Municipality of the District of Yarmouth

Municipal Boundary Review

Report #1

UPLAND
PLANNING + DESIGN STUDIO

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Photo Source: Davey and Sky



Municipal Boundary Review

Background Report

This report was prepared by
UPLAND Planning + Design
for the Municipality of the
District of Yarmouth

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1. INTRODUCTION



1.1 INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Municipalities in Nova Scotia typically review their council size, number of municipal polling districts, and their respective boundaries on an eight-year cycle, as required by the *Municipal Government Act*. This requirement is to ensure effective representation. That is, that every elector's vote has similar power.

As a municipality's population changes over time, the composition of its polling districts changes as well. To ensure that resident's interests are being represented in an equitable manner, efforts are made through this process so that each polling district has a similar number of residents with common interests and identities. The geographic area of each district is also taken into account.

The Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board (NSRAB) is responsible for overseeing the Municipal Boundary Review process. This independent provincial body is responsible for reviewing and making decisions on applications of municipal boundaries.

Municipalities may also apply to make changes to their council size and/or electoral boundaries outside of the regular eight-year review schedule.

In its 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, Council for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth (MODY) resolved to explore a change to its governance structure from the current warden system with seven councillors, to a mayoral system consisting of a mayor elected at large and six electoral districts, each electing one councillor. Sampling conducted by Narrative Research in March 2026 found that more than two-thirds of decided respondents supported a mayoral system over a warden system.

Pursuant to the authority and requirements of the *Municipal Government Act*, Council decided on March 2026 to proceed with Phase 1 of the electoral boundary review, including the establishment of six electoral districts. Following this decision, MODY is undertaking a comprehensive municipal electoral boundary review to develop the proposed boundaries for these districts.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

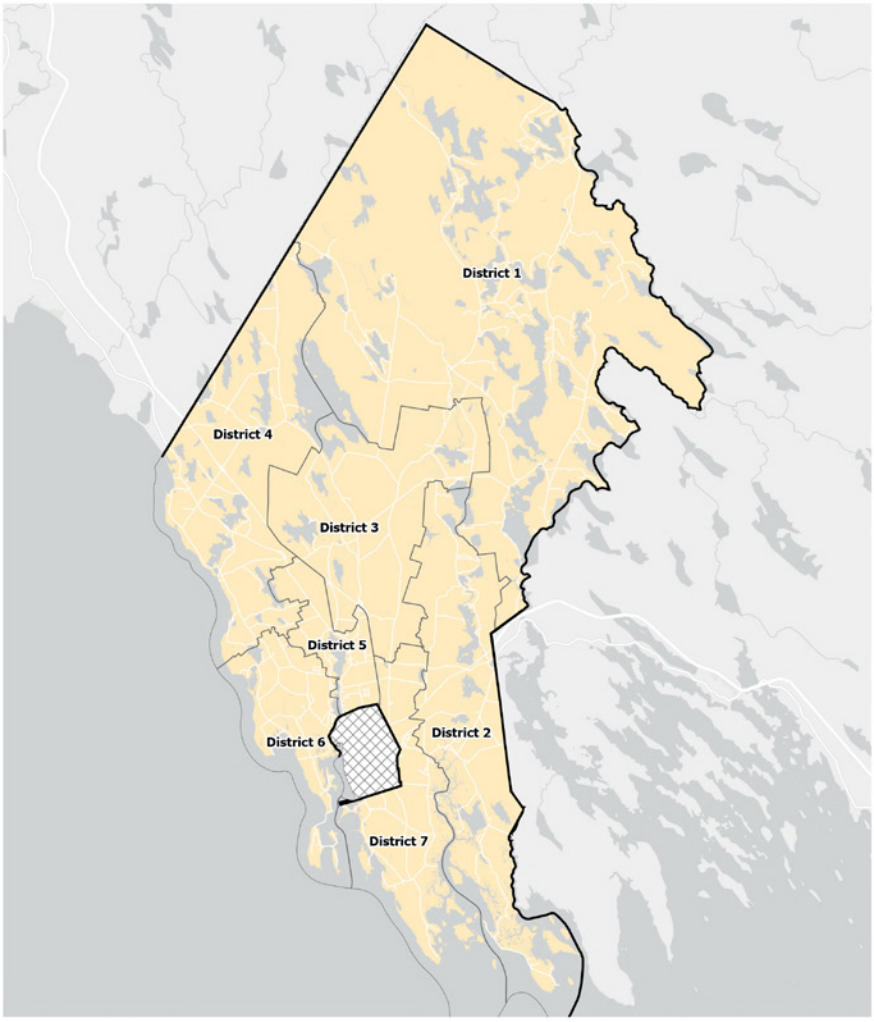
This report provides the background and analysis supporting the municipal electoral boundary review. It outlines the current elector distribution, council composition, and polling district boundaries; describes the municipal boundary review process and the criteria considered by the NSRAB; and reviews MODY's previous NSRAB decisions. The report also examines population and demographic trends to provide context for the development of the preliminary boundary options.

The data presented in this report has been sourced from MODY, the Province of Nova Scotia, Elections Nova Scotia, and the Government of Canada. The majority of the analysis is based on data from the 2021 Census. As a new census release is forthcoming, it is important to acknowledge that some data may not fully reflect current conditions.

1.2 CURRENT COUNCIL SIZE AND POLLING DISTRICTS

Council in MODY is currently composed of seven councillors, each representing a polling district. The Warden and the Deputy Warden are elected from within the elected Council via secret ballot.

The current municipal polling district boundaries were drawn during the 2023 Municipal Boundary Review process. Each councillor currently represents an average of 1,305 electors, as per the most recent Elections Nova Scotia data.



Current Polling Districts

Polling District	Number of Electors	Communities
District 1	1,404	Brazil Lake, Brenton, Canaan, Carleton, Deerfield, East Canaan, Forest Glen, Gardeners Mills, Gavelton, Kemptville, Lake Annis, North Kemptville, Norwood, Pleasant Valley, Raynardton, Tusket Falls.
District 2	1,249	Arcadia, Brooklyn, Deerfield, Greenville, Melbourne, Pinkneys Point, Pleasant Lake, Summerville,
District 3	1,303	Brenton, Brooklyn, Deerfield, Hebron, Hillview, Pleasant Valley, South Ohio,
District 4	1,245	Beaver River, Brenton, Cedar Lake, Darlings Lake, Hillview, Ireton, Lake George, Norwood, Port Maitland, Richmond, Sanford, Short Beach, Wellington, Woodstock,
District 5	1,410	Brooklyn, Dayton, Hebron, Wellington.
District 6	1,332	Cape Forchu, Dayton, Milton Highlands, North Chegoggin, Overton, Pembroke, Sandford, South Chegoggin, Yarmouth Bar,
District 7	1,194	Arcadia, Brooklyn, Central Chebogue, Chebogue Point, Greenville, Kelleys Cove, Rockville, Sand Beach, Yarmouth 33,

Table 1. Description of current polling district boundaries in MODY. Source: Elections Nova Scotia

2. THE BOUNDARY REVIEW PROCESS



2.1 THE BOUNDARY REVIEW PROCESS

The first step in the Boundary Review process is for the Municipality to conduct a study that looks at the current state of the polling districts. This study is then used to make an application to confirm or change the number of councillors, municipal polling districts, and the respective boundaries. The application is submitted to the NSRAB, and it must include explanations and evidence for the decisions to change or maintain the status quo.

A key component to the application is that the Municipality has significantly engaged its community in the process, and that their feedback has been considered or incorporated. This is a mandatory step and the NSRAB considers this aspect in their final decision-making.

Once the application has been received, a public hearing is scheduled. At the public hearing, the Municipality presents its application and evidence to the Board, and answers questions from the NSRAB and the community members who registered to speak. Once the hearing has concluded, the Board decision is issued within 60 days. Applications that are declined are returned to the respective Council for review.

The NSRAB recommends going through the study process in two phases. The first phase is to review the number of polling districts and councillors, which MODY completed in March 2026. The second phase is to review the boundaries of each polling district to ensure that electors are being represented equitably.

2.2 GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES

The review process' main purpose is to ensure **effective representation**. To do so, there are five factors that the NSRAB takes into consideration in making its decision, which are outlined in the *Municipal Government Act*. The factors are:

+ Number of electors
+ Relative parity of voting power
+ Community interest
+ Geographic size
+ Population density

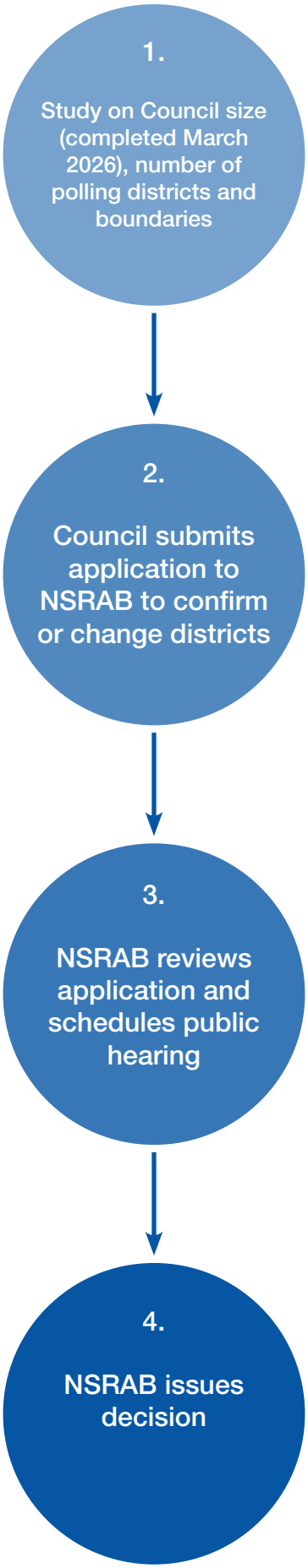
To determine **the number of councillors**, the NSRAB looks at the geographic size and the number of electors in each proposed polling district.

To determine **the number of districts and the district boundaries**, the NSRAB looks at relative parity of voting power, community interest, geographic size, and population density. At this stage of the Review, relative voting parity is prioritized as a factor. This looks at the number of electors in each polling district and its deviation from the average number in the Municipality.

In 2004, the NSRAB established two **thresholds for relative voting parity** that would serve as a guideline when drawing boundaries. The regular threshold in ±10% from the average number of electors in the Municipality. When falling within this threshold, not much justification is needed for the boundaries proposed.

The variance is permitted to be as much as ±25%, with justification proportional to how much the variance exceeds 10%. In cases where the number of electors in a proposed polling district is ±25% from the average number in the Municipality, a very detailed justification is needed on why this is the case. Community interest and geography have justified other muncipalities' applications to have districts outside of the 10% threshold.

Figure 1. Municipal Boundary Review Process



3. PAST NSRAB DECISIONS



3.1 OVERVIEW OF PAST NSRAB DECISIONS

While the current practice of structured reviews every eight years has only been mandatory since 2006, the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth (MODY) has a history of applications prior to that year to amend polling district boundaries and confirm its council composition. These earlier applications were generally undertaken in advance of municipal elections to address changes in voter distribution and to ensure polling district boundaries continued to provide effective representation.

Reviewing previous Board decisions provides important context for the current boundary review by illustrating how the Municipality's polling districts have evolved over time and how proposed changes have been assessed. The decisions demonstrate a consistent approach to balancing voter parity with the preservation of communities of interest, while supporting incremental boundary adjustments where required to maintain effective representation. They also show a longstanding history of NSRAB approval for the Municipality's proposals, reflecting MODY's continued efforts to align with provincial legislative requirements and principles.

3.2 1993 NSRAB DECISION

In preparation for the 1994 municipal election, MODY applied to the NSRAB for approval of three minor polling district boundary adjustments intended to better reflect communities of interest, as well as the renumbering of two districts. Although the municipality continued to have seven polling districts each represented by a councillor, the renumbering would create a more sequential numbering system.

With the average number of voters per councillor being 1,009, three polling districts were beyond the ±25% voter variance.

The Board noted that District 1 was significantly larger in geographic area than the other districts and had experienced an increase of approximately 100 voters between the 1987 and 1991 municipal elections. Although Council had considered dividing the district, the dispersed settlement pattern, with development concentrated along main roads and extensive vacant land between it, made it difficult to establish a practical alternative boundary.

Conversely, District 12 experienced a decline of approximately 100 voters over the same period. While District 12 bordered District 13, the Board accepted that the Chebogue River formed a distinct community boundary and that the two districts represented different communities of interest. Although the Board expressed concern regarding the long-term voter trends in District 1 and 12, it concluded that there was no satisfactory boundary adjustment that would address these issues while maintaining appropriate communities of interest.

The Board approved the proposed boundary adjustments and district renumbering. However, Council was directed to review the polling district boundaries following the 1994 municipal election and, should the voter number trends in District 1 and 12 continue, to submit a further application to redraw the district boundaries.

3.3 1999 NSRAB DECISION

In 1999, MODY applied to alter the boundaries of the polling districts and confirm the number of polling districts and number of councillors. The application proposed moving nine areas located near the boundaries of existing polling districts into other districts to achieve a more balanced distribution of electors while maintaining communities of interest.

The proposed boundary changes addressed significant voter variances identified during the 1997 municipal election. Based on an estimated average of 1,059 electors per councillor, all polling districts except District 7 were projected to fall within a ±15% voter variance. Although District 7 exceeded the ±25% threshold at -26%, the Board accepted that there were no adjacent areas that could reasonably be transferred without adversely affecting established communities of interest or creating greater imbalances in neighbouring districts.

The Board approved the application.

3.4 2007 NSRAB DECISION

In 2007, Council applied to confirm the number of councillors at seven and amend the boundaries of six polling districts.

Based on an estimated average of 1,082 electors per councillor, all polling districts were projected to fall within NSRAB's ±10% voter variance guideline. The Municipality advised that economic, social, and cultural factors were taken into account in drawing the polling district boundaries that were submitted.

The application also proposed a few other voter redistributions in instances where roads served as polling district boundaries. Here, eligible electors on opposites sides of the affected roads were assigned to a single polling district to improve administrative clarity and avoid dividing established communities.

No objections were received, and the Board accepted the Municipality's rationale for confirming the number of councillors and revising the district boundaries. The Board approved the application.

3.5 2015 NSRAB DECISION

In 2015, MODY applied to confirm the existing number of councillors and amend the polling district boundaries.

Council determined that maintaining seven councillors provided an appropriate level of representation. A comparison of district municipalities within the Western Regional Enterprise Network (WREN) found that MODY had the second-highest ratio of electors to councillors in the region. Council concluded that increasing the number of councillors was not warranted given the existing satisfactory workload for council and level of elector representation, while reducing the number of councillors would further increase the elector-to-councillor ratio and reduce representation.

The proposed boundary adjustments responded to concerns arising from the 2006 boundary review, where several district boundaries followed public roads. In some locations, private roads intersecting these boundary roads resulted in residents within the same community being assigned to different polling districts.

Following recommendations from Elections Nova Scotia, the Municipality proposed relocating district boundaries to property lines where possible, resolving five identified boundary inconsistencies while maintaining community integrity.

Based on an estimated average of 1,133 electors per councillor, all polling districts fell within the ±10% voter variance guideline except District 5, which exceeded the guideline only marginally with a variance of 10.59%. The Board determined that the district substantially complied with the guideline and approved the application.

3.6 2023 NSRAB DECISION

In 2023, MODY applied to confirm the number of councillors at seven and to alter the polling district boundaries.

The proposed boundaries were developed in response to voter population changes following the 2022 municipal election, which resulted in some districts, most notably District 2 and 5, falling outside the ±10% voter parity threshold. Council proposed only minor boundary adjustments to restore voter parity while minimizing impacts on existing communities.

The application projected an average of 1,236 electors per councillor, with all polling districts falling within the ±10% voter variance guideline following the proposed adjustments.

As part of the review, the Municipalty undertook an extensive public consultation process regarding both council composition and district boundaries. Consultation results indicated strong support for maintaining the existing governance structure, with 73% of respondents supporting continued use of the Warden system and 76% supporting the council size of seven councillors.

The Board commended the Municipality for its comprehensive consultation process and approved the application.

Decision Year	Council application to NSRAB	Summary of NSRAB Decision
1993	**Change boundaries and renumber polling districts.** Maintain seven polling districts, one councillor per district. Minor alterations to three boundaries. Renumber two polling districts	**Approved application as presented.** Recommended Council to review polling districts after the 1994 municipal election.
1999	**Change boundaries and confirm the number of polling districts and councillors.** Maintain seven polling districts and councillors. Change boundaries to better balance voter parity and communities of interest.	**Approved application as presented.**
2007	**Change boundaries and confirm the number of polling districts and councillors.** Maintain seven polling districts and councillors. Change boundaries and propose voter redistributions for electors on opposite sides of a road boundary.	**Approved application as presented.**
2015	**Change boundaries and confirm the number of polling districts and councillors.** Maintain seven polling districts and councillors. Change boundaries to property lines were possible to resolve electoral inconsistencies.	**Approved application as presented.**
2023	**Change boundaries and confirm the number of polling districts and councillors.** Maintain seven polling districts and councillors. Change boundaries to meet voter parity.	**Approved application as presented.**

Table 2. Summary of NSRAB decisions

4. BOUNDARY ANALYSIS



4.1 INTRODUCTION TO BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

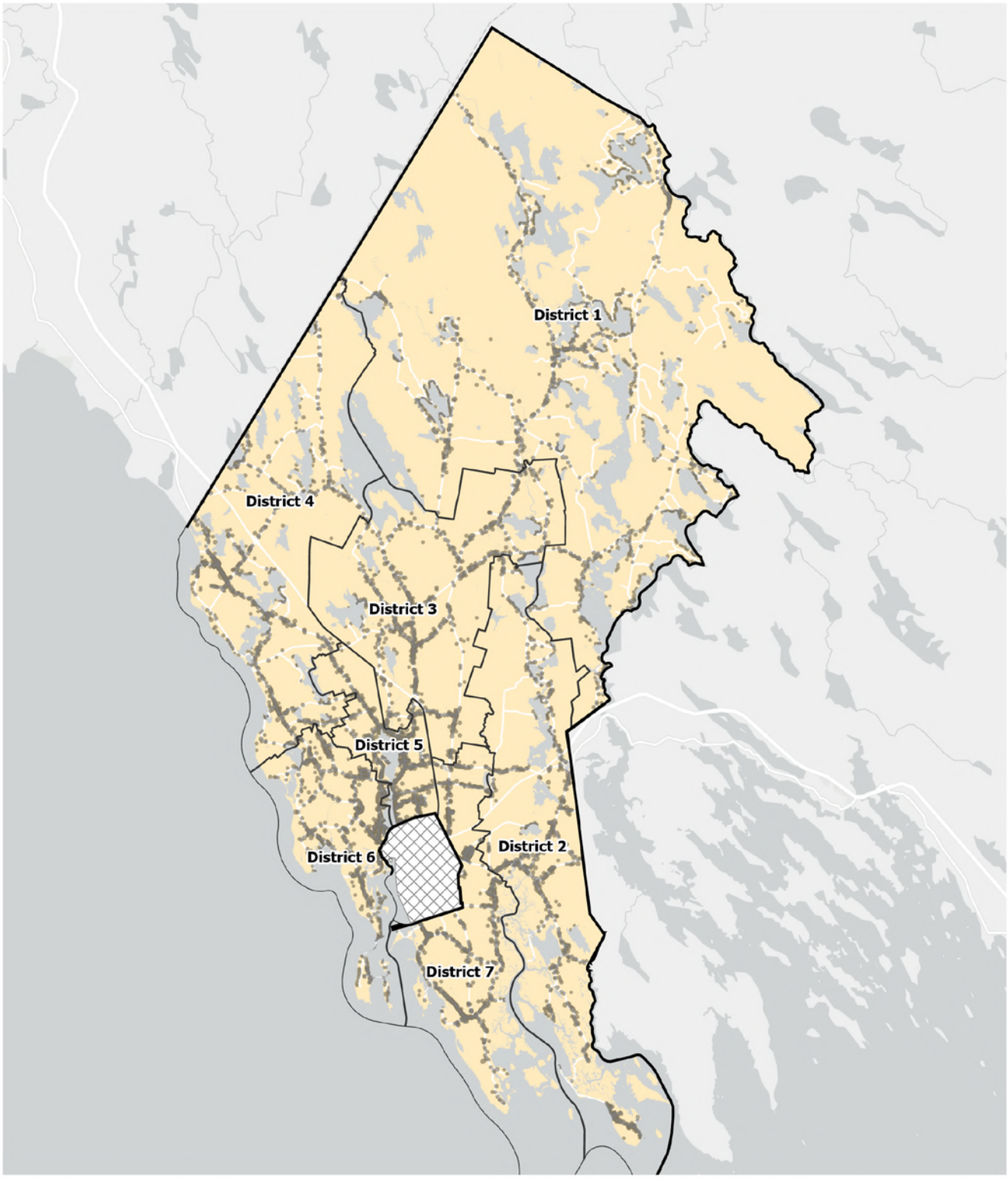
As outlined in Section 2.2, there are five key factors that must be considered when drawing municipal polling district boundaries. Among these is the principle of voter parity, which the NSRAB provides guidelines for to maintain relative parity of voting power by setting certain thresholds for voter variance. The regular threshold is a ±10% variance from the average number of electors in a municipality. However, variances of up to ±25% may be considered where they are throughly justified. This could include factors such as geographic constraints or the preservation of communities of interest.

This Chapter presents the population and demographic analysis that will inform the development of preliminary boundary options. It examines the distribution of electors and key demographic characteristics across the municipality to identify existing settlement patterns, communities of interest, and areas of population concentration.

4.2 CURRENT ELECTOR DISTRIBUTION

Based on data from Elections Nova Scotia, there are 9,137 electors in the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth. This represents an increase from the 8,652 eligible electors identified in the Municipality's 2023 Boundary Review.

The map on the following page shows the distribution of electors across the municipality. The highest concentration of electors is located in the Dayton-Hebron area, immediately north of the Town of Yarmouth. Outside of this area, elector density gradually decreases toward the more rural northern and eastern portions of the municipality where development becomes increasingly sparse. This pattern reflects the municipality's rural character and the tendency for development to be concentrated in areas with proximity to services and amenities.



Elector Distribution

District of Yarmouth Municipal Boundary
Polling Districts
Active Electors
Town of Yarmouth

4.3 POPULATION ANALYSIS

POPULATION CHANGE

The Municipality has experienced changing populating trends over the past 25 years. Between 1996 and 2016, MODY recorded population declines during each five-year census period, with decreases ranging from -1.5% to -2.6%. However, this long-term trend shifted between 2016 and 2021, when the population increased by 2.3%, representing MODY's strongest rate of growth in over two decades.

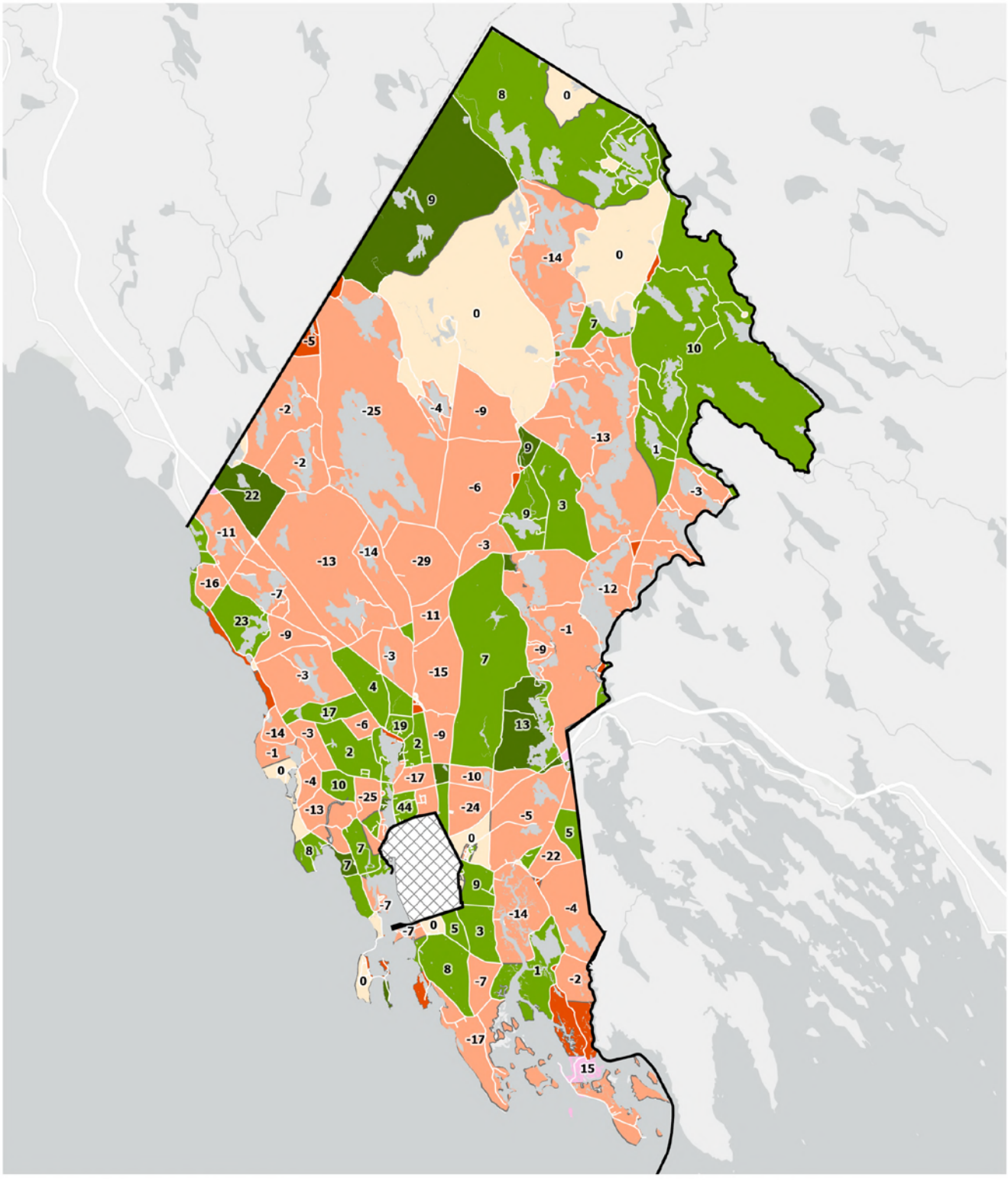
Given MODY's large geographic area, it is important to understand not only how the overall population has changed, but also where growth and decline have occurred. Population change is rarely distributed evenly across a municipality; some communities may experience growth while others continue to lose population. Identifying these local trends is particularly valuable when reviewing electoral boundaries, as it helps determine whether existing districts continue to provide effective representation.

The maps on the following pages illustrate population change between 2011-2016, 2016-2021, and 2011-2021 using small geographic areas called dissemination areas, which are the smallest standard areas for which Statistics Canada publishes census data. Mapping population change at this scale highlights localized patterns of growth and decline that may not be apparent when examining municipal-wide population trends alone.

Looking at the maps, it is clear that growth has been concentrated in communities surrounding the Town of Yarmouth, particularly in the Dayton-Hebron and Greenville areas. Notably, pockets of growth are also evident in the municipality's more northern communities, although much of this growth may be seasonal and cottage development around Killams Lake, northern Carleton, Gavelton and Caanan, and more recently in Gardeners Mills. In contrast, some of the more rural areas have experienced population decline, particularly southern Carleton, Raynardton, Brooklyn, and Lake George.

Census Years	Population Change (%)
1996 - 2001	-2.3
2001 - 2006	-1.5
2006 - 2011	-1.9
2011 - 2016	-2.6
2016 - 2021	2.3

Table 3. Population percentage change, 1996-2021
Source: Statistics Canada



Population Change 2011-2016

(By Census Dissemination Area)

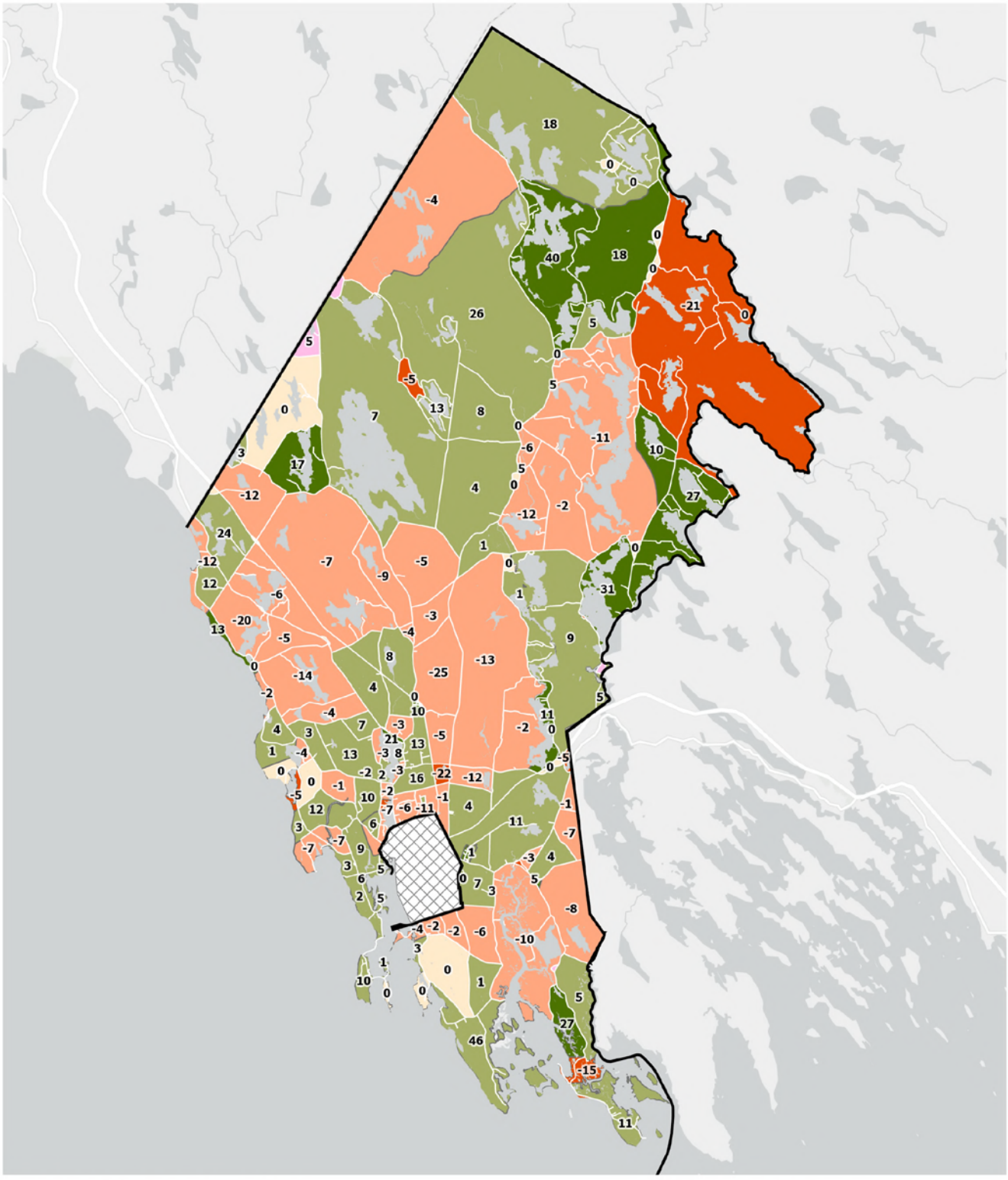
Percent Change

- -100 to -25
- -25 to 0
- 0
- 0 to 25
- 25 to 200

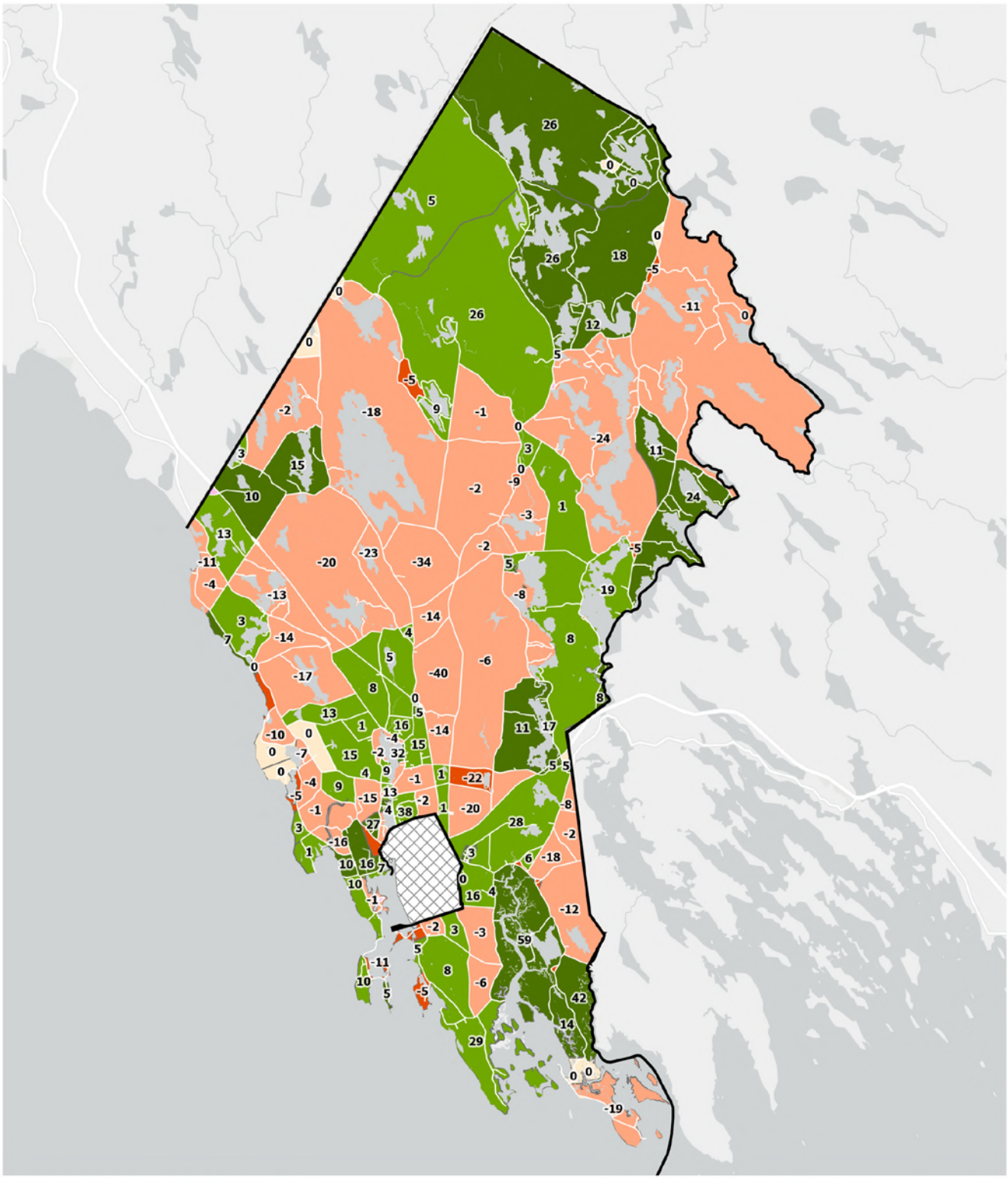
population has increased from 0

-1 Population change (number of residents)

Town of Yarmouth



Population Change 2016-2021
(By Census Dissemination Area)


Population Change 2011-2021
(By Census Dissemination Area)
Percent Change
-100 to -25
-25 to 0
0
0 to 25
25 to 200
population has increased from 0
-1
Population change (number of residents)
Town of Yarmouth

AGE PROFILE

Population pyramids illustrate how a population is distributed across cohorts, typically in five-year age groups, and can be compared across different census years to better understand demographic change over time. Under ideal circumstances, a population pyramid resembles a traditional pyramid shape, with a broad working-age population supporting economic activity and services, and a strong base of children and youth to sustain long-term population renewal.

In MODY, the population is more heavily concentrated in the middle and older age groups, with relatively smaller cohorts of children and young adults. Particularly, the population narrows noticeably among young adults aged 20 to 34, which indicates that fewer residents remain in the municipality during early career and post-secondary years. The population increases in the subsequent age cohorts, with the largest age groups being within 50 and 74 years. This reflects an aging population.

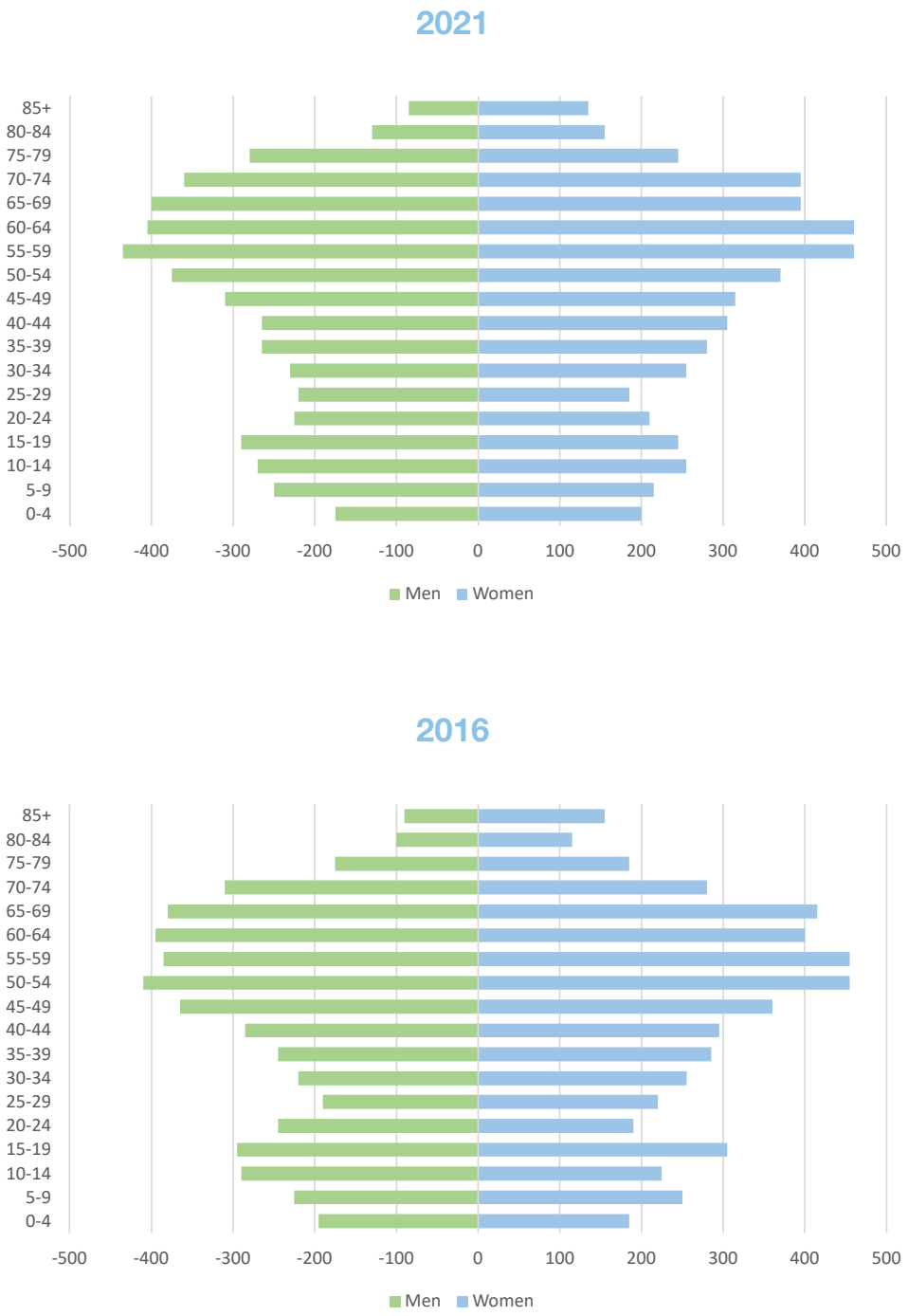


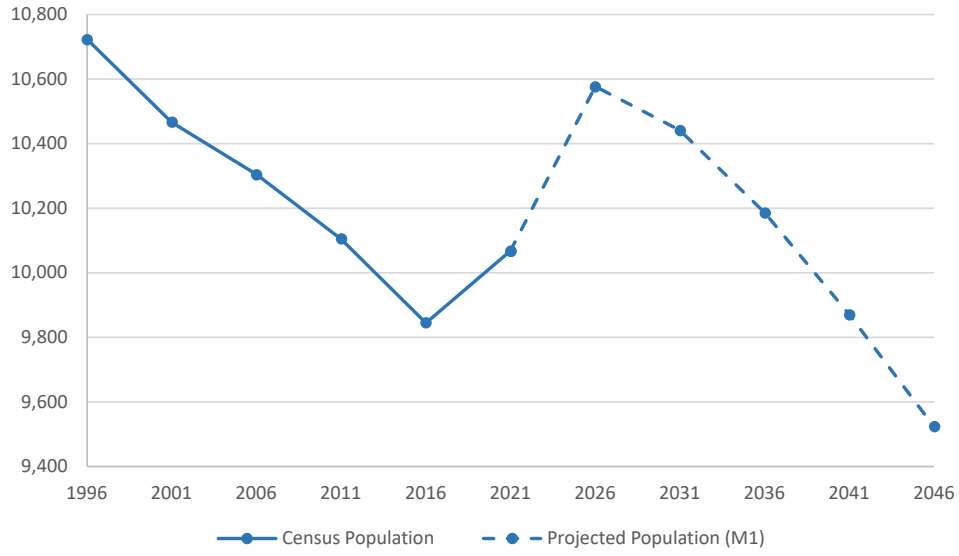
Figure 2. Population pyramids for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, 2016 and 2021
Source: Statistics Canada

POPULATION PROJECTION

In January 2026, Statistics Canada released its *Projected population for census divisions and census subdivisions* dataset, which provides population projections from 2025 to 2050. The dataset includes several projection scenarios based on different assumptions regarding fertility, mortality, and migration. The medium growth reference scenario (M1) was selected for this analysis as it is considered the average scenario that is based on the continuation of established demographic trends.

Under the M1 scenario, the population growth observed between 2016 and 2021 is projected to continue in the short term, with the population increasing to 10,576 by 2026. This is consistent with broader demographic trends observed across Atlantic Canada, including higher levels of interprovincial migration, immigration, and increased movement toward rural and smaller communities following the expansion of remote work opportunities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the projected peak in 2026, the population is expected to gradually decline, reaching 10,186 by 2036 and 9,524 by 2046. The projected population falls below the 2021 population by 2041. This suggests that the recent population gains are unlikely to represent a sustained reversal of MODY's longer-term population decline. Aging and natural decrease are expected to place downward pressure on population growth, with migration gains insufficient to fully offset these trends.



While the short-term population increase may affect the distribution of electors in the near term, the longer-term projection suggests that significant population growth is not anticipated across the Municipality. The projected demographic trajectory should therefore be considered alongside existing settlement patterns, population concentrations, and communities of interest when developing and evaluating preliminary polling district boundaries.

Figure 3. Projected population for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, 2021 - 2046
Source: Statistics Canada

4.4 COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

Communities of interest are an important consideration when establishing electoral boundaries. They are typically defined by shared geographic, social, cultural, historical, or economic characteristics that contribute to a common community identity. Recognizing and preserving these communities, helps ensure that residents with shared interests continue to be represented within the same electoral district.

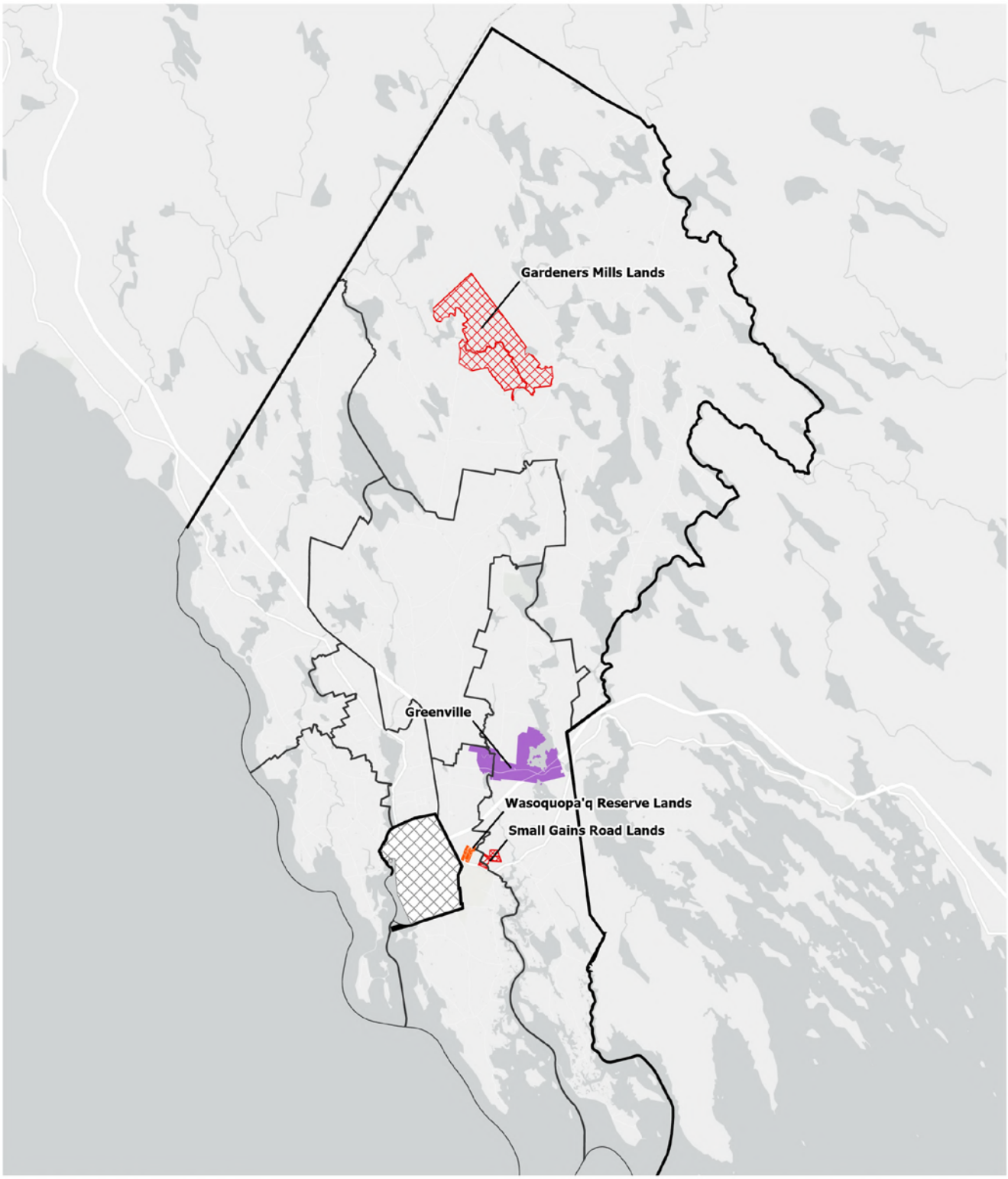
Within MODY, Greenville and the Wasoqopa'q First Nation reserve lands are recognized as communities of particular historical and cultural significance.

GREENVILLE

Greenville is a historic African Nova Scotian community that traces its origins to 1820. Many of its early residents were Black Loyalists who first settled in Shelburne before relocating to Yarmouth County. The community has a long-standing cultural and historical identity and is home to the Greenville United Baptist Church, one of the oldest surviving churches established by Nova Scotia's Black community.

WASOQOPA'Q LANDS

Wasoqopa'q First Nation is a multigenerational Mi'kmaw Nation with reserve lands extending across five counties in southwestern Nova Scotia, from Yarmouth to Halifax. The Yarmouth Reserve, established in 1887, is the Nation's most populous reserve and serves as the administrative centre for the community. In addition to the existing reserve, there are two properties currently undergoing the federal Additions to Reserve process; Gardeners Mills and Arcadia.

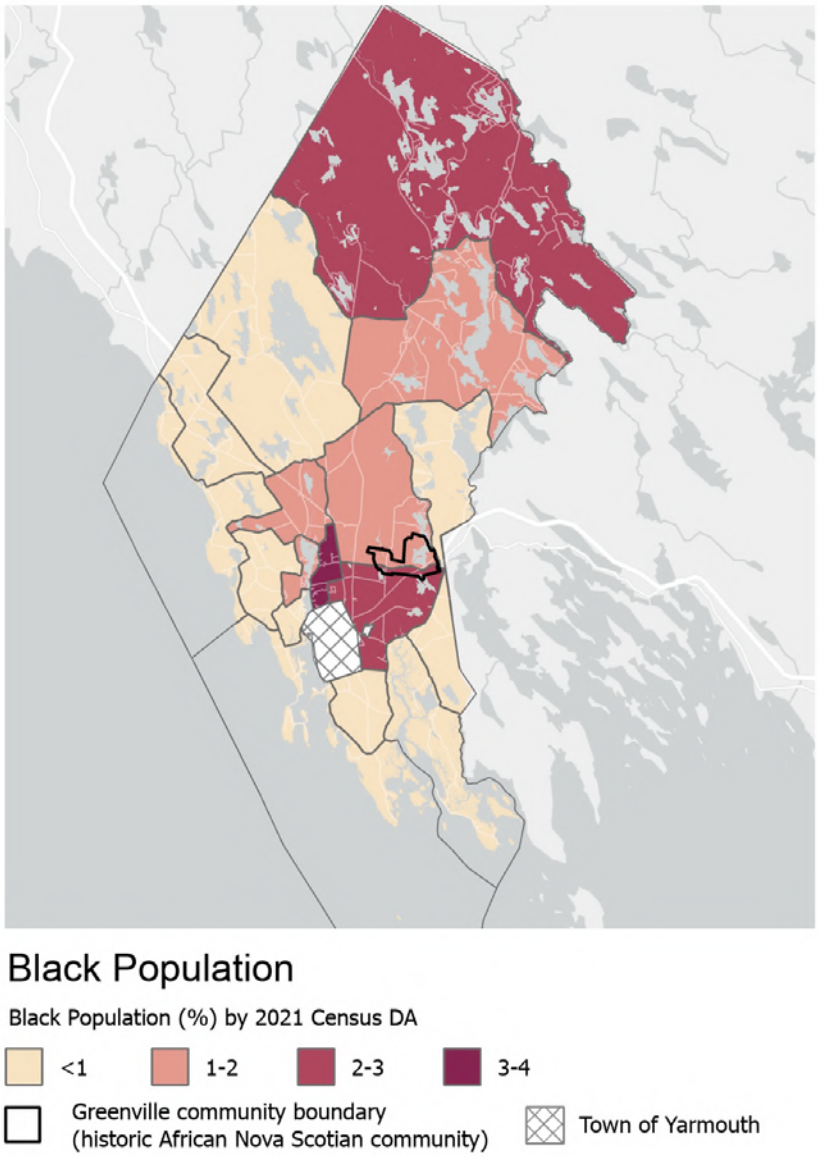


Communities of Interest

4.5 DEMOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATIONS

BLACK POPULATION

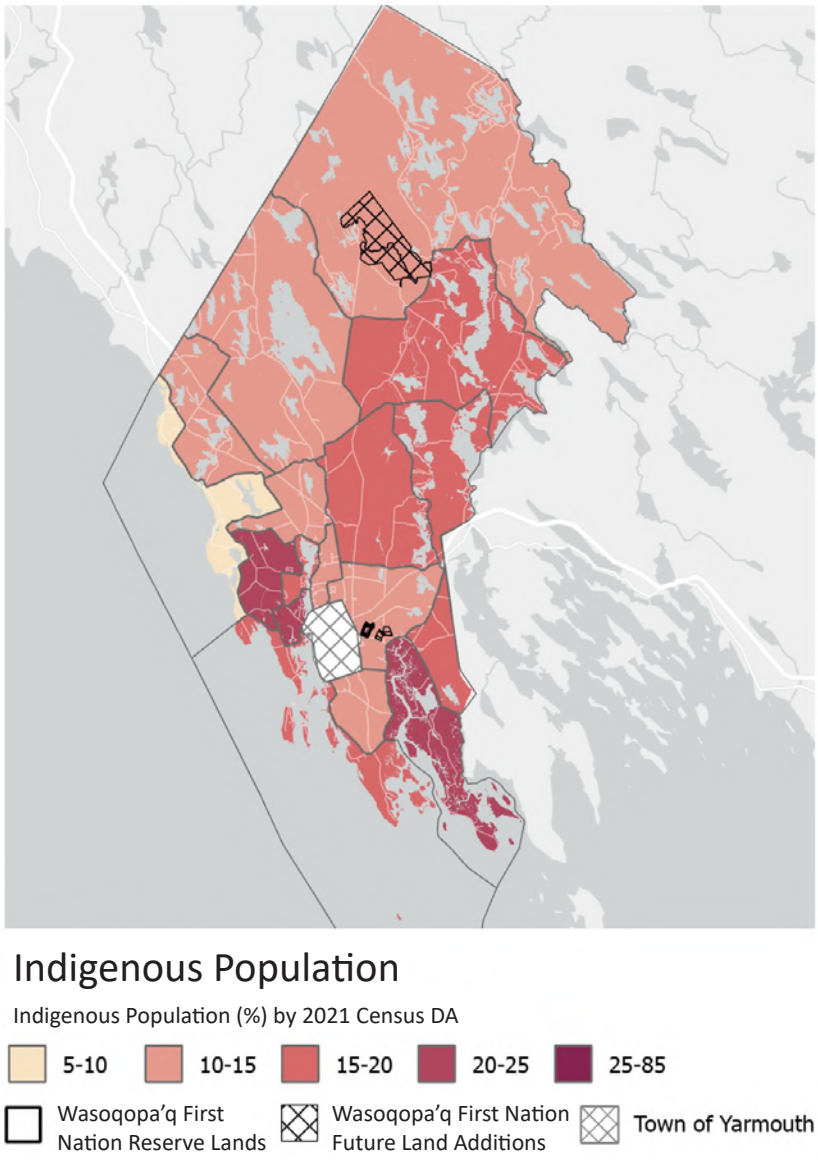
There is a concentration of Black residents north and east of the Town of Yarmouth, including the communities of Greenville, Arcadia, and Dayton-Hebron, as well as in the northern areas of the municipality, from Gardeners Mills to North Kemptville, Kemptville, and East Canaan. The highest concentration of Black residents is not within Greenville itself, but in Dayton-Hebron (east of Doctors Lake), where they represent 3.1% of the population. This is greater than the provincial representation of Black residents, which is 2.9% of the total population.



INDIGENOUS POPULATION

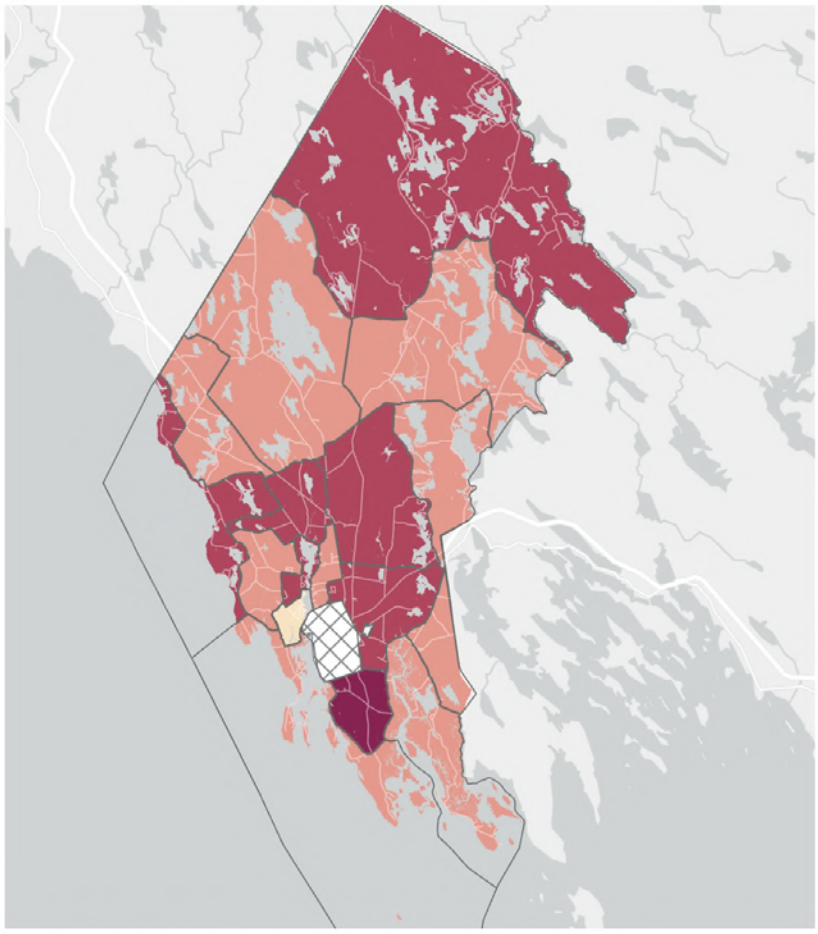
The population of residents with Indigenous identity in MODY is most highly concentrated within the Wasoqopa'q First Nation reserve, located east of the Town of Yarmouth. Other notable concentrations exist between Arcadia and Pinkneys Point, and in the Cape Forchu area.

However, there is a significant population that self-identifies as Indigenous throughout the broader municipality, representing 20% of the total population of MODY, as compared to around 5.5% of the total population of Nova Scotia.



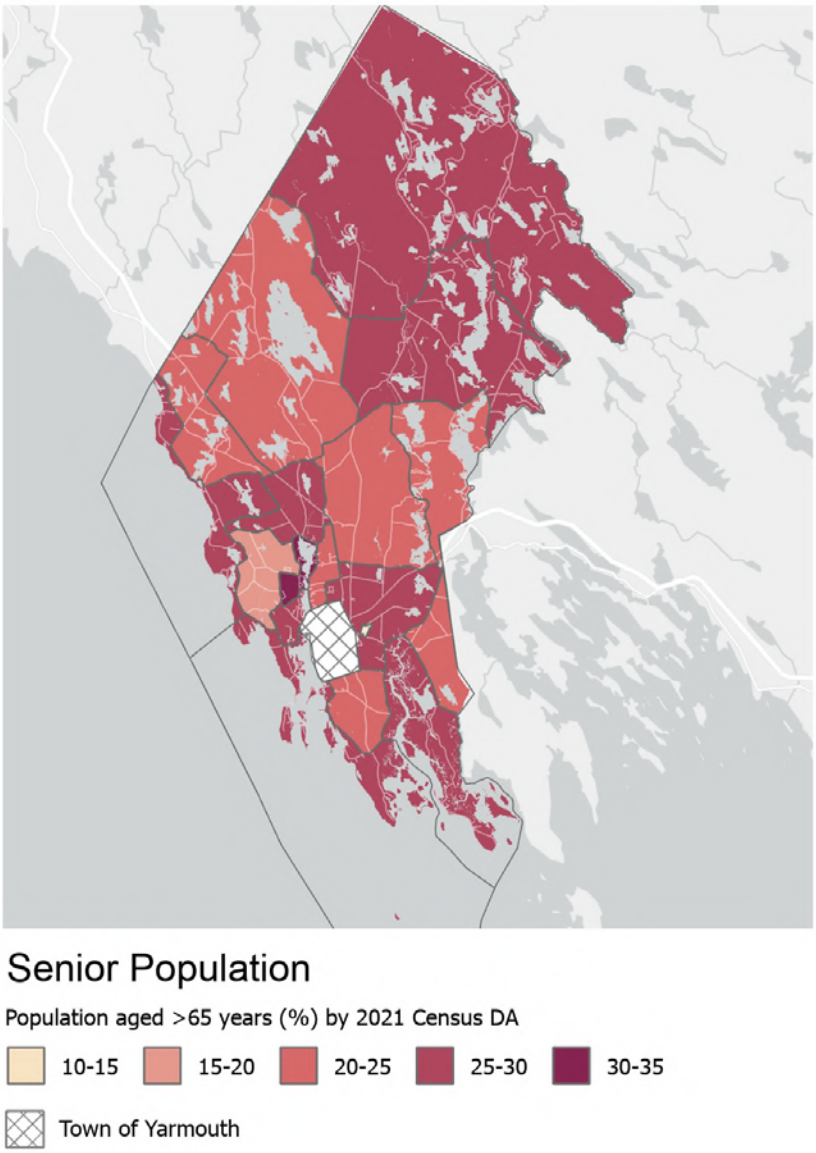
LOW INCOME POPULATION

Households considered to be in low income (after tax) are most concentrated south of the Town of Yarmouth, in Rockville, Central Chebogue and Sand Beach, where over 20% of the population is in this category. There is also a high concentration of low income households along the coastline from Cape Forchu to Port Maitland, and further inland in Dayton, Wellington, South Ohio, Summerville, Greenville, Brooklyn, Pleasant Lake and Arcadia. The northern reaches of the municipality also have a significant low-income population.



SENIORS

The distribution of residents who are over the age of 65 is similar to the distribution of low-income residents across the municipality, with high representation in the coastal areas, around the Town of Yarmouth, and in the northern parts of the municipality. However, there is a higher concentration of seniors in Chebogue Point, Southern Rockville, Melbourne and Pinkeys Point than in Sand Beach and Centreal Chebogue. The highest concentration of seniors is found in Dayton-Hebron, where nearly 35% of residents are over 65 years old, and along the coast from Cape Forchu to Port Maitland.



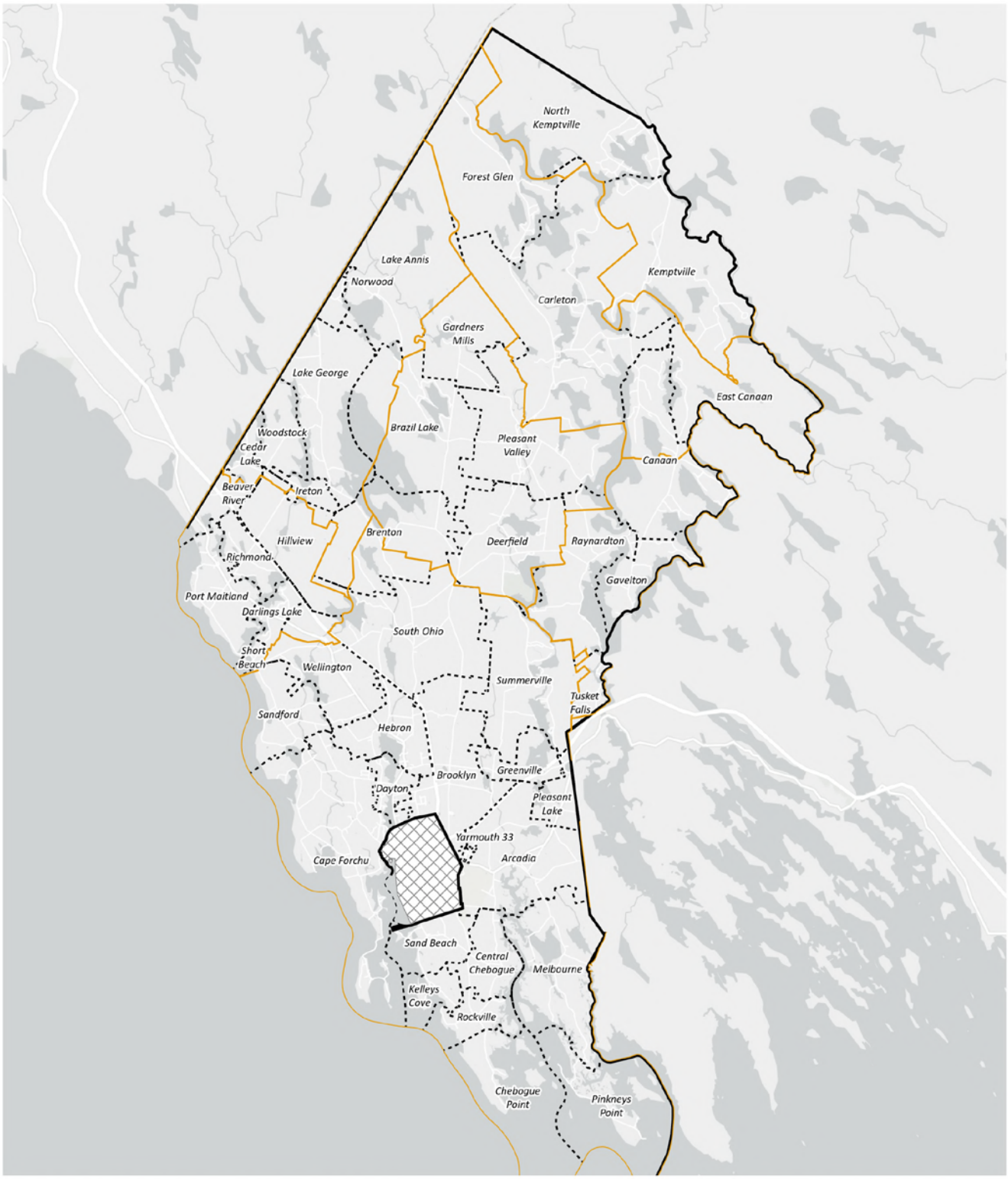
4.6 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

During initial conversations with stakeholders regarding district realignment, several additional considerations emerged that could help inform the development of the electoral boundaries. One considerations was the alignment of electoral boundaries with existing community and fire district boundaries. Aligning these boundaries could serve to improve the coherence of the proposed districts and make them more recognizable and intuitive for residents.

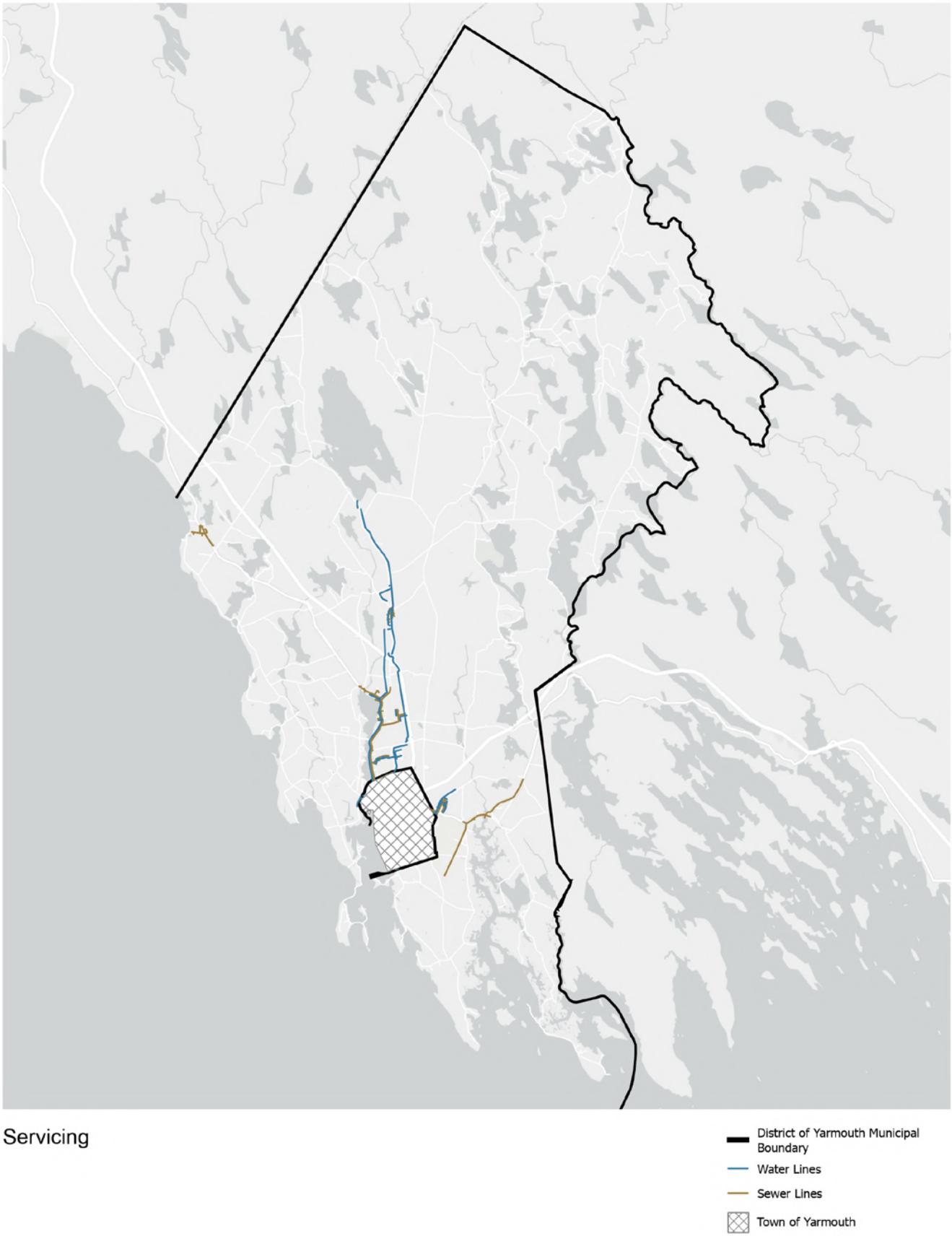
However, it should be noted that fire service boundaries vary considerably in size, with the area serviced by the Town of Yarmouth being substantially larger than those serviced by volunteer fire departments (VFDs). Additionally, VFDs are separate legal entities, and their service boundaries may change independently of Council. So, while fire service boundaries may provide some context for boundary development, they are a lower-priority consideration.

Stakeholders also identified the distribution of municipal servicing infrastructure as an important consideration. Concentrating areas served by municipal water and wastewater infrastructure within fewer electoral districts could reduce situations where only a small portion of a district has access to municipal services while the majority of residents rely on private wells and on-site septic systems. This approach may also help ensure that residents with shared servicing interests are represented within the same electoral district, particularly when Council considers matters related to the maintenance, expansion, or management of municipal infrastructure.

Conversely, sharing serviced areas across districts could help ensure more Councillors are invested in decision-making about servicing.



Community and Fire District Boundaries


Servicing
District of Yarmouth Municipal Boundary
Water Lines
Sewer Lines
Town of Yarmouth

