

**BRRAG****Belmont Resident and Ratepayer Action Group Inc.***“To provide an effective voice for the people of Belmont”*

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## Review of Ward Representation Submission

### Councillor Elector Ratio

Based on the discussion paper presented by the City of Belmont for comment, the numbers of councillors per elector, in all three wards is significantly more than the average across the state. The total elector councillor ratio of Belmont is quoted as being 2751. On page two of the report it states the average across the metropolitan area is approximately 4,095 electors per Councillor.

Based on the above figures as quoted in the report, reducing numbers of councillors should be considered whether or not changes to the wards occur. If the City retains three wards, consideration should be given to a reduction of one councillor on each ward. If you calculate 2751 by the existing 9 councillors it gives you an elector base of 24 759. If there was a reduction of three councillors, one in each ward, meaning you divide the 24 759 by 6 instead of 9 this would calculate to a councillor elector ration of 4126 per councillor, This would be more consistent with the metropolitan average of 4095.

In terms of reducing councillors this would be an effective cost saving to the residents. Previous figures quoted, it would amount to around \$200-250 000 per year. This figure includes other costs associated with having councillors not just remuneration set by the Tribunal.

It has been quote in the report that currently the West Ward is under represented and that the East Ward is over represented in terms of the number ratio between councillor and elector. Based on the existing council and presumably into the future, the over or under representation whilst calculated on resident numbers, it is not always accurate. An example of this would be that the current councillors in the West Ward are far more pro active overall in representing their residents, than those in the East or South Wards.

### No Change To Boundaries

On page 8 of the discussion paper it is noted one of the possible advantages of leaving the boundaries as they are is that it provides for possible growth in the Eastern parts of the City. Not enough consideration has been given to potential delays for growth due to the impact of Covid 19. It is not clear to any government agencies or forecasters as to what the impact in the longer term is going to be on economies around the world.

In the Eastern area of Belmont, growth was expected particularly in the DA6, to be more high density housing. At the present time there is a shift from high density living with current real estate

demands being more towards people wanting a yard. This trend is also in other states. As a result of Covid 19, people are able to work from home more using the internet and for this reason they do not have to consider travel distance to work as they did previously. Families want a yard to grow vegetables and areas for their children to play. Whether this trend will remain is unknown. At the very least it is likely to slow down the previous anticipate growth rate for living closer to cities.

Given the time frame for the next review is eight years, it is less relevant to state that it would be an advantage for the boundary to remain the same on the basis of growth potential in the Eastern area. The next review will give a far better idea of long term impact than this current review.

A noted disadvantage is that the suburbs are split between wards. This is not really relevant as it has been this way for many years and has not had a significant impact on how the council has operated. Being split between area name and councillor elector ratio is quite different. It is quite common in other local governments to have suburbs split between wards.

### Moving of Ascot Waters to East Ward

This would be the least disruptive option to implement. It would result in more equality in distribution of the councillor elector ratio which would comply with the requirements of the LGAB.

As previously mentioned, any growth in numbers of electors in the East Ward as a result of population increase due to development, can be re- assessed at the next review in eight years. In the event that Covid 19 does not hold up growth and the number of elector councillor ratio in the East Ward goes higher, it is unlikely it would exceed the current ratio in the West Ward for a significant period until the next review.

Other reasons this option would be more appropriate is that both Ascot Waters and Ascot are unique to the rest of Belmont as they both border the Swan River. They would have similar environmental concerns. Both the Ascot Waters area and that of the Ascot area are both going to be affected by any development in the Golden Gateway area. Both sides of Grandstand Road will be affected by any future outcome of both the Kilns and Parry Field.

Given that this area is marked for development, it is important that they are represented by one Ward. How is it possible to separate these area into two wards when a development area is between both of them? Similar problems will be faced by both sides of Grandstand Road and all the surrounding areas.

If the area of The Springs was to increase in numbers over the next eight years, the councillor elector ratio will be even more under represented than it is presently. By moving Ascot Waters into the East Ward, the resulting reduction in numbers in the West Ward will better allow for increasing numbers in The Springs, without a significant under representation in the West Ward until the next review.

### Removing of Boundaries

If the boundaries are removed altogether, the number of councillors should be reduced to a ratio consistent with the average in Western Australia. Consideration could be given to having seven councillors with one being the Mayor. Once elected councillors are suppose to work for the entire Belmont area. This is not always the case.

It has been noted that some councillors are very in tune with their local wards and are very mindful of the residents of their ward when voting on issues within their wards. It may well be due to lack

of understanding of electors in the other wards, but this cannot be said at times when voting on items that affect residents outside their wards. Removing boundaries may well mean that any councillor elected has to be far more aware of residents across Belmont should they hope to be re-elected in future.

It is a disadvantage to any ward under the current system if you have a Mayor who is in your ward, they have additional duties to do for the entire community. There is less time available for them to specifically concentrate on the electors of the ward they represent. In having five or six councillors and a Mayor, it would allow better distribution of duties amongst the councillors freeing up time for the Mayor to concentrate on the additional duties they perform.

On the table of disadvantages suggested on page 12 for not having wards, is the reference to electors not knowing who they are voting for, or the electors may not have an affinity with any of the councillors. This alone, is not a good enough reason to keep wards. Many electors do not know any of the councillors, or who they are voting for anyway. A good percentage of the electors do not have any personal contact with their councillors between elections. Few show enough interest to attend meetings to judge performance of their councillors.

Another disadvantage referenced is large numbers of candidates might be confusing for voters. This is somewhat contradictory when in the same table it is listed as an advantage that the election process is much simpler for the community to understand and administer.

An advantage listed in not having wards is the knowledge and interest in all areas of the Council's affairs could broaden the views beyond the immediate concerns of those in a ward. Once elected as a councillor you are supposed to represent the entire district not just the ward. As previously mentioned this is not always the case. The removal of boundaries would require more effort and knowledge of all areas by councillors, as they would be elected by the entire district not just the smaller numbers of a ward.

### Summary

Out of the three options suggested, moving the Ascot Waters area into the East Ward appears to be the best option. It will reduce electorate numbers in the West Ward and increase the East Ward numbers so there is a fairer and more equitable distribution between the two wards. Given that the LGAB places significant importance on distribution of elector numbers, it appears this option is the most likely to be in keeping with their requirements. It also allows all of the Ascot area to be in the same ward. An important consideration given the development areas within the Golden Gateway will affect both sides of the Ascot area.

Given the changes that have occurred as a result of Covid 19, it is less likely that we will see an over representation in the East Ward in the immediate future as a result of development, if this option is exercised. A review of the ward representation in eight years, would give a clearer picture as to future development and projected elector numbers within the ward boundaries. Should further changes be required in eight years, it would be appropriate to do so at that time depending on growth.

It is unfortunate the date that this item will go before council on the 15 December 2020 for endorsement. Less interest by residents in council matters is normally seen around this period due to the upcoming holiday period. There may well have been residents who would have liked to do submissions or deputations on the final report prepared by Officers for endorsement.

It is probably less likely this further input from residents will occur, due to the timing of this item

being brought before council. Perhaps in future. council should due more planning when important items such as this come before council. Had this item been brought forward prior to the start date of the review process on 3 September 2020, the final outcome would have come before the December Ordinary Council Meeting.

Yours sincerely  
BRRAG Committee