



REPORT

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Valerie Petryniak, Town Clerk & Director of Legislative Services

DATE: September 7, 2021

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2021-0021

SUBJECT: Alternate Voting Methods for the 2022 Municipal Election

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2021-0021 dated September 7, 2021 regarding Alternate Voting Methods for the 2022 Municipal Election be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the use of Online Voting for the advanced polling period of the 2022 Municipal Election and Vote Tabulators on Election Day;

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute the necessary By-law which authorizes the use of vote tabulators for the 2022 Municipal Election;

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute the necessary By-law which authorizes the use of online voting for the advanced polling period of the 2022 Municipal Election.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The next Municipal Election will take place on Monday October 24, 2022
- Municipalities have until May 1, 2022, to pass a by-law authorizing the use of any voting and vote counting equipment, or alternative voting method.
- Introduce online voting as an alternate voting method for the 2022 Municipal Election giving voters a choice on how to cast their ballots in a safe manner
- Staff are recommending the use of Online Voting as an alternate voting method during the advanced polling period and Vote Tabulators on Election Day.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The next Municipal Election will take place on Monday October 24, 2022, and preparation is already underway. On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff are researching various voting methods to give voters a choice on how to cast their ballots and to ensure the election maintains the principles of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (the MEA). The Clerk is responsible for administering elections in a fair and objective manner and strives to deliver progressive and innovative elections that support the democratic voting process, making the voting experience accessible and convenient.

With COVID-19 being an ongoing concern, planning for the 2022 Municipal Election must take into consideration the effects of the global pandemic and be ready to accommodate the needs of the voters to give them a comfortable and safe voting experience. This includes rethinking the function and operation of voting places and exploring alternative methods of voting which will allow electors to cast ballots without physically attending a voting place. With this in mind, staff are recommending the use of Online Voting for 2022 Municipal Election.

Online (Internet) Voting- Advanced Polling Period

During the pandemic we saw an increased need for people to do more of their business online, from shopping to ordering food from grocery stores and restaurants. With people becoming more accustomed to online services, staff felt it a good time to introduce Online voting to the 2022 Municipal Election during the Advanced Polling Period.

Online voting is the method of voting where an elector, through any electronic device with internet capabilities, logs into a secure internet voting session. The voter will be mailed a voter information card which will give them a pin number and instructions on how to cast a ballot. They will also be required to input another personal piece of information, such as their birthday, as a two-factor authentication. Once logged in, they follow the easy online instructions and cast a ballot. They are able to confirm their selections before officially submitting their ballot, which they will then receive a confirmation indicating the vote was successful.

Each cast ballot is encrypted and anonymized for additional security prior to processing. When it's time to count the votes, staff download the encrypted files containing all of the marked ballot images. The file is then loaded into the Result Tally Reporting system which is the same system used for recording ballots from the tabulators which we've used in the past. Once loaded, the remotely marked ballots are read and the vote count reports are created with instant results. The online voting system is integrated with Datafix Vote Management System, the electronic voters list that staff have used in previous elections where once someone casts their online ballot, they will be stricken from the voters list preventing them from voting twice.

Online voting has been used by many municipalities for a number of years now and is increasing in popularity. 178 municipalities used both internet and telephone methods

of voting in the 2018 Municipal Election. ¹During this election there were over one million voters casting ballots online. Of the 444 municipalities, 30 upper-tier municipalities do not hold elections and 23 single-lower-tier municipal councils were acclaimed and therefore did not run an election. In total there were 391 elections involving 9,444,628 eligible voters; 131 municipalities used electronic voting only.

Online voting is an easily accessible option which allows voters the opportunity to cast their ballot in the comfort of their own home during the advanced polling period. Staff will encourage online voting during the advanced polling period to help lessen the crowds at the voting locations on election day. This will help with any social distancing requirements and any other Provincial regulations that may still be in effect from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The cost to implement online voting is approximately \$2 per every eligible voter. As of the 2018 Municipal Election there were 42,547 eligible voters in Halton Hills which would bring the cost of online voting to approximately \$85,000. During a recent poll by AMCTO many municipalities will once again be using Online/Internet Voting as an Alternative Voting method for the 2022 Municipal Election, and for some this will be their only voting method.

Vote Tabulators- Election Day

Dominion Voting Systems' vote tabulators have been utilized by the Town of Halton Hills for the past three municipal elections. The 2010 election was the inaugural year for moving to an alternative voting method with the use of vote tabulators. The benefits of utilizing vote tabulators include:

- Fast and accurate voting results on election night;
- Large reduction in staff time required on voting day to count paper ballots;
- Use of accessible vote tabulators at advanced polls allows individuals with disabilities to vote independently;
- Enhanced by poll/ward results provided to the public on election night upon the closing of the polls.

Using this method, voters attend one of the various voting sites in Town to fill in a ballot and cast it in the vote tabulator. Polling locations can become very busy with congestion and long lines. Planning for 2022 we need to take into consideration space at the voting locations to allow for social distancing and other precautionary measures.

Staff are not planning to increase the number of voting places on election day anticipating that more people will choose the online voting option.

With Vote Tabulators, residents will attend a voting place in person to cast a paper ballot which is fed through a vote tabulator machine where the votes are recorded and

¹ Online Voting in Ontario Municipal Elections: A Conflict of Legal Principles and Technology? Anthony Cardillo, Nicholas Akinyokun and Aleksander Essex

tallied. This method provides a quick and reliable method to produce the election results in a very timely matter.

Should Online Voting be approved as an alternate voting method for the advanced voting period, staff would reduce the amount of in person voting places for the advanced voting period to only two days and at only one location, Town Hall. Staff will be encouraging residents to use the online voting system throughout the advanced period and will assist the public with kiosks at various places throughout Town which will not only assist the public with online voting, but also provides a place for those who would like to online vote but don't have the means at home.

Staff feel offering online voting for the advanced voting period and vote tabulators on election day offer residents a safe and accessible way of voting for the 2022 Municipal Election.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report aligns to the Town's Strategic plan recognizing the value to provide responsive, effective municipal government and strong leadership in the effective and efficient delivery of municipal services.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement will be required; consultation with Communications staff to follow.

Communications staff will assist with marketing and promoting of the 2022 Municipal Election.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Clerks staff have met to discuss the alternate voting options for the 2022 Municipal Election and have also met with the Director of Communications to plan out a marketing strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report will be funded through an existing approved budget source.

In 2017 Council approved \$150,000 from the Capital Budget for the Clerk to investigate alternative voting methods for the next Municipal Election. These funds originally in the 2025 Capital Budget have been moved to 2022 to accommodate the online voting request.

Reviewed and approved by,

Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer