989.

Recommended ward boundaries are illustrated in the map in Appendix 2.
2 Review background

2.1 Legislative basis

The Local Government Act 1989 (the Act) requires the VEC to conduct a subdivision review to ensure the equitable representation of all voters in a municipality.

A subdivision review considers adjustments to ward boundaries so that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for the whole municipality. This is known as the ‘equality requirement’.

As population changes affect voter numbers and distribution in subdivided municipalities, one or more wards may be unlikely to meet this requirement at the next general election. A subdivision review considers adjustments to existing ward boundaries so the voter-to-councillor ratio in all wards meets the equality requirement.

Subdivision reviews only apply to subdivided councils:

- that are not scheduled for an electoral representation review before the next general election and
- where, two years before the council is to hold a general election, the VEC considers one or more wards are unlikely to meet the equality requirement at the time of the next general election.

The VEC notified the Minister for Local Government that North Ward was unlikely to meet the equality requirement at the 2016 general election. The Minister then advised the VEC that a subdivision review of Whittlesea City Council was required before the general election.

2.2 Scope

A subdivision review only considers the location of ward boundaries. A subdivision review cannot consider changes to the number of councillors or wards. These changes are considered in a council’s periodic electoral representation review.

The next scheduled representation review for Whittlesea City Council will be held before the 2024 general election. An earlier review may take place if required.

A subdivision review also cannot:

- change the external boundaries of the municipality
- divide municipalities or
- amalgamate municipalities.
These changes can only be made by an Order in Council.

2.3 The VEC’s approach

Developing recommended changes

Recommended changes to ward boundaries are modelled using both population growth data provided by .id (Informed Decisions) Pty Ltd¹ and voter statistics prepared by the VEC.

Where possible, models are developed using a ‘minimal change’ approach, so recommended changes affect as few voters as possible.

The VEC also considers the following factors in developing its recommendation:

• relevant issues identified in the council’s last representation review
• communities of interest
• geographic features
• means of transport and traffic routes and
• the likelihood of population changes before the next election.

Public involvement

Public input is accepted by the VEC via:

• written submissions to the subdivision review preliminary report and
• a public hearing for people to speak about their submission.

Submissions are an important part of the process, but are not the only consideration during a review. The VEC ensures its recommendations are in compliance with the Act and are formed through careful consideration of public input, independent research, and analysis of all relevant factors.

¹ .id is a company specialising in population and demographic analysis that builds suburb-level demographic information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.
3 Current review

3.1 Council background

Council profile
Located on the northern fringe of the Melbourne metropolitan area, the City of Whittlesea is one of the largest municipalities in Victoria in terms of population, with an estimated residential population of 186,368 in 2014. The City is the third fastest growing municipality in Victoria in percentage terms, and the third largest growing municipality in terms of raw numbers. The population is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.5 per cent between 2011 and 2031, and to reach 316,919 by 2031. At 490 square kilometres, the City of Whittlesea is also geographically large, stretching from long established suburbs such as Thomastown and Bundoora across farmland to the forests of the Great Dividing Range.

As might be expected in such a fast growing municipality, the City of Whittlesea has a lower median age (34 years) than Greater Melbourne as a whole (36 years), and a greater proportion of couples with children. The municipality has high rates of cultural and linguistic diversity; almost half of the population speak a language other than English at home, and more than 30 per cent were born overseas. Whittlesea has a lower median weekly household income ($1,275) than Greater Melbourne ($1,333), and some parts of the municipality experience high levels of disadvantage.²

Broadly, the City of Whittlesea falls into three main zones:

1. In the south are established industrial suburbs around Lalor and Thomastown, characterised by a stable population, an older age profile, high proportions of residents who speak languages other than English, and a degree of social disadvantage.

2. Immediately to the north is the growth belt, stretching from Epping North to Doreen, which has a younger age profile and higher incomes, lower unemployment and fewer residents who speak languages other than English.

3. The northern two-thirds of the municipality is the rural area, including the township of Whittlesea and localities such as Humevale, Eden Park and Yan Yean. Its population overwhelmingly speaks English only, and its age and income distributions are close to the metropolitan average. The rural area features intensive farming, cattle grazing, forests

and Melbourne’s first reservoir. Residential development is starting to spread along the western side of the municipality through Wollert, Donnybrook and Beveridge.

**Electoral structure**

Whittlesea City Council currently consists of 11 councillors, elected from two four-councillor wards and one three-councillor ward. The 2011–12 representation review of the municipality recommended an increase from nine to 11 councillors, in light of the municipality’s rapid and continuing growth with associated development and planning pressures, its social diversity, and the level of disadvantage in parts of the municipality. Two wards were increased from three to four councillors; their names were changed to better reflect their geographic location (from ‘East Ward’ and ‘West Ward’ to ‘South East Ward’ and ‘South West Ward’); and ward boundaries were modified.

Diagram 1 illustrates this structure and voter statistics by ward as at 13 July 2015.

*Diagram 1: Whittlesea City Council electoral structure and voter statistics.*
**Voter numbers**

Enrolment for North Ward is more than 10 per cent above the average for the municipality. Consequently, voters have to be transferred out of North Ward so that the ward’s enrolment will be within the 10 per cent tolerance at the 2016 general election.

### 3.2 Subdivision review preliminary report

The VEC’s subdivision review of Whittlesea City Council commenced with the release of a preliminary report on Tuesday 15 September. The report contained proposed ward boundary changes based on analysis of enrolment information and projected growth patterns.

Throughout this century, ward boundaries in the City of Whittlesea have been shaped by the rapid and uneven growth within the municipality. Enrolment for North Ward, which covers most of the growth belt, has repeatedly exceeded the 10 per cent tolerance allowable under the Act. In its 2005 representation review, the VEC recommended that the structure of nine single-councillor wards be replaced by three three-councillor wards, partly because multi-councillor wards would better absorb the rapid population growth that was occurring. However, by 2008, a subdivision review was necessary to transfer voters from North Ward to West Ward, as enrolments for both wards were likely to be outside tolerance by the 2008 general election. At the commencement of the 2011–12 representation review, North Ward’s enrolment was 15.09 per cent above the average, and East Ward’s enrolment was 13.25 per cent below average. The review adjusted ward boundaries to return enrolments to within the 10 per cent threshold and allow, as far as possible, for future population changes. Enrolments on the ward boundaries recommended by the review are detailed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Deviation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26,276</td>
<td>-12.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44,457</td>
<td>+11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39,278</td>
<td>-1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for municipality</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>110,011</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than four years later, enrolments for the North Ward had again grown beyond the 10 per cent threshold, necessitating this subdivision review.

Both the southern wards were slightly below average. The South West Ward includes growth areas in Epping North and Wollert as well as more stable areas in Lalor and Thomastown, and

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3 Under the Act, compliance with the 10 per cent tolerance requirement may be determined either by reference to the number of voters at the time of the review or by reference to the projected number of voters on the entitlement date for the next general election. In this 2011–12 review, the VEC correctly predicted that enrolments for North and South East Wards would be within tolerance by the time of the October 2012 general election.
its enrolment is likely to remain within the threshold. In contrast, there are relatively few growth areas in the South East Ward, whose enrolment is trending downwards. The logical solution was to transfer voters from the rapidly growing North Ward to the relatively declining South East Ward.

Under the current boundaries, the South East Ward includes the southern part of the suburb of South Morang. The VEC proposed to transfer more of South Morang from North Ward to South East Ward. (The VEC could not place all of South Morang in the South East Ward, because the ward’s enrolment would then be well above the 10 per cent threshold.)

An advertisement was placed in the Whittlesea Leader on Tuesday 15 September to notify the public of the proposed changes:

3.3 Public response

Public submissions
The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Tuesday 15 September until Tuesday 13 October. The VEC received one public submission. The submission is discussed in detail in Section 4.1.

The name of the person who made the submission can be found in Appendix 1.

Public hearing
The VEC scheduled a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their submission at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 21 October in the Fountain View Room, Council Offices, Whittlesea City Council, Ferres Boulevard, South Morang. There were no requests to speak so the hearing was not held.
4 Recommendation

4.1 The VEC’s findings

Public submissions
The VEC received one public submission, from Mr Ray Hutchinson. Mr Hutchinson supported
the recommended boundary change, and also suggested increasing the number of councillors
for North Ward so that each ward was represented equally.

Mr Hutchinson’s suggestion could be considered in an electoral representation review, which
deals with the number of councillors and the electoral structure of a municipality. However, under
the Act a subdivision review can only consider ward boundaries, and cannot change the number
of councillors overall or the number of councillors for each ward.

Proposed ward boundaries
The VEC takes a minimal change approach to subdivision reviews. The aim of the review is to
ensure that the numbers of voters enrolled for the wards are within the allowable 10 per cent
tolerance at the time of the following Council election. Within that overriding numbers
requirement, the VEC takes into account community of interest and clear boundaries, as these
assist with representation.

Under the proposed boundaries, a total of 6,721 voters (5.08 per cent of City of Whittlesea
voters) were transferred from North Ward to South East Ward. The transfer reduced North
Ward’s enrolment to 7.2 per cent below the average, and increased South East Ward’s
enrolment to 9.75 per cent above the average. These deviations from the average allow for the
opposite growth patterns of the two wards (rapid growth in North Ward and relative decline in
South East Ward), maximising the period in which the wards will comply with the 10 per cent
tolerance.

With the great majority (70.6 per cent of the voters) of South Morang included in South East
Ward, the proposed boundaries reflect communities of interest as far as possible. The proposed
boundaries are clear, running along the edge of Quarry Hills Park and then following Gordons
Road. The Quarry Hills estate is included in the South East Ward, as well as most of The Lakes
estate.

The VEC considers that the proposed boundaries should be adopted.
4.2 The VEC’s recommendation

The VEC recommends adjustments to the boundaries of the following wards within Whittlesea City Council:

- North Ward
- South East Ward

Recommended ward boundaries are illustrated in the map in Appendix 2.
Appendix 1: Public involvement

Public submissions

A public submission was received from:

Ray Hutchinson
Appendix 2: Recommended ward boundaries map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>Electors</th>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33,480</td>
<td>-7.20%</td>
<td>384.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52,791</td>
<td>+9.75%</td>
<td>42.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46,010</td>
<td>-4.35%</td>
<td>62.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>132,281</td>
<td>-7.20%</td>
<td>489.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>44,094</td>
<td></td>
<td>163.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map prepared by the Victorian Electoral Commission
Vicmap spatial data provided by Department of Environment and Primary Industries
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