Municipality of the District of Yarmouth

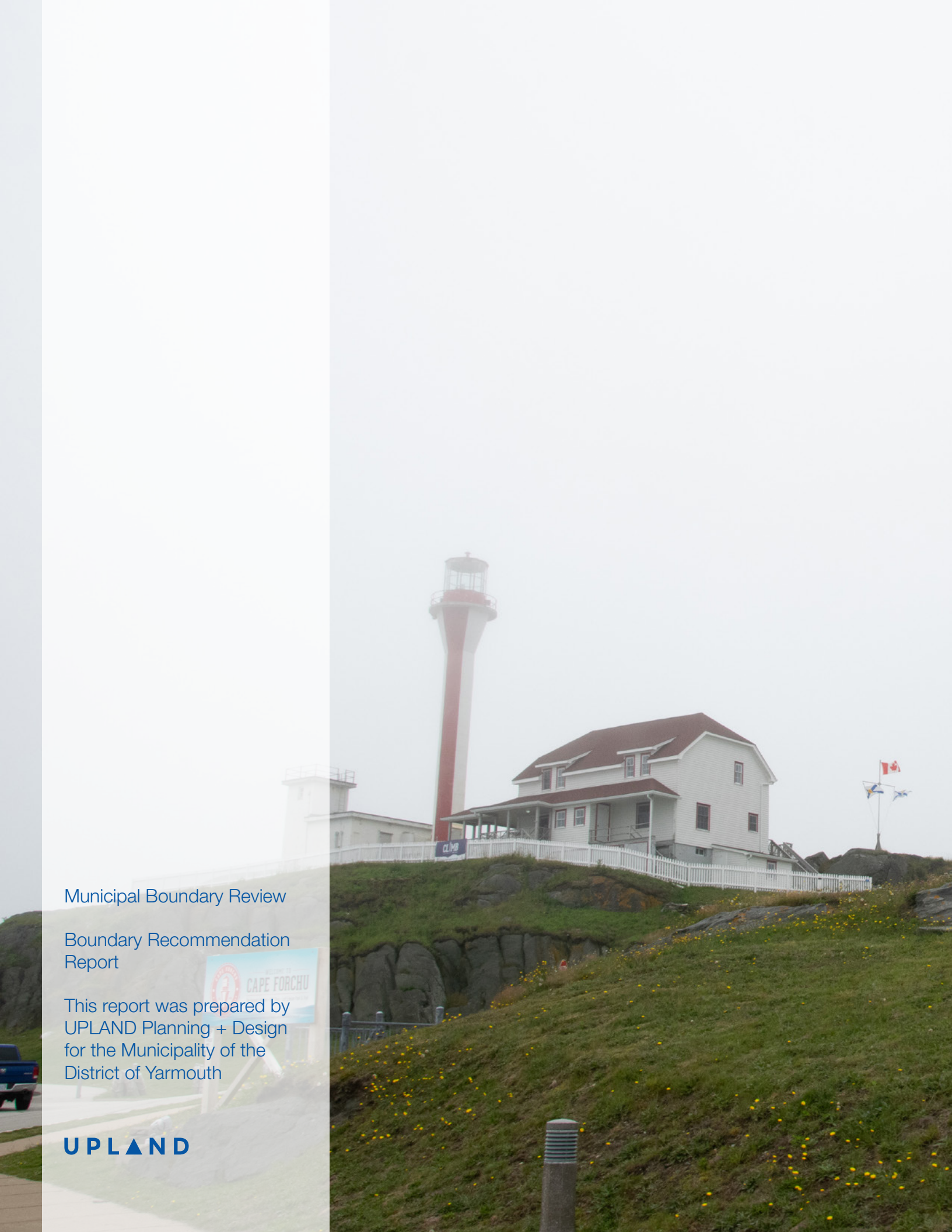
Municipal Boundary Review

Report #3 – Boundary Recommendations

UPLAND
PLANNING + DESIGN STUDIO

October, 2026





Municipal Boundary Review

Boundary Recommendation 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 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 change as well. To ensure that residents' 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. This included a potential change 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 in March of 2026 to proceed with a transition to a mayoral system with six electoral districts. This completed "Phase 1" of a typical Boundary Review process. Following this decision, MODY is undertaking "Phase 2", a comprehensive review to develop the proposed boundaries for these districts.

Part of the review process includes engaging with community members to gather their input on how they think the new electoral district boundaries should be drawn.

1.2 ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the third of three reports regarding potential boundaries for MODY's six new electoral boundaries.

Report #1, dated August, 2026 provided background context on the project. It discusses the boundary review process and past NSRAB decisions regarding MODY electoral boundaries. It also explores some of the key data and factors that feed into the boundary analysis, including current elector distribution, demographic trends, communities of interest, and administrative boundaries.

Report #2, dated October, 2026 provided an overview of community engagement on the potential electoral boundaries, and what we heard from people during those engagements.

This report builds on the previous analysis and the results of engagement to establish a recommended boundary scenario. This recommendation, as well as alternatives, will be presented to Council for a vote on Council's preferred scenario. The scenario selected by Council will then be forwarded, along with the analysis and engagement results, to NSRAB for review and potential adoption.

2. BOUNDARY OPTIONS



2.1 METHODOLOGY

As outlined in the Background Report, section 368(4) of the *Municipal Government Act* outlines the factors to be considered for evaluating the number of polling districts and their respective boundaries. Primarily, the goal is to provide effective representation by considering relative parity of voting power, community interest, geographic district size, and population density. Successive guidance from NSRAB has suggested that elector counts for each district should be within +/- 10% of the average, and in no circumstance should the variance be greater than +/- 25%.

In addition to these core criteria, the project team established a number of other guiding factors to use when testing boundary scenarios:

- Where possible, follow administrative boundaries such as community boundaries from the Government of Nova Scotia Civic Address File or fire district boundaries.
- Where possible, follow physical features such as roads or watercourses.
- Consider the impact of boundaries on representation for the historic Black community of Greenville, and on Wasoqopa'q First Nation.
- Consider the impact on representation for fishing communities.
- If possible, keep elector populations lower in districts with a high proportion of non-elector property owners (e.g. seasonal residents) to help balance councillor workloads.
- If possible, minimize travel times within the districts to help balance councillor workloads.
- If possible, keep elector populations lower in areas with high expected population growth to allow for such growth without exceeding voter parity requirements.
- If possible, minimize changes from existing districts to minimize elector confusion.

The project team explored different options by starting with the existing electoral boundaries and testing different options for "dissolving" one existing district and reconfiguring the remaining districts to fill the gap. The team then built on this analysis by adjusting various boundaries to test the effects of prioritizing different options from the above guiding factors.

One of the early findings of this iterative analysis was that the physical distribution of electors in MODY makes it relatively easy to meet the variance requirements for voter parity. This process led to tens of boundary scenarios that are viable from a variance perspective. The project team therefore used professional judgment to cull these to four major scenarios and a handful of sub-scenarios, primarily on the basis of how easy they would be to understand for the average elector.

The project team then met with municipal Staff to review the options and to establish three scenarios that would be used for community engagement. Through this discussion, the project team determined that the most useful approach would be to choose three scenarios that best showed fundamentally different arrangements of districts and would potentially garner the strongest responses from engagement participants.

2.2 BOUNDARY SCENARIOS

Amended versions (see 2.4) of the three scenarios presented at public engagement are attached as Appendix A. In summary:

SCENARIO 1

This scenario focuses on following administrative boundaries, including fire district boundaries, and keeping fishing communities together. This scenario has many districts that show a moderate amount of variance.

SCENARIO 2

This scenario focuses on minimizing changes in the overall structure from the existing boundaries. The overall orientation of districts is generally north-south. This scenario exhibits the largest variances, with District 3 (-9.18%) and District 5 (+8.55%) nearing the 10% threshold.

SCENARIO 3

This scenario focuses heavily on clarity of boundaries, using clear physical features such as Highway 101 and the chain of Doctors Lake and Lake Milo as dividing lines. The overall orientation of districts is generally east-west. This scenario minimizes variance, with only District 5 show substantial variance from the average.

2.3 ENGAGEMENT RESULTS SUMMARY

Report #2 includes a full overview of the engagement efforts and results. The amount of feedback was limited, with a handful of members of the public at the engagement sessions and 19 responses to the survey.

Of those who participated in the survey, Scenario 2 was most strongly preferred (35%), followed by Scenario 1 (24%) and then Scenario 3 (18%). The remaining respondents did not prefer any of the scenarios.

Specific comments on Scenario 1 included:

- Liking how fire boundaries are followed
- Liking how communities of interest are kept together
- Concerns about the size of districts
- Concerns about how the area north of the Town of Yarmouth is divided.

For Scenario 2:

- Liking that it was similar to existing boundaries
- Concerns about the large size of some districts

For Scenario 3:

- Liking that geographic areas are distributed more evenly among districts
- Mixed feelings about the divide between Districts 5 and 6.

2.4 SCENARIO UPDATES

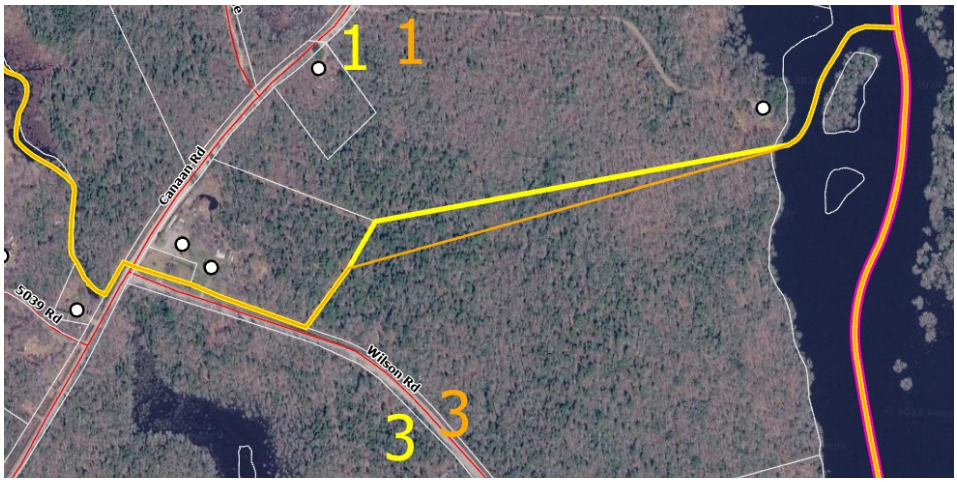
Following community engagement, the project team and municipal Staff took a fresh look at the boundary scenarios to determine if there were any ways to further refine and improve them before a final scenario is selected. This review identified a number of small adjustments where the boundary scenarios could better align with existing community boundaries, property lines, physical features, etc., and support clarity and ease of future administration. These adjustments are included in the scenarios as presented in Part 3. In most cases, the changes do not change elector numbers.

For full transparency, each change is listed below, with the following scheme:

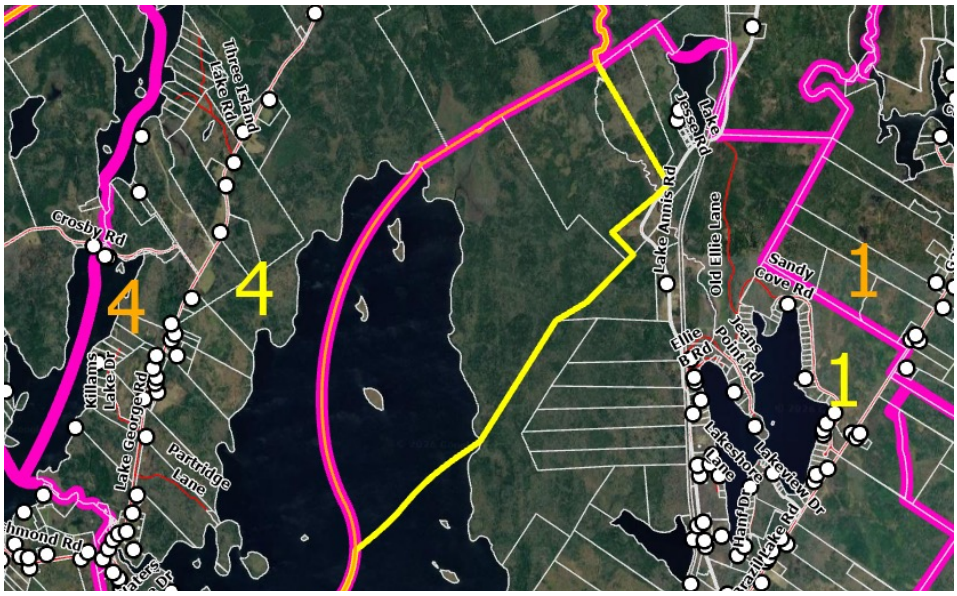
- Yellow lines = electoral boundaries as presented during public engagement
- Orange lines = electoral boundaries after this refinement
- Magenta lines = community boundaries as identified in the Nova Scotia Civic Address File
- White dots = elector locations

SCENARIO 1

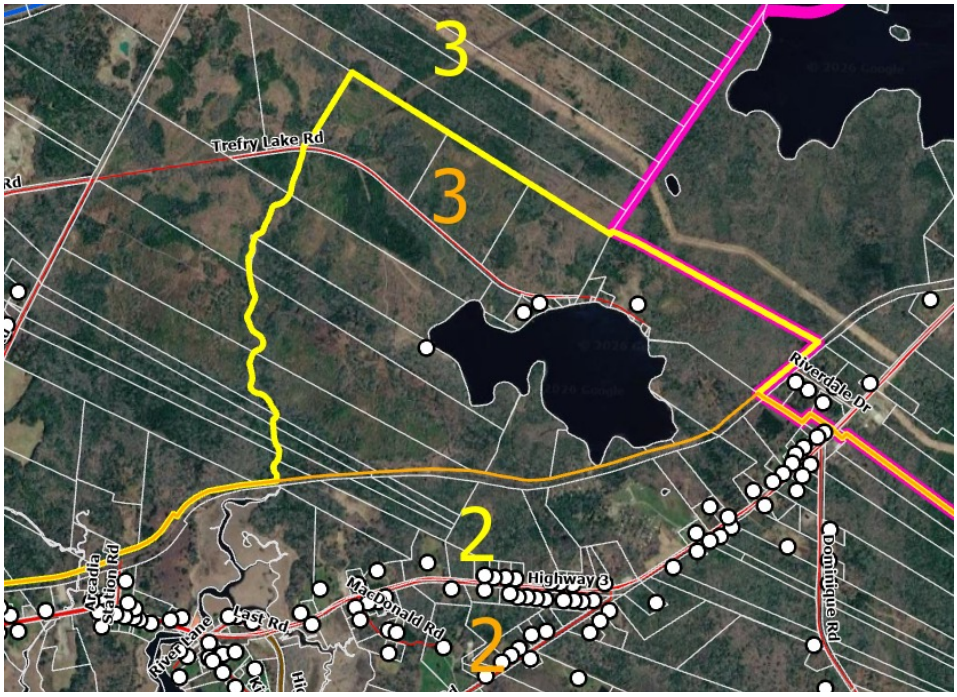
Boundary between District 1 and District 3 in the vicinity of Canaan Road and Wilson Road, updated to follow property line. No effect on elector numbers.



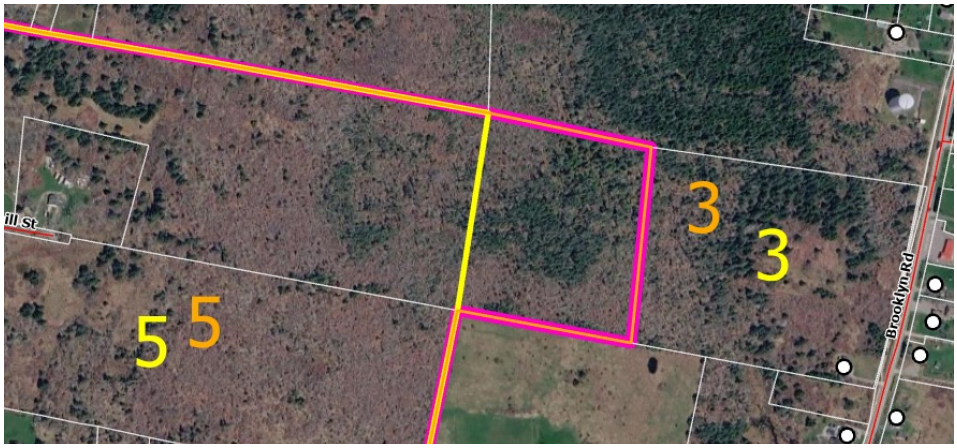
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Lake George, updated to follow community boundary. No effect on elector numbers.



Boundary between District 2 and District 3 in the vicinity of Trefry Lake, updated to follow rail trail and place all of Trefry Lake Road in District 3. Small effect on elector numbers.

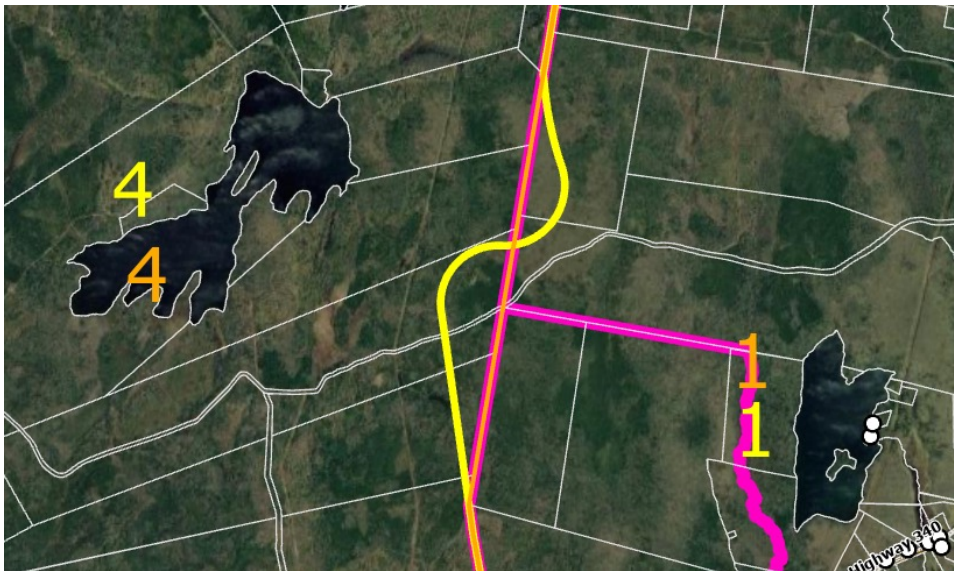


Boundary between District 3 and District 5 in the vicinity of Brooklyn Road and Park Drive, updated to follow community boundary and property line. No effect on elector numbers.

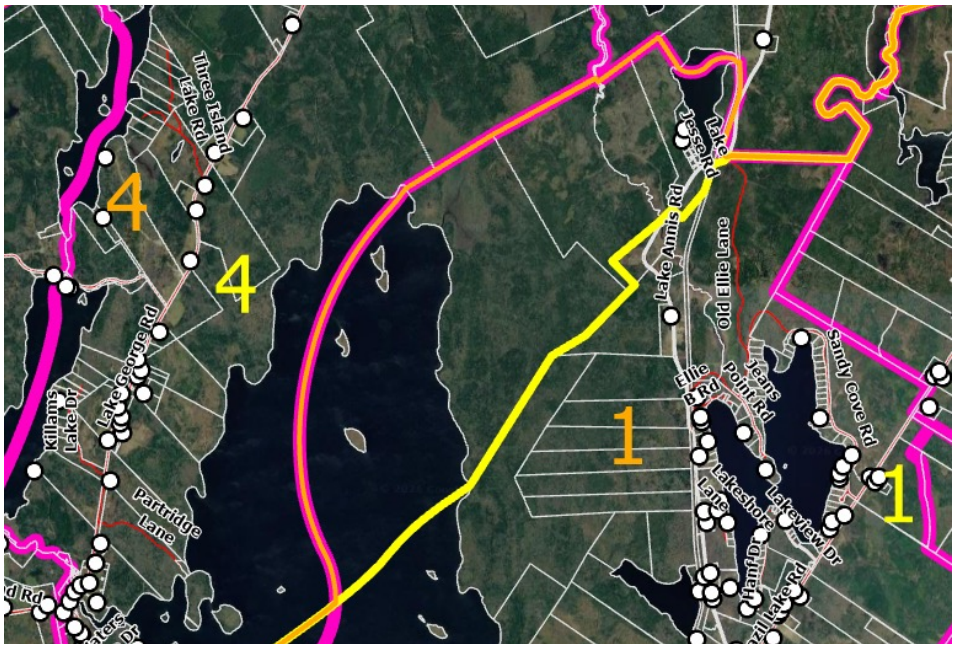


SCENARIO 2

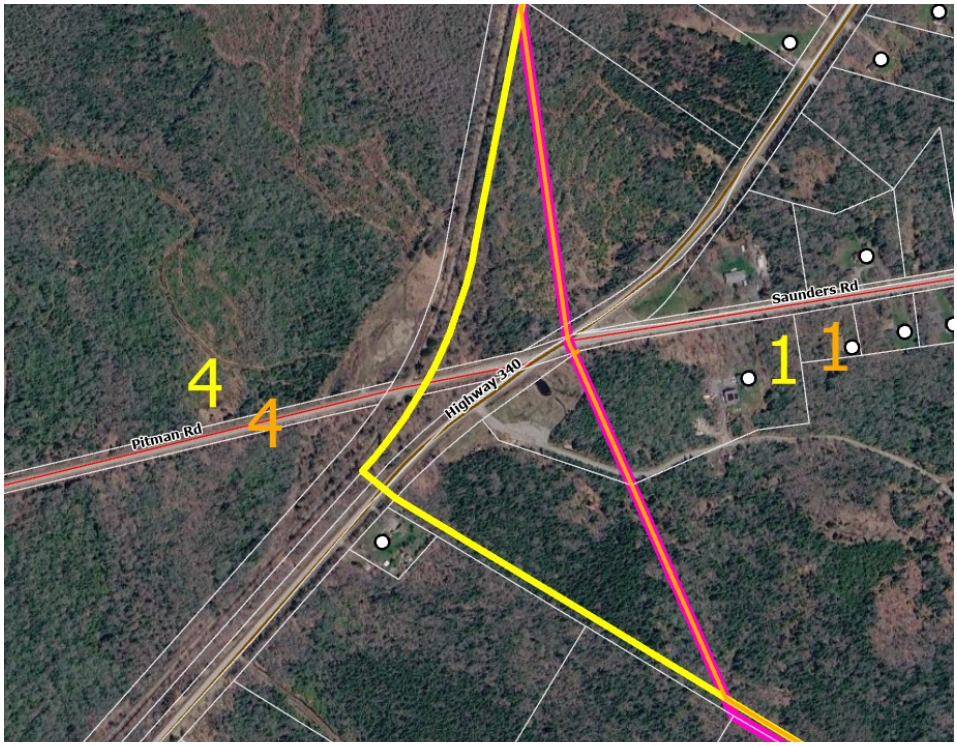
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Dove Lake, updated to follow community boundary and property lines. No effect on elector numbers.



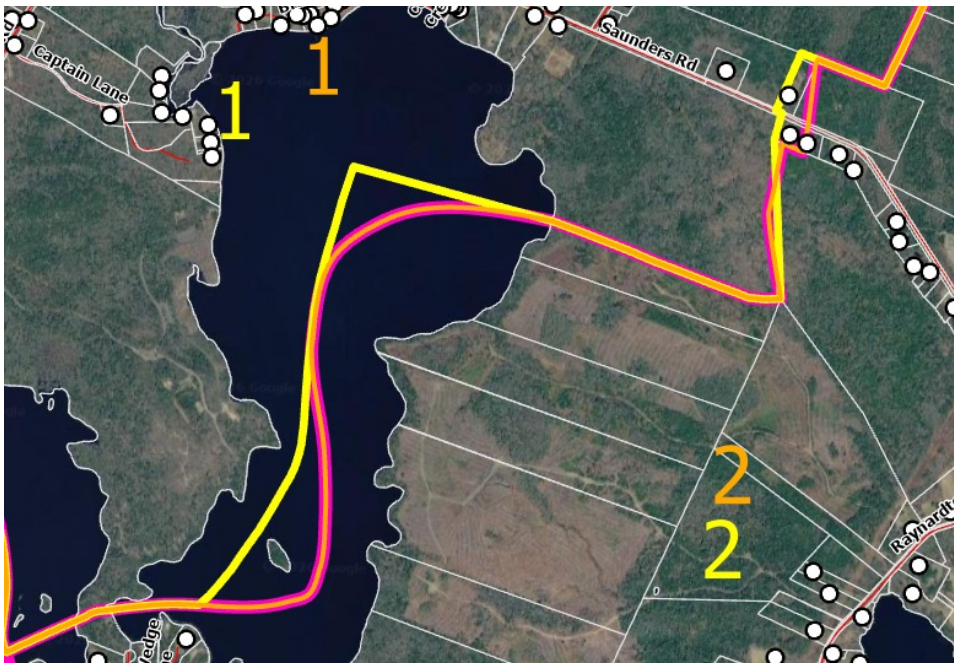
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Lake George, updated to follow community boundary. Small effect on elector numbers.



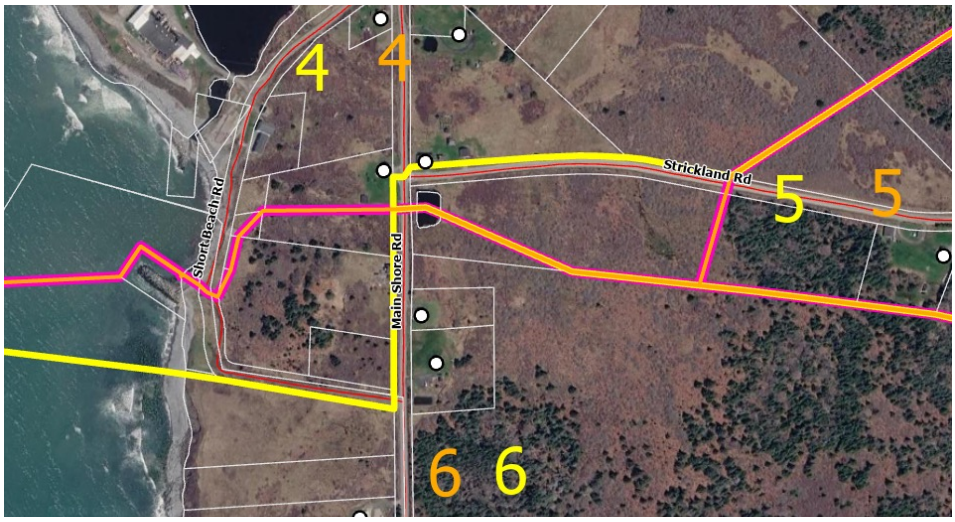
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Highway 340 and Saunders Road, updated to follow community boundary. No effect on elector numbers.



Boundary between District 1 and District 2 in the vicinity of Ellenwood Lake, updated to follow community boundary. Small effect on elector numbers.

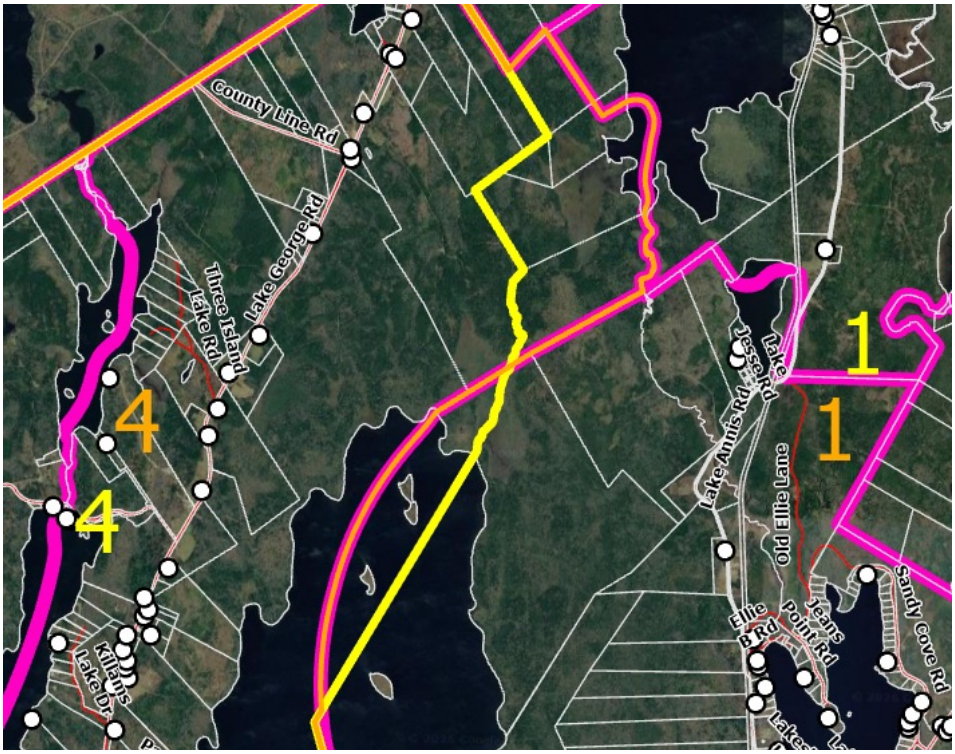


Boundaries between District 4 and District 6 in the vicinity of Main Shore Road and Strickland Road, updated to follow community boundary. No effect on elector numbers.

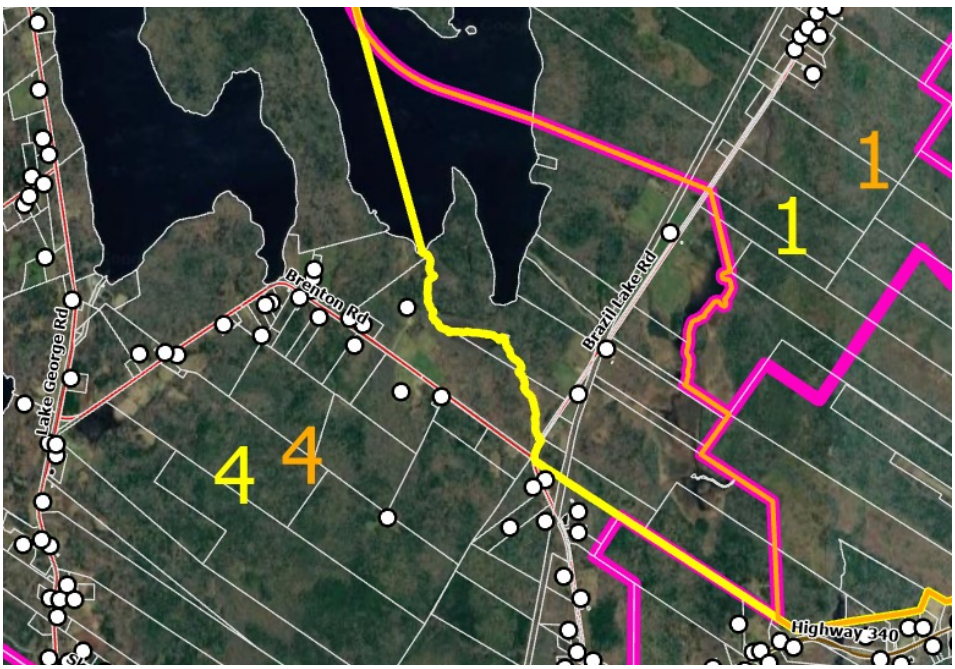


SCENARIO 3

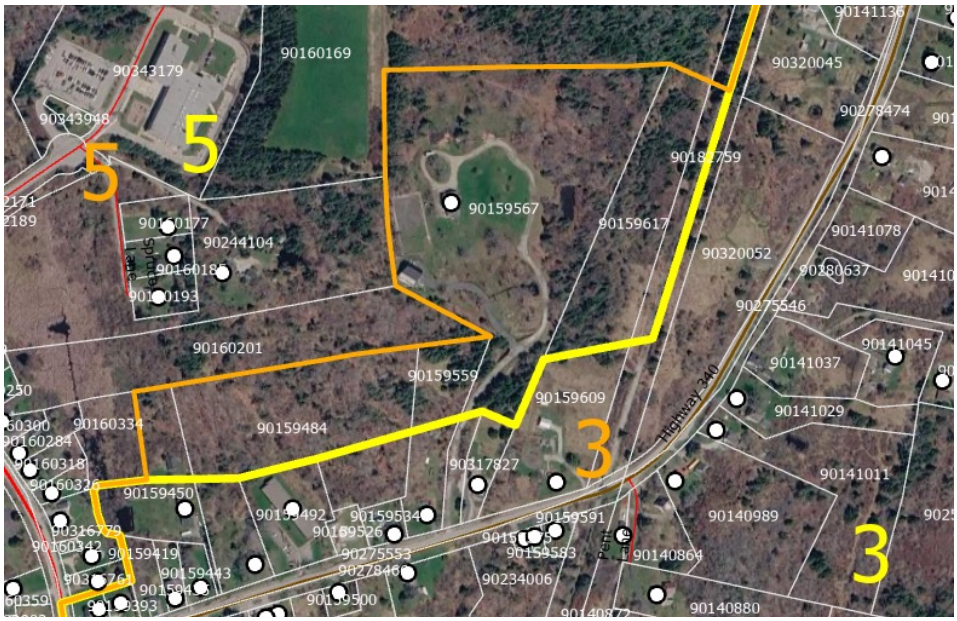
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Lake George, updated to follow community boundary. No effect on elector numbers.



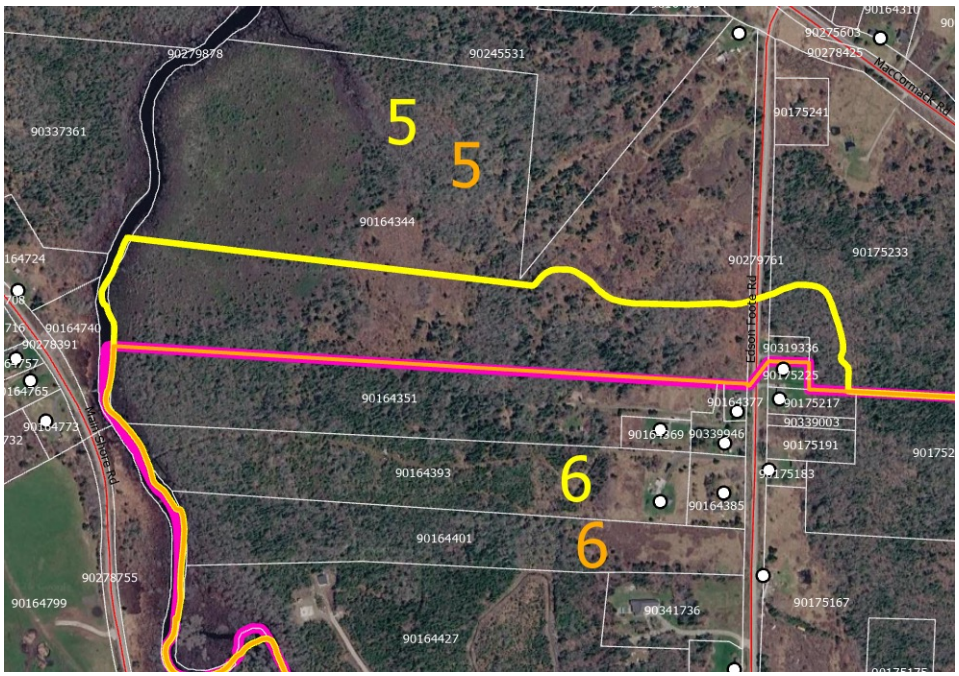
Boundary between District 1 and District 4 in the vicinity of Lake George, updated to follow community boundary. Small effect on elector numbers.



Boundary between District 3 and District 5 in Hebron, updated to follow property lines and so that 69 Highway 340 is within the district that contains its road frontage. Small effect on elector numbers.



Boundary between District 5 and District 6 in the vicinity of Taylors Lake, updated to follow community boundary. No effect on elector numbers.



3. RECOMMENDED BOUNDARIES



3.1 DISCUSSION

As stated previously, NSRAB's primary evaluation factors for electoral boundaries are voter parity (i.e. variance from the average number of voters in a district), communities of interest, and the geographic aspects of the districts (size, connectivity, etc.).

All three scenarios explored align with NSRAB's variance criteria; none contain districts that exceed 10% variance from the average number of electors.

Further, all three are similar in regard to keeping Greenville consolidated in one district, Wasoqopa'q First Nation consolidated in one district, and potential additions to Wasoqopa'q First Nation consolidated in one district. The one difference for these communities of interest is that Scenario 2 would have a councillor for Greenville and a separate councillor for the areas around Wasoqopa'q First Nation, while in Scenario 1 and Scenario 3 both areas would fall within the same district.

The other "community of interest" identified during the early stages of this project was communities engaged in the fishing industry. Scenarios 1 and 2 keep a good number of the western fishing communities consolidated in one district, while Scenario 3 splits the responsibility between two councillors. One approach here is not necessarily better than the other. On one hand, keeping all of the fishing communities together consolidates the shared interest. On the other hand, splitting the responsibility across two districts increases the number of councillors who may feel a responsibility to advocate for this "community of interest".

Geographically, all three scenarios are similar, with the size of each district varying little from scenario to scenario. In all cases, District 1 is going to be large due to the relatively low density of electors in the northern portion of the municipality.

To sum up the above, all three scenarios are viable from the perspective of meeting the key primary evaluation factors. Therefore, we must turn to secondary factors to provide some guidance.

From this perspective, we look to two questions:

1. What is the long-term viability of a scenario as populations change?

2. How easy is a scenario to communicate and administer?

Whatever scenario is chosen will be used in the 2028 municipal election and then will need to be reviewed for the 2032 election and every eight years thereafter. Ideally, the chosen scenario should stand with minimal changes for 2032 and potentially beyond that. Any analysis based on future populations is at best a prediction; however, we can provide the best chance of maintaining district boundaries into 2032 and beyond by considering district variances. From that perspective, Scenario 1 and 2 both have some risks.

In Scenario 1, two districts are nearing the 10% threshold: District 1 (-7.67%) and District 2 (+7.17%). District 1 saw strong growth from the 2011 Census to the 2021 Census, so there is actually some advantage to this district being underpopulated. However, District 2 also saw very strong growth during this period, and if this trend continues the district could easily exceed the 10% variance.

Scenario 2 is similar in that District 3 is underpopulated (-9.18%) but has the potential for growth, while District 5 is overpopulated (+8.55%) and has the potential for strong growth that rapidly pushes it beyond the 10% variance.

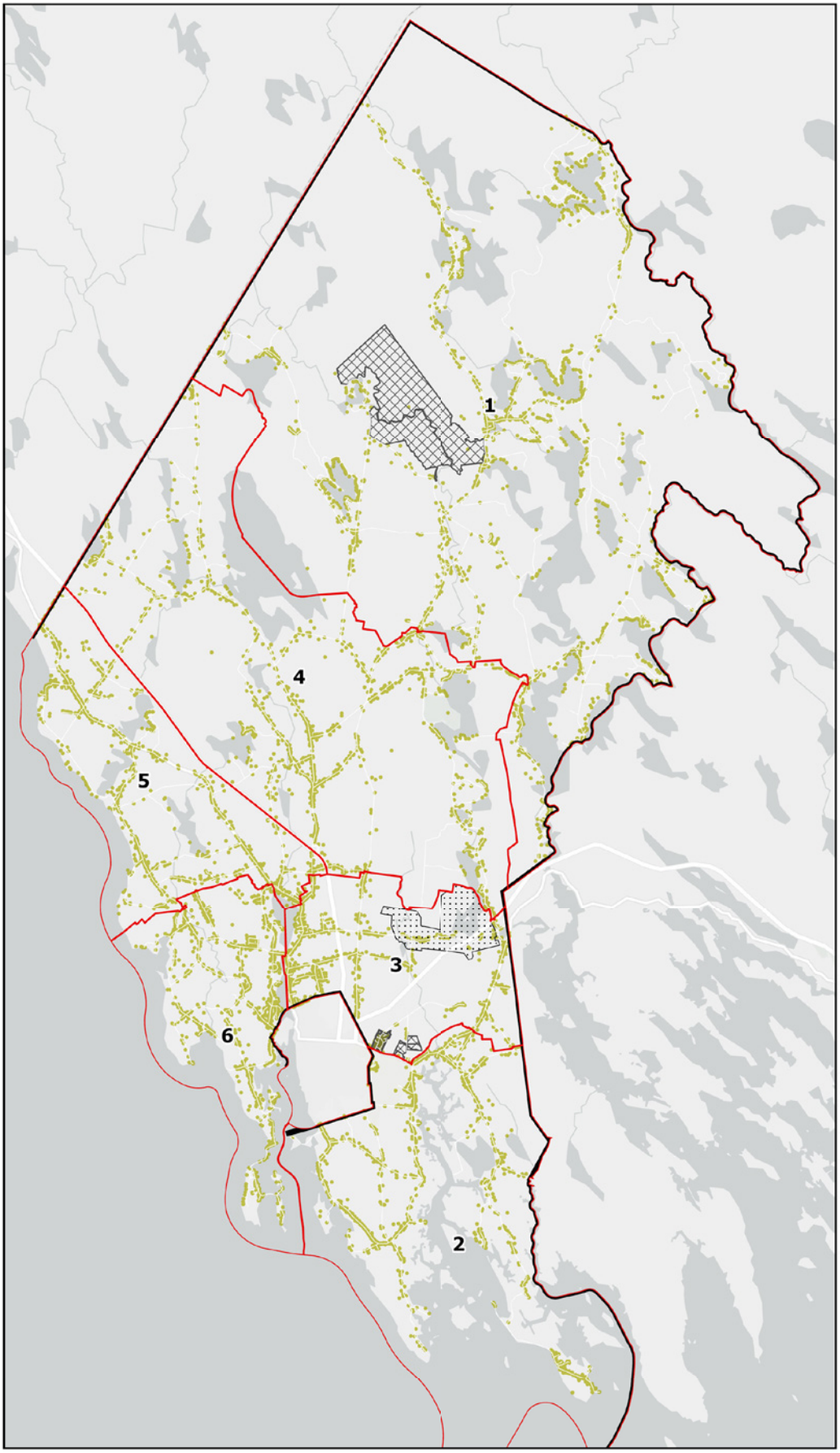
In contrast, Scenario 3 only has one district that exceeds +/- 5%. District 5 in this scenario sits at -7.47%. In this case, the specific boundaries of District 5 did have some minor population decline from 2011 to 2021, so there is some small risk of this particular District 5 exceeding 10% variance in the future.

Scenario 2 had the most support among public engagement participants, primarily on the basis that it minimizes changes from the current overall electoral boundary structure. While recognizing that there is some comfort in the familiar, from an administrative perspective Scenario 3 is the clear preference. This scenario includes very easily-identifiable boundaries that will make it easy to communicate to electors the district in which they live and the location of their polling stations. While this scenario does represent a substantial change in structure from the current boundary alignments, this is a one-time change that lays a strong foundation for the future.

3.2 RECOMMENDED SCENARIO

All three scenarios are viable in terms of NSRAB's primarily evaluation criteria. However, one scenario has strong advantages when it comes to administration and "future-proofing": Scenario 3. This scenario allows for the greatest future population changes before boundaries need to be revisited, and also eases communications efforts for future elections. While it will require some additional effort in the 2028 election to acclimatize electors to the new district structure, the effort should pay dividends in future elections.

Therefore, we recommend Scenario 3.



District Scenario 3

District	Electors	Variance
1	1516	-0.45
2	1543	1.32
3	1559	2.37
4	1547	1.59
5	1401	-8
6	1571	3.16

- ☐ Prioritizes following Community Boundaries
- ☐ Prioritizes following Fire District Boundaries
- ☑ Prioritizes following physical/ logical features
- ☑ Keeps First Nations Lands and future additions consolidated
- ☑ Keeps Greenville consolidated in a single district
- ☑ Keeps Communities of Interest consolidated according to their distribution shown in census data
- ☐ Keeps Fishing Communities consolidated in a district
- ☐ Fewer electors in districts that contain Communities of Interest
- ☐ Fewer electors in districts where population of rate payers is high
- ☐ Lower elector numbers where population growth is expected
- ☐ Minimizes change from current electoral districts
- ☑ Prioritizes balancing elector numbers/minimizing variance
- ☑ Minimizes travel time within districts

- Potential District Boundary
- District of Yarmouth Municipal Boundary
- Electors
- Greenville
- Acadia First Nations Lands
- Acadia First Nations Lands Future Additions

3.3 COUNCIL'S PREFERRED SCENARIO

The above recommendation is exactly that – a recommendation based on the evaluation factors discussed.

However, it is Council's prerogative to choose the scenario that is forwarded to NSRAB for evaluation.

Council may accept the above recommendation or may choose a different scenario. However, NSRAB is the ultimate authority on approving a boundary scenario. NSRAB will review the submitted boundary analysis, and may supplement this review with questions asked to the Municipality during the formal evaluation hearing.

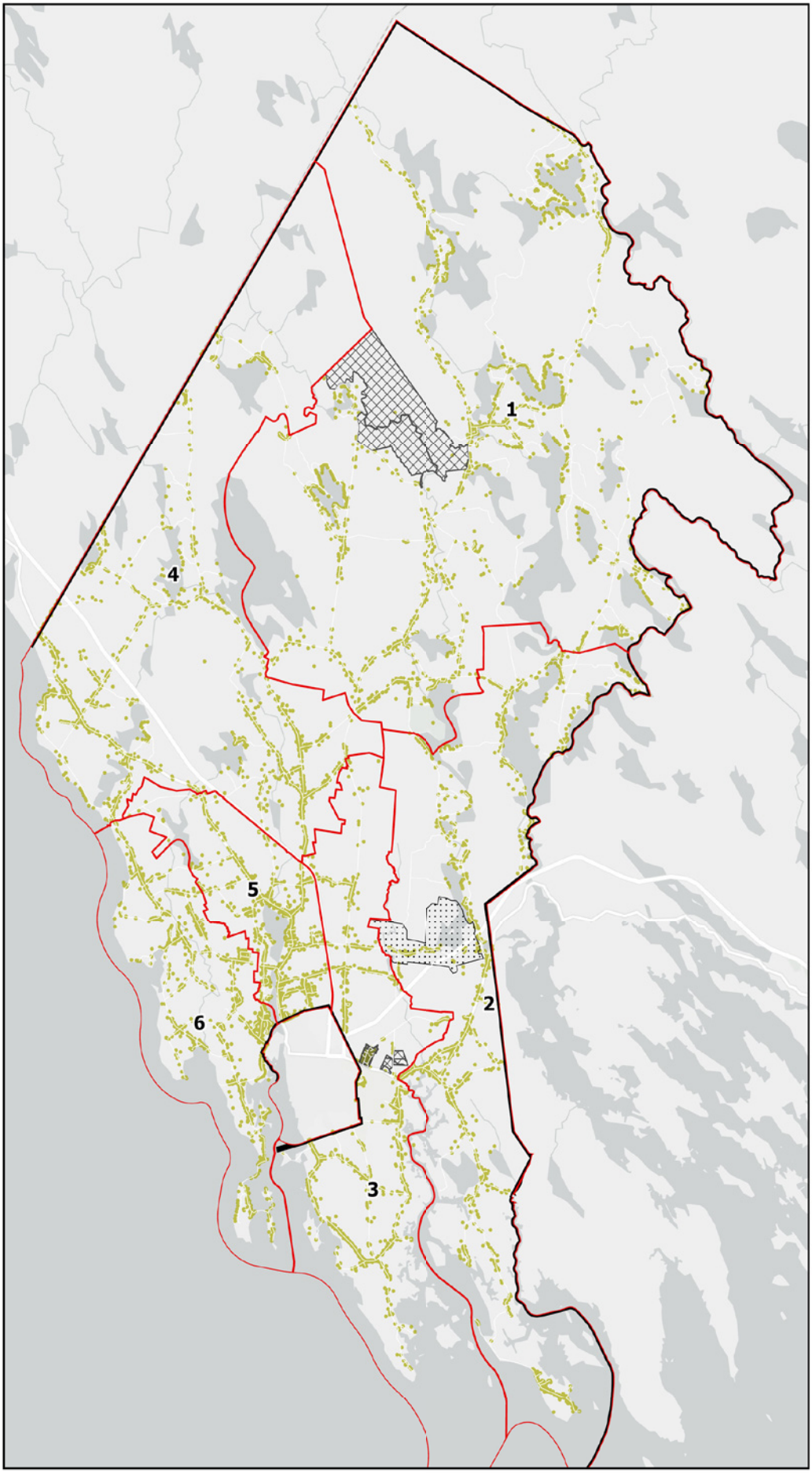
Therefore, Council should be prepared to provide direction to Staff with Council's justification for its preferred scenario if it differs from the above recommendation. This will help ensure the Municipality is able to adequately defend whichever preferred scenario is forwarded and avoid the risk that NSRAB sends the Municipality back to conduct further analysis.

On October 28, 2026 Council considered the results of community engagement, the preceding analysis, and the staff recommendation. Following thorough discussion, Council passed the following motion:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth directs staff to forward Electoral Boundary Scenario 2, as identified in the report dated October 28, 2026, to the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board as the preferred electoral boundary configuration for the 2028 municipal election.

In setting this direction, Council placed weight on the following factors:

- All three scenarios meet the variance criteria.
- Scenario 1 and 2 achieve a Council priority of keeping the fishing communities together in one district.
- While there was a clear public mandate in the spring to restructure from a warden to a mayor system, the limited public feedback on the boundaries themselves did not present a clear mandate to substantially reorganize the arrangement of districts. Scenario 2 maintains the closest structure to the existing district arrangement.
- Among the few members of the public who did provide feedback, Scenario 2 was the preference.



District Scenario 2

District	Electors	Variance
1	1549	1.7
2	1498	-1.63
3	1383	-9.18
4	1591	4.48
5	1653	8.55
6	1463	-3.93

- ☐ Prioritizes following Community Boundaries
- ☑ Prioritizes following Fire District Boundaries
- ☑ Prioritizes following physical/ logical features
- ☑ Keeps First Nations Lands and future additions consolidated
- ☑ Keeps Greenville consolidated in a single district
- ☐ Keeps Communities of Interest consolidated according to their distribution shown in census data
- ☑ Keeps Fishing Communities consolidated in a district
- ☑ Fewer electors in districts that contain Communities of Interest
- ☐ Fewer electors in districts where population of rate payers is high
- ☑ Lower elector numbers where population growth is expected
- ☑ Minimizes change from current electoral districts
- ☐ Prioritizes balancing elector numbers/minimizing variance
- ☐ Minimizes travel time within districts

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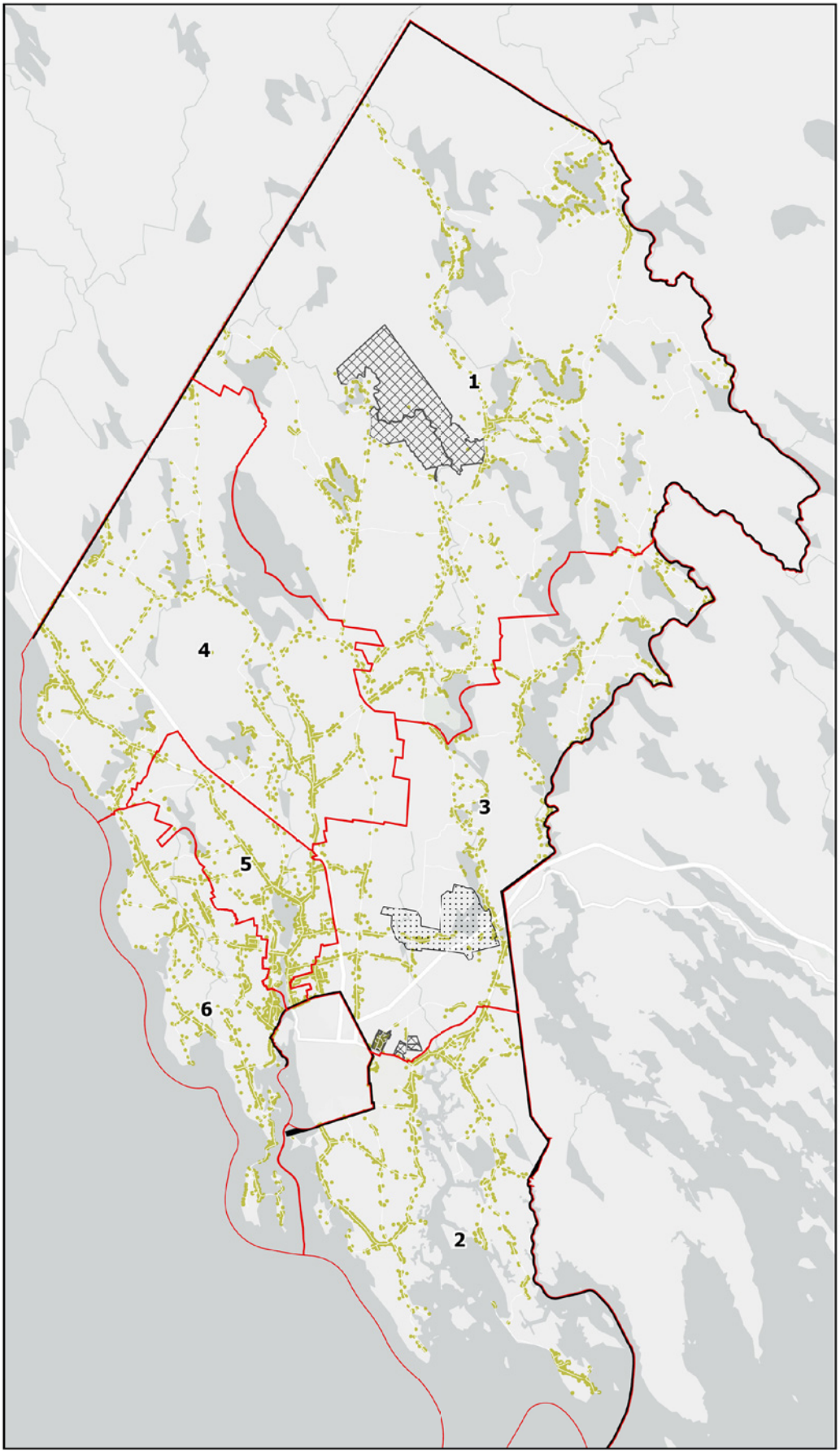

District Scenario 1

District	Electors	Variance
1	1406	-7.67
2	1622	6.51
3	1543	1.32
4	1605	5.4
5	1498	-1.63
6	1463	-3.93

- [x] Prioritizes following Community Boundaries
- [x] Prioritizes following Fire District Boundaries
- [ ] Prioritizes following physical/ logical features
- [x] Keeps First Nations Lands and future additions consolidated
- [x] Keeps Greenville consolidated in a single district
- [ ] Keeps Communities of Interest consolidated according to their distribution shown in census data
- [x] Keeps Fishing Communities consolidated in a district
- [ ] Fewer electors in districts that contain Communities of Interest
- [x] Fewer electors in districts where population of rate payers is high
- [ ] Lower elector numbers where population growth is expected
- [ ] Minimizes change from current electoral districts
- [ ] Prioritizes balancing elector numbers/minimizing variance
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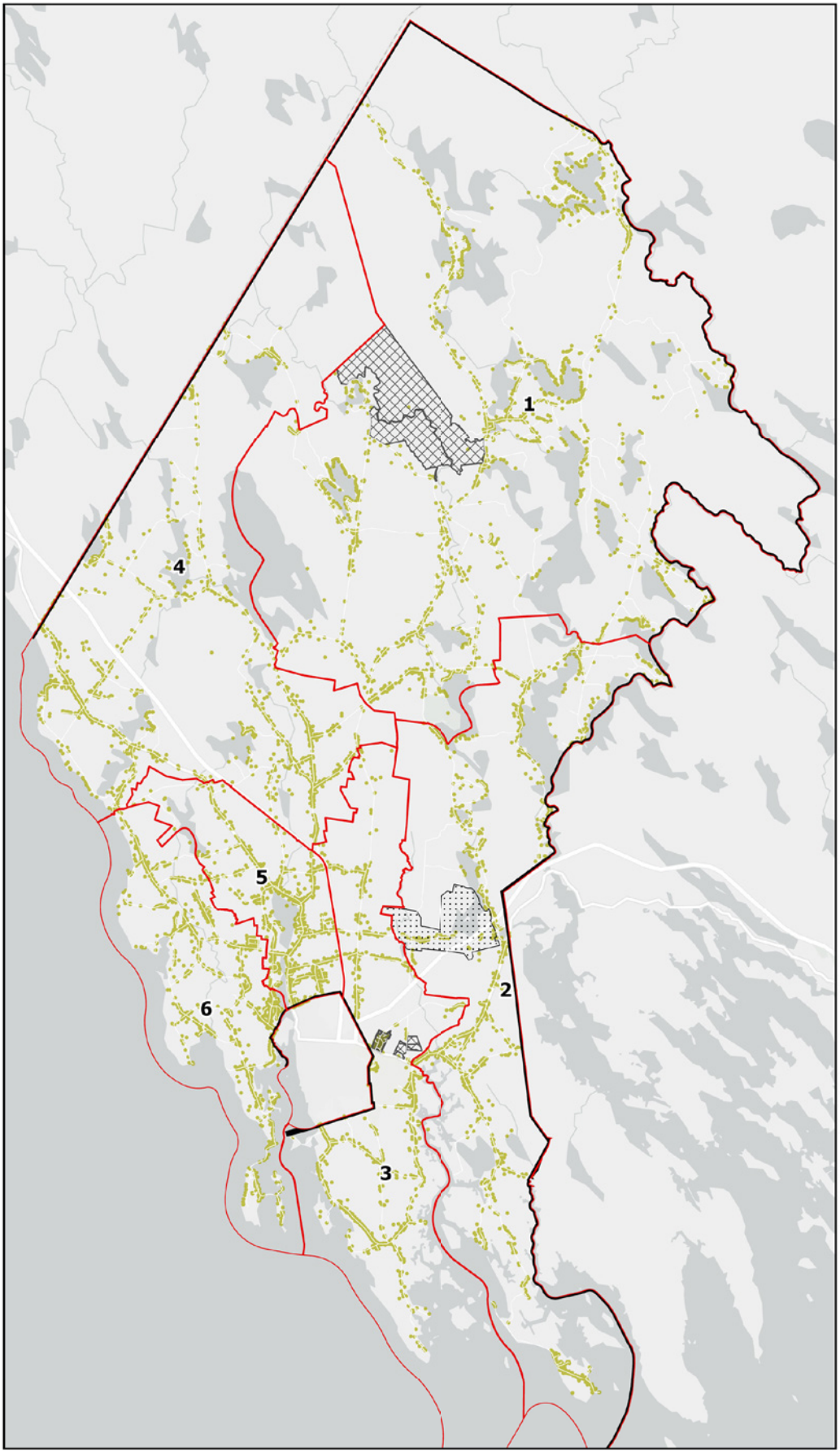

District Scenario 2

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3	1383	-9.18
4	1591	4.48
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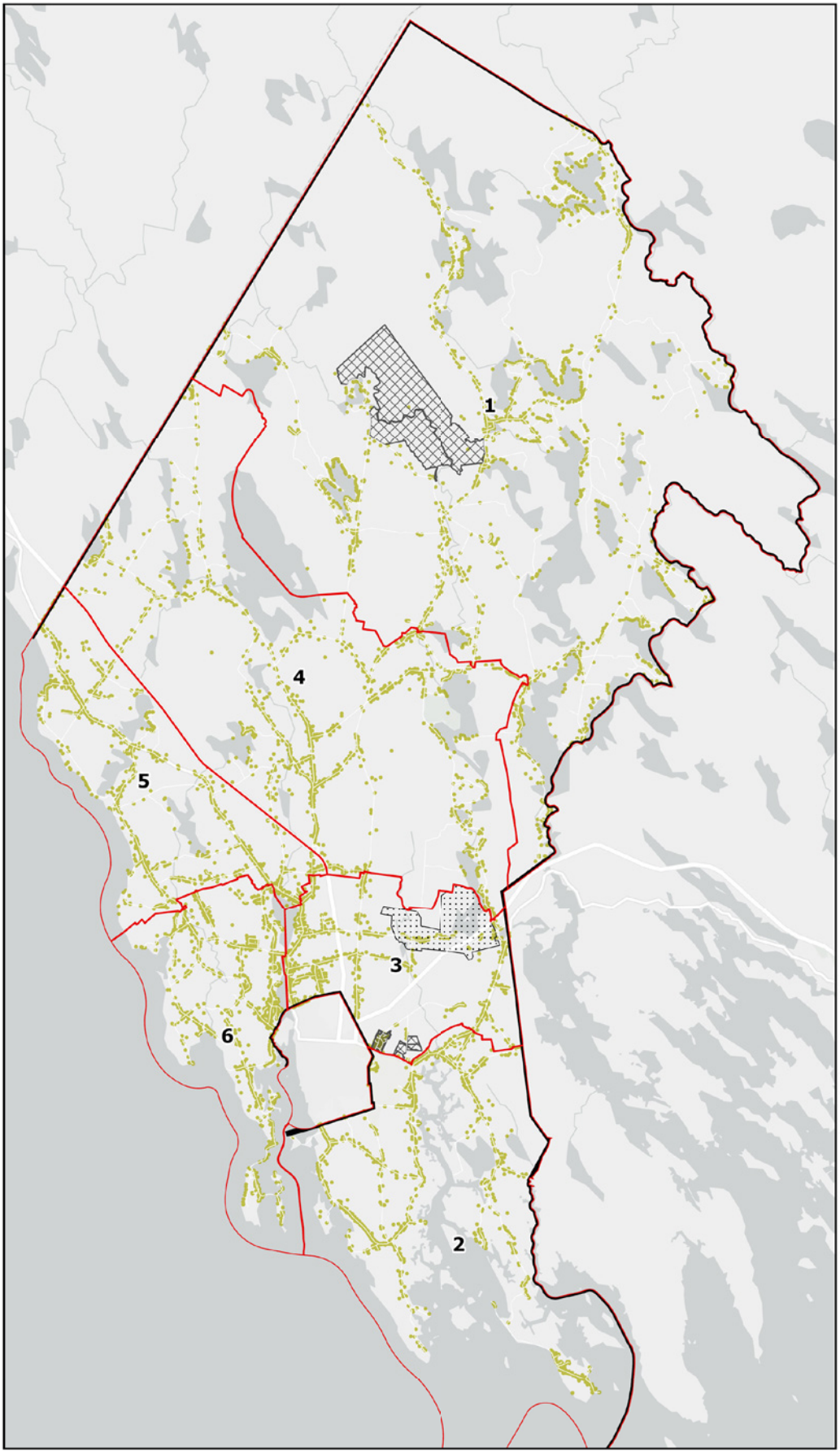

District Scenario 3

District	Electors	Variance
1	1516	-0.45
2	1543	1.32
3	1559	2.37
4	1547	1.59
5	1401	-8
6	1571	3.16

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- ☐ Prioritizes following Fire District Boundaries
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