



Corporate Report

NO: R131

COUNCIL DATE: July 14, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: July 9, 2008
FROM: Deputy City Manager Deputy City Clerk FILE: 6600-02
SUBJECT: Official Population Figures for Surrey

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Office recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Authorize the Mayor to forward a letter to the Minister of Community Services on behalf of City Council requesting that the Ministry develop a means by which to provide annual updates to the certified population figures for municipalities in the Province between years in which the Federal Census population figures are available so that population-based decisions properly reflect the current population of each municipality.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on when and how the Province certifies population figures for each municipality in the Province and the implications of this process. The report also recommends a course of action for consideration by Council to initiate changes in this process to better reflect the needs and interests of local governments.

BACKGROUND

At its Regular meeting on April 28, 2008, Council raised concerns regarding Provincial certification of the City's population figures and the implications of such certification on the allocation to the City of Surrey of votes and Director positions on the Metro Vancouver (MV) Board and on Provincial grants available to the City.

DISCUSSION

Metro Vancouver Board Votes and Director Positions:

With respect to the allocation of votes and Director positions on the Metro Vancouver Board, in accordance with Section 783 of the *Local Government Act RSBC c 323* (“LGA”), the number of votes to which each member municipality and electoral area is entitled is the number obtained by dividing the population of the municipality with the voting unit specified in the Regional Districts Letters Patent. For Metro Vancouver, the letters patent specify that a municipality will receive one vote for each 20,000 in its population. In Metro Vancouver, each municipal member receives the number of votes obtained by dividing its population by 20,000 with the product rounded to the next highest whole number. The letters patent further specify that each municipality will be allocated Director positions by dividing the total number of votes allocated to the municipality by 5 with the product rounded to the next highest whole number (i.e., an additional Director position on the Board is available as the municipality passes increments of 5 votes; 1 Director position for 1 to 5 votes; 2 Director positions for 6 to 10 votes; etc.)

Ministry of Community Services staff advise that the certified population for each municipality is established by the Federal Census which is taken every 5 years, the most recent Census being in 2006. After each Federal Census the Ministry adjusts the census numbers provided by the Federal Government to account for Census boundaries that do not align with municipal boundaries. Ministry staff advises that the Census undercount is not taken into consideration. The final population numbers are then certified by the Ministry of Community Services and published for each of the Regional Districts in the Province. These numbers are then used to calculate the Board vote allocations to each of the member municipalities in each Regional District. The certified population for Surrey, based on the 2006 Federal Census, is 395,085.

There is no mechanism available within Provincial regulations for a local government to appeal its population number as certified by the Minister of Community Services. Further, there is no mechanism, regulation or policy that allows for the Ministry-certified population of a municipality to be changed between the years on which Federal Census numbers are available. This clearly penalizes high growth municipalities, such as Surrey, that have significant population growth between the years on which the Federal Census is taken.

The Minister may consider adjusting the voting units specified in a regional district's letters patent where inequities appear to have developed because of the population changes in high growth areas.

MV Board implications: The voting strength for each local government member of the MV Board is determined by dividing the certified population by the voting unit identified in the MV “letters patent” (20,000 population). With a certified population from the 2006 Federal Census of 395,085, Surrey has been allocated 20 votes and 4 Director positions (i.e., 5 votes per Director) on the MV Board. The total number of votes allocated to all members of the MV Board is 117.

Taking into account the Census undercount and the new dwelling units constructed in the City since 2006 Census day, the total estimated population of Surrey is 452,000. This population would indicate that Surrey should have 3 additional votes and an additional Director position on

the Metro Vancouver Board. This would give the Surrey 23 votes and a total of five (5) Director positions on the MV Board.

For the majority of matters considered by the MV Board, the vote is by “weighted votes” (i.e., each Director votes with the number of votes that has been assigned to him/her by her local Council).

Provincial Grant implications: The three population-based grants (Victim Services, UBCM Community Tourism, and Library Services) for which Surrey receives use population numbers from BC Stats rather than the Federal Census certified population number. The BC Stats number is based on the Federal Census number but includes adjustments for the estimated federal census undercount and annually estimates the population change since the last Federal Census.

Use of Federal Census population:

The Provincial Ministry of Community Services only uses the Federal Census for the purposes of determining “weighted voting” for Regional Districts. This is referenced in Section 783 (4) of the *Local Government Act*, which states:

“A change in the population of a municipality or electoral area established by census, for the purposes of the voting power on that Board, takes effect in the year following the year in which census was taken.”

The Ministry uses the Federal Census as a trigger to review and update the weighted votes in each regional district in the Province. A few municipalities and electoral areas have requested the updates between census dates in previous years; however, the requests have not resulted in any action. The Province holds the view that the voting units set in each Regional District were derived to ensure fair representation of each member municipality and electoral area. They are of the opinion that there is no reason to adjust population on an annual basis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, it is recommended that the Mayor be authorized to forward a letter to the Minister of Community Services on behalf of City Council requesting that the Ministry develop a means by which to provide annual updates to the certified population figures for municipalities in the Province between years in which the Federal Census population figures are available. In this way, the population of each municipality, especially high growth municipalities like Surrey, will be properly recognized on a year-to-year basis in relation to, among other things, the municipality’s voting strength on the related Regional District Board.

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