

DATE: October 29, 2021
TO: Administration & Finance Executive Committee
FROM: Municipal Clerk
SUBJECT: Voting Method for the 2022 Municipal Election

Issue

A By-Law is required by May 1st, 2022, to authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment and or authorize electors to use an alternative voting method.

Facts

- In order to use the Alternative Voting method Council must enact a By-Law in Accordance with Section 42 of the Municipal Elections Act (1996) as amended, a by-law is required to authorize alternative voting on or before May 1st, 2022.
- Council has the option to select any or a combination of the following voting methods:
 - Traditional paper ballots
 - Vote by Mail
 - Vote by Telephone
 - Internet Voting
 - Vote Counting tabulators
- Point of interest *Ranked ballot election is no longer an option having been revoked by regulation on November 20, 2020
- An alternative voting method has proven to lower costs while arguably increasing participation.
- Historically the options selected for this voting method has been Vote by Mail, Vote by Telephone and Internet. Internet and telephone voting was used for the Municipal and School Board Election for the Town Fort Frances in 2018.
- In past elections experiences, the results and feedback from voters/staff/candidates was very positive.
- In the 2018 Municipal election 72% of Ontario Municipalities conducted a form of alternative voting method on election day.
- Moving from a traditional paper ballot to alternative voting showed a significant decrease in the overall cost of the elections in terms of resources requirement and equipment.
- Although a By-law is not required until May 1, 2022 it is important that the method be decided early for planning process, such as procurement activity that may be required should a service provider be needed to conduct an alternative voting election.

- As required by legislation and in accordance with the set deadlines, formal procedures and policies will be reviewed / drafted for the upcoming election.

Analysis

- This type of voting is advantageous to;
 - Enables results to be produced almost immediately after close of poles.
 - Accessibility benefits: Votes may be cast on mobile devices, home computers, by telephone, or at kiosk locations.
 - Electronic ballots are utilized therefore there are no rejected, mismarked or invalid (spoiled) ballots.
 - Potential increase in voter turnout.
 - Accurate and secure vote results.
 - Allow qualified electors to vote anywhere, and anytime during the voting period, provides easy access for voters to cast their ballot.
 - Eliminate traditional advance voting.
 - Reduce staffing requirements.
 - Eliminate proxy voting.
- As the pandemic goes on it is uncertain as to where we may be in a years' time. Planning must be in place to ensure voters can comfortably cast their ballot. Having alternative voting will deliver more options for voters to safely cast their votes without having to attend a voting place.
- Should Council choose not to move forward with alternative voting method, a financial increase is expected to be required, (additional staff / training will be needed as well as necessary vote counting equipment). Voter turnout may decrease. Traditional voting may also create a barrier for accessibility needs and disconnects the overall engagement with residents.
- Although voting is only one aspect of community participation, it is an important one. Often referred to the foundation of democracy, elections essentially serve to reinforce the legitimacy of the political process. As we know there is a continuous decline in participation at a municipal level, leading to a real risk in losing the public trust and giving an important civic duty upon a new generation of voters. Therefore, it is advisable to use alternative voting to promote participation.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council authorize Voting by Telephone/Internet for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

THAT Council hereby directs the Municipal Clerk to deliver the 2022 Municipal Elections utilizing a Telephone / Internet method;