

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Polling Location Increases – 2020 Municipal and CSAP Elections

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

ORIGIN

On April 14, 2020 Regional Council approved the following motion:

THAT Halifax Regional Council adopt option 3 as outlined in attachment A of the staff report dated March 19, 2020 and direct:

- (a) that the use of telephone and a personal computing device for voting be used in the 2020 Municipal and CSAP Elections during alternative polling days, including during the advance polls;
- (b) that Electronic and Paper Voting be available at a minimum of one location per district on two advanced polling days;
- (c) that paper ballot be used as the only method of voting on ordinary polling day.

2. Set the dates for alternative voting to commence on Tuesday, October 6, 2020 at 8:00 a.m. and run continuously through to Wednesday, October 14, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

3. Request a supplementary staff report regarding options to increase the number of polling locations in all electoral districts, increase the number of in-person electronic and paper voting locations per district from one to three during advanced polling aligning with federal and provincial locations.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 60 Polling Places *Municipal Elections Act* R.S.N.S. 1989, Chapter 300 with amendments to April 15, 2016.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council increase the number of polling locations for the advance poll to two in the following districts:

- District 1 – Waverley, Fall River, Musquodoboit Valley
- District 2 – Preston, Chezzetcook, Eastern Shore
- District 3 – Dartmouth South, Eastern Passage
- District 11 – Spryfield, Sambro Loop, Prospect Road
- District 12 – Timberlea, Beechville, Clayton Park West

BACKGROUND

This report responds to Part 3 of the April 14, 2020 motion of Council regarding **8.1.3 Municipal and CSAP Elections - Election Methods and Alternative Voting Dates**

In a report for the April 14, 2020 Regional Council Meeting, staff recommended one polling location per electoral district for advance polling. This was to encourage people to use alternative voting methods (telephone and internet). Council expressed accessibility concerns around reducing the number of physical polling locations on advance polling days requested a report regarding an increase to three polling locations per district to better align with provincial and federal election planning.

Traditionally there have been one or two polling locations available on advance polling days for electors to cast their ballots. With the introduction of alternative voting, and electors having the option to vote from home via phone or internet, the turnout at advance polls has dropped. In 2016 there were a maximum of two polling locations in the more rural districts to allow for shorter travel distances for electors if they wished to cast their ballots in person in advance.

The chart below shows the number of polling locations on Advance Polling days for 2008 and 2016. To compare the data staff overlaid the old electoral districts and fit the 23 districts from 2008 into the 16 districts in 2016. This is to provide a better idea of how many polling locations HRM has provided in the past.

District	AP Locations in 2008	AP Locations in 2016
1	3	2
2	3	2
3	2	2
4	1	1
5	2	1
6	2	1
7	2	1
8	2	1
9	1	1
10	1	1
11	2	2
12	3	2
13	2	1
14	2	1
15	1	1
16	1	1
Total	30	21

DISCUSSION

Research indicates that the cost to increase polling locations to three per district for the advance polling days is significant. Staff also consulted Elections Nova Scotia to learn more about their polling location arrangements as requested by council, and staff are awaiting information.

The average cost per polling location is \$5000 per day. If HRM increased polling locations to three from one in the five identified districts that would be an average increase of an additional \$50,000. If there was an increase of three polling locations in all 16 districts, that would be an average increase of \$160,000. Adding one polling location to have two polling locations in all 16 districts would be an average of \$80,000. The proposed budget for Election 2020 is not enough to cover these additional costs.

The 2020 election budget does, however, include funding to accommodate the 2016 Advanced Poll model with the five districts identified in the recommendation having two polling locations on advance polling days. The cost of this scenario is \$25,000.

Concerns around connectivity and computer knowledge are mitigated by the ability for residents to vote by phone using a pin and being directed through the process. Additionally, the alternative voting period runs from October 6, 2020 at 8:00 a.m. to October 14, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. continuously providing expanded opportunity to vote.

In the 2016 general election the total participation percentage was 31.77%, and of that, 60% of electors choose to vote electronically (phone or online).

With Covid-19 considerations, staff have also investigated the costs associated with Personal Protective Equipment for polling station staff. These costs are estimated to be:

- Masks \$4.50 per unit (KN95)
- Gloves \$18.00 per box of 100 individual gloves
- Disinfecting wipes \$7.00 per canister (70 per canister) these would likely be Clorox or could be what is available in the market at that time.

These are estimates only and will depend on availability in the marketplace and may require significant lead times. For approximately 1100 staff and 120 locations, the costs for PPE would be \$6200. This cost is for one mask and one set of gloves per polling station staff member.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendation of increasing the five indicated locations from one to two polling stations is estimated to have a cost of \$25,000 if approved. The election budget, funded by reserve funds, is equipped to manage this recommendation. The municipal election operating budget (A125) is pending approval of the 2020/21 operating budget and if approved will have a withdrawal of \$2.3 million from Q511, the Election Reserve. An additional \$391,500 has been approved in the 2019/20 capital budget, also funded by Reserve. Funding has been confirmed by Finance.

Personal Protective Equipment for polling location staff would be approximately \$6200.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are risks to community engagement and voter turnout if there are not enough polling locations in the rural districts where voters have a longer drive than in the more urban locations. However, these are mitigated by the availability of phone and on-line voting during the Advance polling period.

There are significant financial risks if HRM goes over budget to provide more than two polling locations per rural district.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For the 2016 election there was extensive community engagement activities to plan the election. These findings continue to influence 2020 planning.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications.

ALTERNATIVES

Provide one polling location per electoral district for the Advance Poll.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Maps:
 - a. 2008 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations
 - b. 2008 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations with community names
 - c. 2020 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations
 - d. 2020 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2016 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations

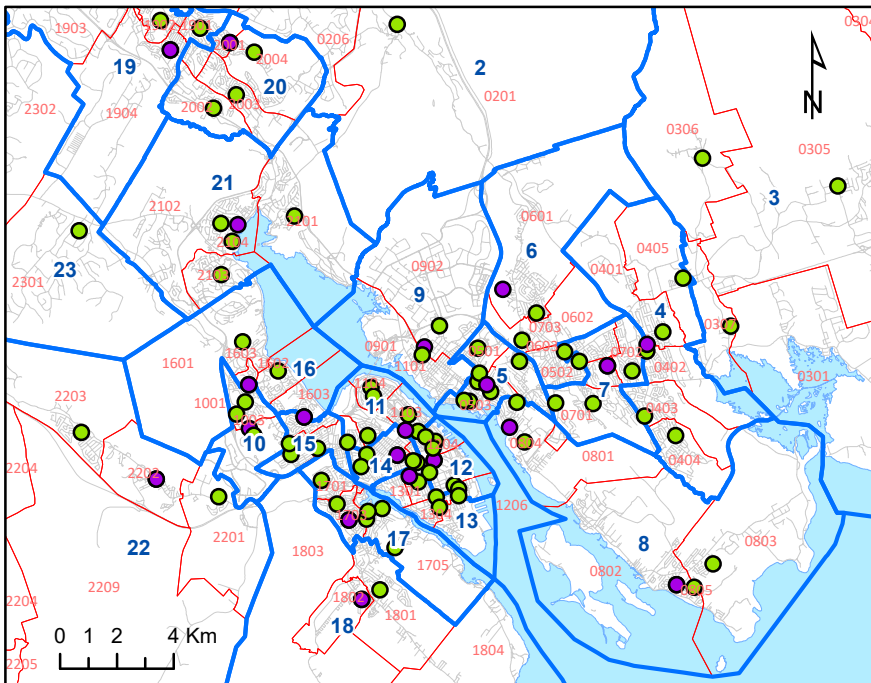
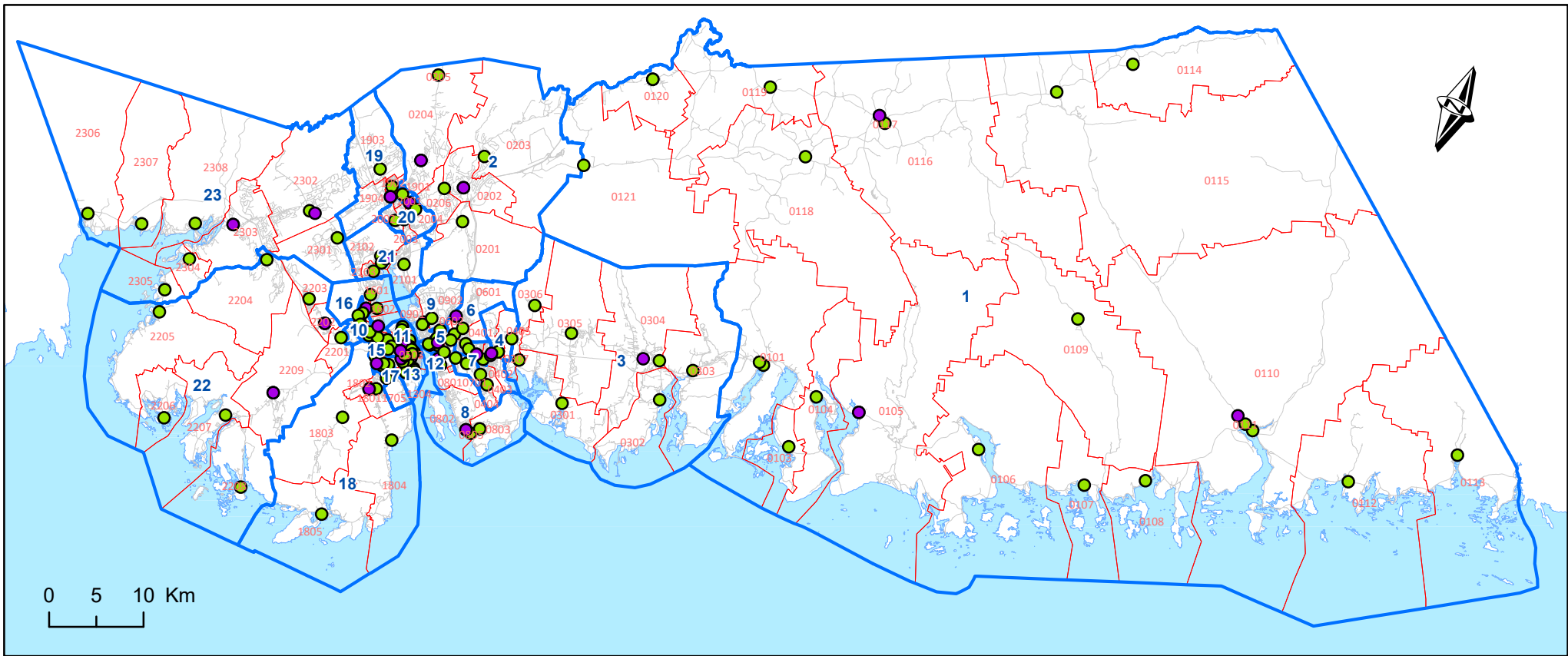
A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Trish Smith, Elections Coordinator and Assistant Returning Officer 902.490.6810

Report Approved by: Original Signed
Sherryl Murphy, Municipal Clerk and Returning Officer 902.490.6546

Financial Approval by: Original Signed
Jane Fraser, Director of Finance, Asset Management and ICT/CFO 902.490.4630

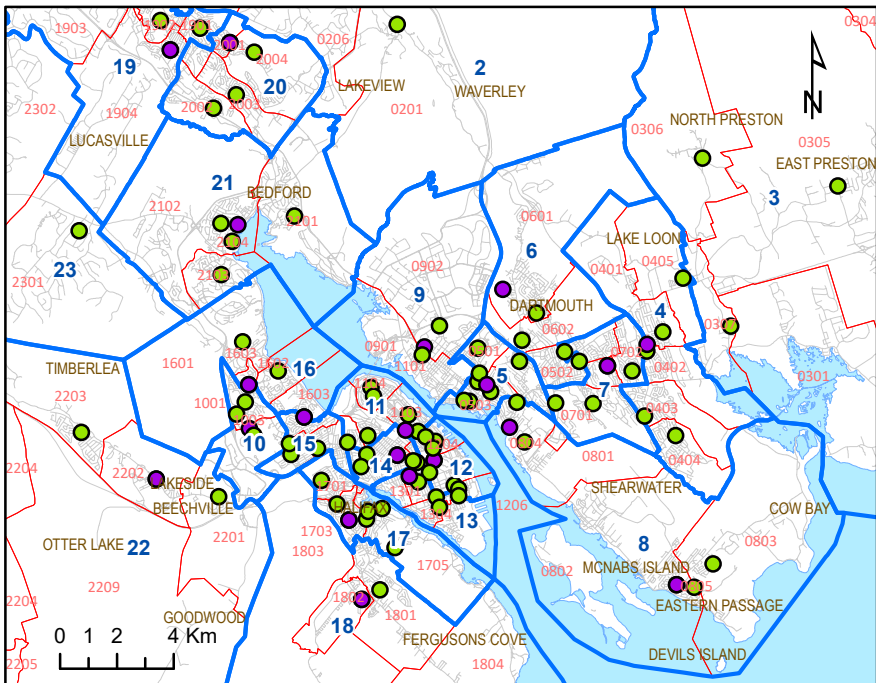
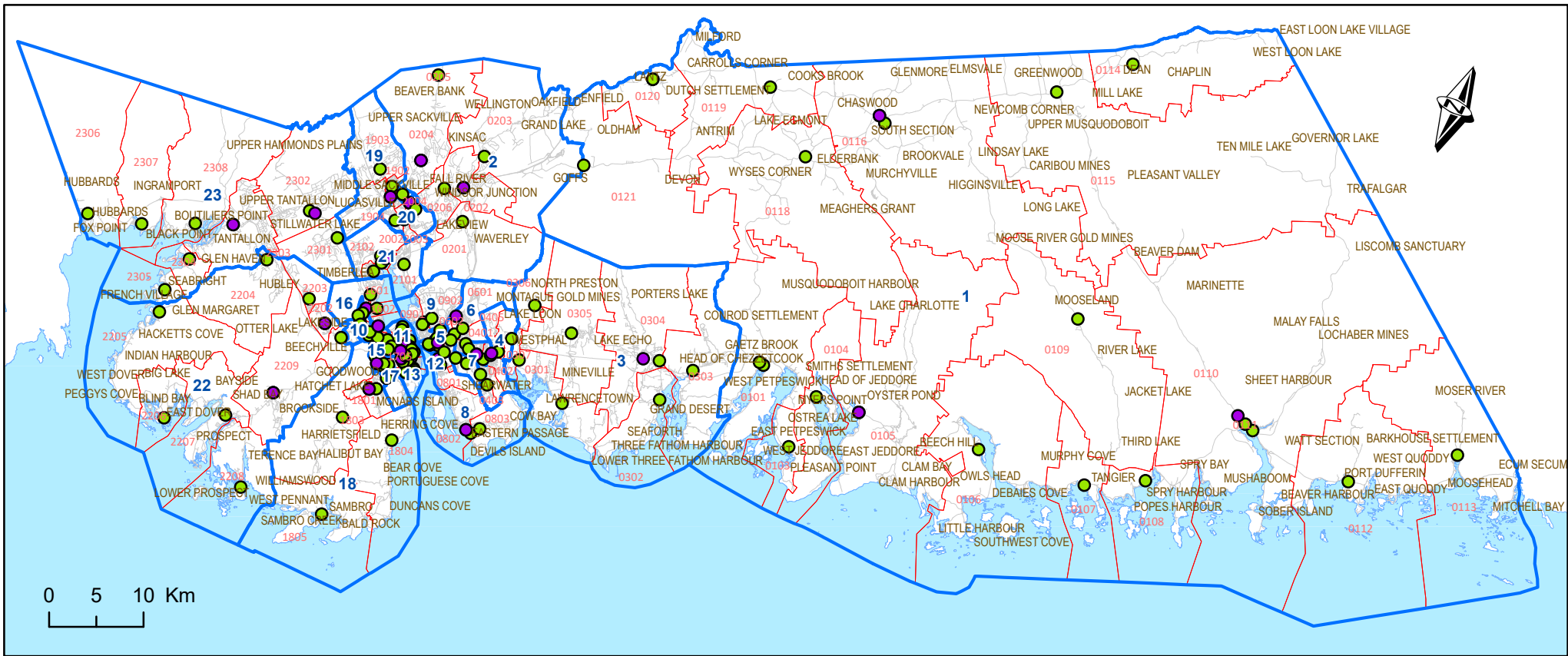
Report Approved by: Original Signed
John Traves, Municipal Solicitor, Legal & Legislative Services 902.490.4219



2008 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations

- 2008 Advanced Poll (30)
- 2008 Election Day Poll (135)
- 2008 Polling District
- 2008 Polling Division

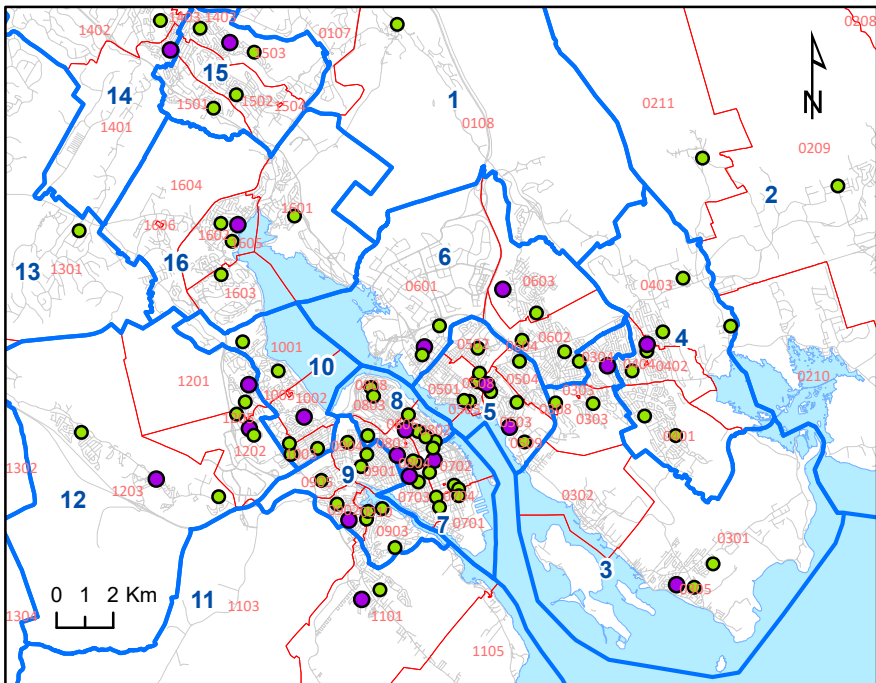
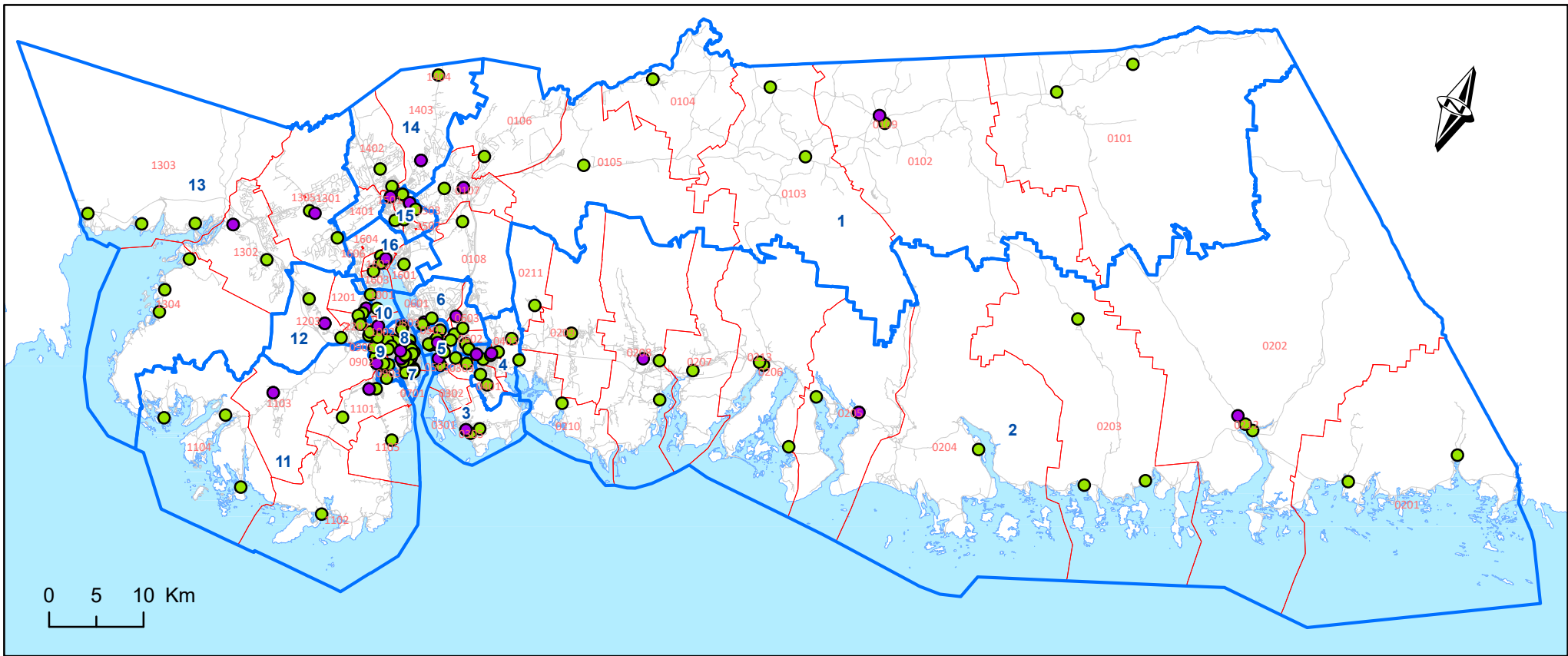
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2008 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations

- 2008 Advanced Poll (30)
- 2008 Election Day Poll (135)
- 2008 Polling District
- 2008 Polling Division

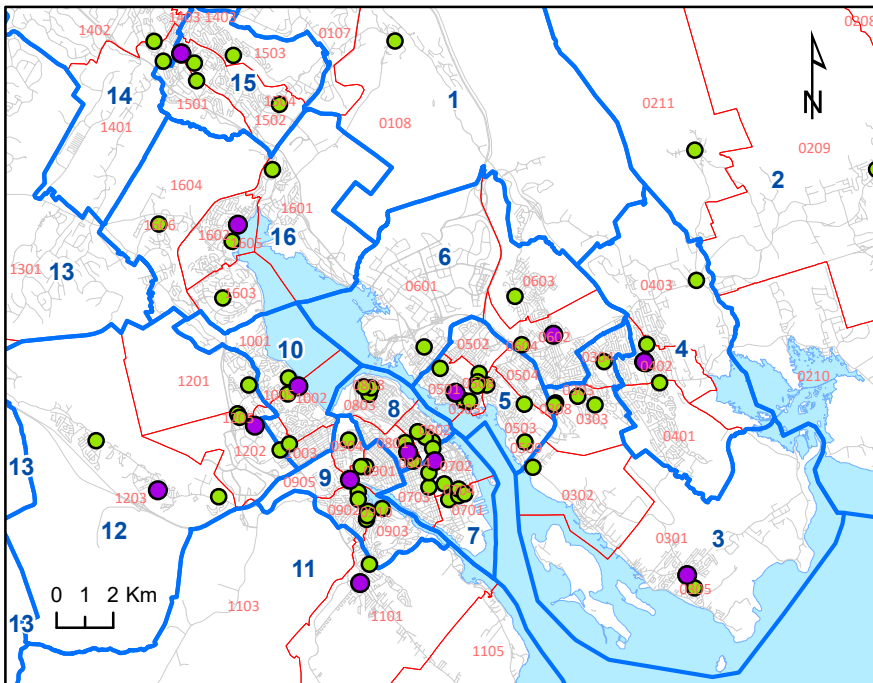
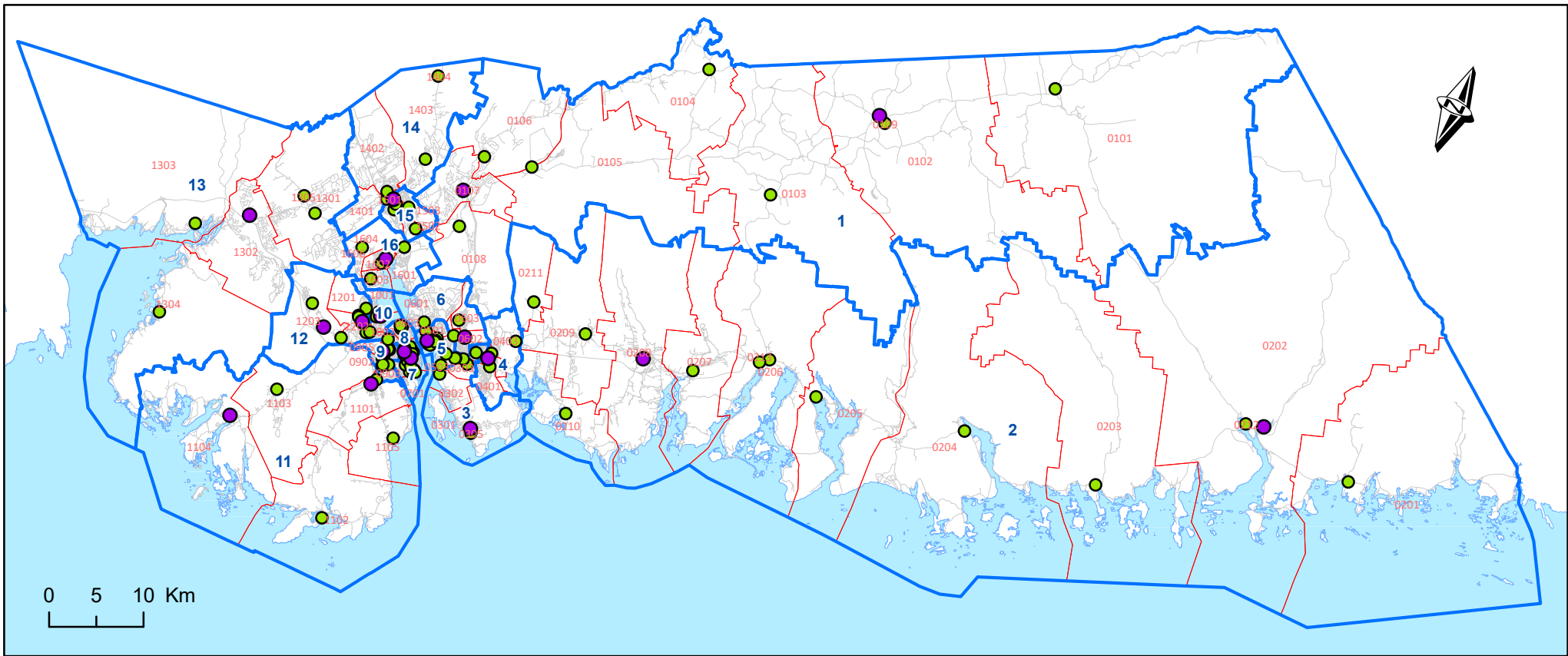
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2020 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2008 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations

- 2008 Advanced Poll (30)
- 2008 Election Day Poll (135)
- + 2020 Polling District
- + 2020 Polling Division

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2020 Election Year Polling Districts & Divisions with 2016 Advanced & Election Day Polling Locations

- 2016 Advanced Poll (21)
- 2016 Election Day Poll (108)
- 2020 Polling District
- 2020 Polling Division

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