

DATE: December 7, 2016

TO: Mayor & Council

FROM: Elizabeth (Lisa) Slomke, Town Clerk

SUBJECT: Choice of Electoral Systems for 2018 Municipal Elections

## **BACKGROUND**

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

With the implementation of Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act, a new option available to Ontario municipalities is the ability to utilize a Ranked Ballot Electoral System instead of the First Past the Post (FPTP) Electoral System. This report will provide Council with information related to the two options available, so that Council may decide which method the Town of Fort Frances will use in the 2018 Municipal Elections.

### How First Past the Post Works

FPTP is currently used in federal, provincial and municipal elections across Canada and is popular around the world as well. Very simply, the candidate with the most votes wins. There is no requirement to obtain a certain percent of the vote. Should Council decide to continue the use of this electoral system, there will be no additional requirements in preparation for the 2018 Municipal Elections.

### How Ranked Ballot Voting Works

In a ranked ballot election, the voter ranks the candidates in order of preference (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> choice, etc). In the first round of counting, all first choice voters are counted. If one of the candidates receives more than 50% of the votes, then we have a winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated, and the ballots are recounted using the second choice of those voters. This process continues in subsequent rounds until a majority winner is declared.

It is important to note that at present, this system has not been used in any federal, provincial or municipal election in Canada, however it has been used in political party leader selection. There are cities in the United States that currently use ranked balloting. Also, while ranked balloting is able to be used for the election of Mayor and Council, at present is not permitted for School Board elections.

With any electoral system, there are benefits and challenges that will be faced and they are outlined in the below table. These points are not exhaustive, and are meant to provide Council with information necessary to make their decision.

<b>First Past the Post Electoral System</b>	<b>Ranked Ballot Electoral System</b>
<u>Benefits</u> -easy to understand -ballots easily counted -less costly to administer -no new voter education necessary	<u>Benefits</u> -majority support is obtained -discourages negative campaigning -reduces strategic voting -expected to increase voter engagement -candidates remain in the race to the end (no splitting the vote)
<u>Challenges</u> -restricts voter choice -strategy may impact results	<u>Challenges</u> -results will take considerably longer -voter confusion increases -significantly more education will be required for voters and staff -may require separate ballots due to exclusion of school board elections

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

If Council moves ahead and chooses to continue using FPTP, I am not anticipating any additional costs related to this electoral system. Also, there wouldn't be a need for increased education and advertising if Council continues with the same system that has been used in every prior municipal election.

If Council chooses to implement Ranked Ballots, then I expect costs will increase related to ballot counting (if using tabulators or manual count) which would be over and above the standard costs expected to deliver the election. Additionally, there may be a requirement to have two ballots (separate School Board), thus increasing costs again.

## **NEXT STEPS**

If Council wishes to move ahead and offer Ranked Ballots, the by-law is required to be passed by May 1, 2017. Council should consider the public interest, increased costs, availability of technology and the impact on election administration as they consider the option and ultimately make their decision.

Additionally, Bill 151 requires that at least one Open House is held prior to the implementation of the necessary by-law to implement Ranked Ballots. The Open House would give the public the opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarification.

At this time, this report is provided to Council as information only. The matter will be revisited in the New Year, after which Council will be required to make a decision related to the use of Ranked Ballot Voting in the 2018 Municipal Elections.
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## Resources

- Ranked Ballot info from MAH (attached)
- Counting Votes in a Ranked Ballot Election info from MAH (attached)
- Article from Municipal Monitor magazine Q4 2015
- YouTube video link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHRPMJmzBBw>