Rocky View's Electoral Boundary and Governance Initiative – Factors to Consider

Current Structure
- Rocky View has nine divisions, each with its own councillor.
- The councillors elect the County's "chief elected official", the Reeve, from among themselves on an annual basis.
- According to the County's website, Rocky View's population by division is as follows:

Division	2018 Population	% Deviation from Average for 9 Divisions
1	2,525	- 44%
2	3,479	- 23%
3	5,957	+ 32%
4 – Langdon	5,384	+ 19%
4 – other	1,626	
4 – total	7,010	+ 55%
5	5,051	+ 12%
6	2,768	- 39%
7	3,462	- 23%
8	5,576	+ 23%
9	4,877	+ 8%
Total	40,705	
Average for 9 divisions	4,523	

- The generally accepted best practice for effective representation, based on a Canadian Supreme Court decision, is to have each division's population deviate by no more than 25% from the average.
    - The + / - 25% range recognizes that factors other than mathematical purity are important for effective representation – such as, maintaining identifiable communities, creating easily identifiable boundaries, etc.
    - Divisions 1, 3, 4, and 6 are well beyond the + / - 25% range which is between 3,392 and 5,634 with the existing nine divisions.

- The question then becomes – what, if anything, should be changed to address these deviations?
    - The County's survey identifies possible alternative solutions.
    - The survey also proposes replacing the reeve, who is selected by his/her fellow councillors, with a mayor elected directly by voters across the entire County.
        - This change is unrelated to dealing with out-of-balance electoral divisions; but would require substantial changes to divisional boundaries.

Alternative Electoral Division Configurations
Maintain the existing 9-division structure
- Due to the County's geographical realities, there are constraints on workable alternatives to reach the + / - 25% population deviations in all the divisions.
  - In the southwest of the County, Divisions 1,2, and 3 are largely left on their own to divide up their populations.
  - On the east side of the County, Divisions 4, 5, and 6 face similar constraints.
- It may be least confusing to maintain the existing nine divisions, but to do so requires many changes and it is not clear how "natural" the resulting boundaries would be.

Shift to a 7-division structure
- With seven divisions, the average population would be 5,815 and the + / - 25% range would be between 4,361 and 7,269.
- Divisions 1, 2, 6, and 7 are currently beyond the + / - 25% range in this scenario.
- Seven divisions each falling within the + / - 25% range could be achieved simply by combining Divisions 1 and 2 and Divisions 6 and 7.
- This results in significantly fewer boundary changes than required to maintain nine divisions. Because of this, it is less likely that existing communities would be split apart.
- Reducing the number of councillors to seven would result in cost savings of approximately $200,000 per year in salaries and benefits paid to councillors.
- A seven-division option would also provide an intermediate solution that retains flexibility to deal with potential future build-out of Harmony and/or Langdon.

Shift to an 11-division format
- With eleven divisions, the average population would be 3,700 and the + / - 25% range would be between 2,775 and 4,625.
- Only Divisions 2 and 7 have existing populations within this range. However, it would be difficult to leave them unchanged.
- Division 4 would have to be split into two divisions since Langdon, on its own, is larger than the + 25% range.
  - That would create one of the extra divisions. The question would then be, how to carve up the remaining divisions to produce another extra division while maintaining some community continuity.
- In terms of budgetary impacts, this alternative is the opposite of the seven-division option. Council's budget would increase by about $200,000 per year and any future expansion of Harmony and/or Langdon would either require another increase in the number of councillors or a major realignment of the divisional boundaries.

Shift to an 8-division structure
- The survey assumes an eight-division structure if the at-large mayor governance model is adopted. Technically, any even number of divisions would work.
- With eight divisions, the average population would be 5,088 and the + / - 25% range would be between 3,816 and 6,360.
- Divisions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 are currently beyond the + / - 25% range.

- Since one division would have to be eliminated, the most obvious choice would be to combine Div. 1 and 2.
- Getting all other divisions within the + / - 25% range would require a significant realignment of other divisional borders, especially on the east side of the County.
- Again, there is uncertainty as how all these boundary changes would affect existing communities.

Shifting to a governance model with all councillors elected "at-large"
- This option is raised as a possibility in the on-line survey and is independent of any specific number of councillors.
- All candidates would run across the entire county and the candidates with the most votes would win (e.g. with 9 councillors, the top 9 candidates would win).
  - There would be no guarantee that the wining candidates would be drawn equitably from across the County.
- This approach can be portrayed as having all councillors represent all residents in the County, which may sound like a good idea. However, it also raises many concerns:
  - Running a county-wide campaign costs more than division-specific campaigns. This may create substantial challenges for self-funded candidates and result in more candidates relying on financial support from those with deep pockets, such as large landowners and developers with private agendas.
  - Contacting voters and gaining the recognition needed to win would be more onerous given the size of the County.
  - Successful campaigns would likely focus on in the higher density areas where more votes are located, reducing the ability of voters in less densely populated areas to influence decisions.
  - Residents and candidates would be less likely to interact during campaigns because of the greater distances that candidates have to cover.
  - Without councillors with specific ties to the areas where residents live, residents may feel less of a connection with the councillors.
  - It would be quite possible for the majority of councillors to come from one area in the County. Therefore, unique issues in specific areas of the county, may not be properly understood. This raises questions as to whether such a system can truly represent all residents effectively.

Changing RVC's Governance Model: Reeve versus Mayor
- The Municipal Government Act does not define "reeve" or a "mayor" – it refers to a "chief elected official". In a rural municipality, this person is selected by council from among the councillors and is typically called a "reeve". In a town or city, this person is selected by a vote of all electors and is typically called a "mayor".
  - The MGA allows municipalities to change from one system to the other. This is what Rocky View is proposing to do with its at-large mayor option.
- What are the key differences between a reeve model and an at-large mayor model?

- o The reeve obtains his/her authority by maintaining the confidence of the other councillors.
    - A mayor elected directly by residents and obtains his/her authority independent of other councillors.
  - o The reeve has responsibility to represent both residents in his/her division and residents across the entire County.
    - A mayor does not have any divisional responsibilities.
- What are the implications of these differences?
  - o Many implications are similar to those discussed above under the "at-large" councillor option.
  - o The most significant difference is the cost and logistics of running a county-wide election campaign versus running a campaign in a single division. A county-wide election requires substantially more money and volunteers.
    - It is much easier for a "hand-picked" candidate with significant outside financial backing to win a county-wide campaign.
    - The financial burden of a county-wide campaign may deter candidates who are running because of a sense of public duty.
  - o Obtaining name recognition and contacting voters across the entire County is more difficult.
  - o There is no certainty that a mayor elected at-large will be aligned with a majority of the councillors. If not, residents could face four years of dysfunctional governance.
  - o Since the mayor would be the head of the County, the position may attract multiple good candidates, only one of whom can win. This may not be a problem if there are lots of potential good candidates for both the mayor and councillor positions. However, Rocky View typically has not had an overabundance of candidates. Is having a mayor worth the risk of losing some of those good candidates for councillor positions?

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