

DATE: November 30, 2016

TO: Administration & Finance Executive Committee

FROM: Elizabeth (Lisa) Slomke, Town Clerk

SUBJECT: Alternative Voting Methods – 2018 Municipal Election

## **BACKGROUND**

The next municipal elections are scheduled for October 2018 per the regulations provided for in the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

The Town of Fort Frances has utilized the alternative voting method – Vote by Mail (VBM) since 2000. The VBM method has provided the Town of Fort Frances with higher participation than when it used traditional voting in pre-2000 municipal elections. The most important advantage gained has been the ability of eligible electors to vote from their home, thereby gaining eligible electors accessibility and convenience. Additionally, alternative voting has provided those with a disability, those with transportation issues, those who work out of town as well as seasonal residents with the opportunity to vote.

The Clerk is mandated under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to enable eligible electors to exercise their rights. The amended Municipal Elections Act, 1996 requires that Council pass a by-law by May 1, 2017 if an alternative form of voting is going to be utilized in the 2018 Municipal Elections.

## **OPTIONS**

### Vote By Mail

The Vote by Mail method along with Vote Tabulators were used by the Town of Fort Frances in the 2006, 2010 and 2014 elections. This method provides eligible electors with an accessible and convenient method of voting. The voter kit with instructions are mailed out a few weeks prior to election day, with voters having the option of using return postage or to drop off their sealed ballot (with voter declaration form) in person.

In 2014, the results weren't quite as instantaneous as in past years due to the high number of candidates running in the various races. This was an issue that was not predicted as it was my first time utilizing VBM and tabulators. There are a number of things that can be done in 2018 to reduce this delay, should this be the method that Council chooses.

## Telephone/Internet Voting

Telephone/Internet voting will provide eligible electors with the ability to vote anywhere at anytime. This option provides the eligible electors with the choice of voting from home or while travelling and with hours that suit many schedules, including shift work. Also, telephone/internet voting gives eligible electors with a disability the option to vote utilizing their existing aids (i.e. big button phone, screen recognition readers).

More and more demand is coming from consumers to provide access to online services including banking, bill payments and license renewals. Interest, adoption and acceptance of telephone/internet voting has increased steadily since its introduction in the 2003 Municipal Elections which saw 12 cities/towns utilize this method. Since then, the number increased to 20 in 2006 and more than doubled in 2010 to 44. Numbers increased again in 2014, with 59 cities/towns offering telephone/internet voting to the eligible electors.

## Traditional Polling Stations & Paper Ballots

Council can also decide to return to the traditional polling stations and paper ballots to deliver the 2018 Municipal Elections.

## **OPPORTUNITIES with Alternative Voting**

- removal of barriers for people with disabilities and mobility issues
- inclusion of travelling, out of town workers and seasonal electors
- reduced pressure on polling stations on Election Day
- no need for proxy voting
- environmentally friendly
- reduced staffing requirements
- timely results
- candidate module available with telephone/internet voting

## **CHALLENGES with Alternative Voting**

- security questions regarding the alternative system chosen
- potential for fraud (exists with every method, not just alternative)
- need for sufficient advertising and education
- incorrect ballot delivered with alternative system
- spoiled ballots with vote by mail

## **POTENTIAL FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2014 Municipal Election in the Town of Fort Frances was provided a budget of \$30,000.00 and used Vote by Mail. I believe that the same budget would be sufficient to deliver the elections in 2018 using telephone/internet voting. If Council opts to return to traditional polling stations and paper ballots, I believe that number would need to increase substantially and would be a significant step backwards. The eligible electors in the Town of Fort Frances have used vote by mail for multiple elections, and moving to telephone/internet voting is simply the next step in a progressive boundless community.