

Subject: 2022 Municipal and School Board Election – Voting, Vote Counting Equipment and Alternative Voting Methods

Recommendation:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council receive Report #2021-0173 – 2022 Municipal and School Board Election – Voting, Vote Counting Equipment and Alternative Voting Methods;

AND THAT Council reaffirm the use of AccuVote Optical Scanning Vote Tabulators and Touch Screen Vote Tabulators;

AND THAT Council approve and support a hybrid-voting approach for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, specifically using a combination of in person voting and special on demand mail in ballots;

AND THAT the Clerk be directed to prepare the necessary By-law for voting, vote counting equipment and alternative voting methods for Council consideration prior to May 1, 2022;

AND THAT the Clerk be directed to review and update all procedures required for the conduct of the 2022 Municipal Election, in accordance with the requirements of the *Municipal Elections Act*;

AND THAT the Clerk be directed to prepare a policy regarding circumstances in which the municipality would require a recount;

AND THAT the Mayor and Clerk be provided the delegated authority to execute any agreements necessary to implement the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

Background:

The 2022 Municipal Election Day is Monday, October 24, 2022.

Pursuant to the *Municipal Elections Act* ("MEA") the municipal Clerk is responsible for conducting the municipal election and establishing all procedures, forms and providing for any matters necessary for conducting the election. Having said that, there are certain matters related to the election that do require Council consideration and direction. Specifically, Section 42(1) of the MEA requires that:

The Council of a local municipality may pass by-laws:

- (a) authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators; and
- (b) authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method, such as voting by mail or by telephone, that does not require electors to attend a voting place in order to vote.

Furthermore, the MEA requires the municipal Council to pass said by-law for use of voting and vote-counting equipment, authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method and circumstances in which the municipal Clerk shall hold a recount on or before Sunday, May 1, 2022.

Analysis:

When determining voting methods there are three (3) major considerations to consider:

- 1) The secrecy and confidentiality of the vote (security);
- 2) That the integrity of the process is maintained and the results reflect the votes cast (verifiability); and
- 3) That the election is accessible to both candidates and electors (accessibility).

Prior to the 2020 Ward 1 By-Election, the Town of Pelham has historically voted in person with paper ballots.

The current COVID-19 health pandemic has dramatically affected the way in which municipalities, schools, businesses and individuals function daily. Optimistically, it is hoped that COVID-19 will have little impact on the 2022 Municipal Election, however this is still an unknown. Due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, staff are planning for a municipal election similar to that of the Town's 2020 Ward 1 By-

Election, and therefore are recommending the use of traditional in person voting along with the alternative voting method of 'special on demand mail in ballots'.

Vote Counting Equipment

Staff recommend the continued use of a paper ballot optical scan vote tabulation method. The Town of Pelham currently owns 14 AccuVote Tabulators that can be utilized for the 2022 Municipal Election.

It is recognized that the AccuVote tabulator equipment has been under the Town's ownership since 2001. The equipment is put through rigorous testing and maintenance prior to any election event. Following the 2022 Municipal Election, the Town will have to explore the benefits of leasing or purchasing new equipment for following elections.

Alternatively, the Town can replace its vote tabulation machines with new machines. The approximate cost of complete fleet replacement is \$110,525.00. The approximate cost to lease the said machines is \$19,755.00, per election. As indicated, staff recommend using the Town's current machines for the 2022 Municipal Election while undertaking a purchase vs lease cost analysis to determine the best financial path forward for the Town and future elections.

Advance Voting Opportunities

The MEA indicates advance voting shall not be held more than 30 days before voting day, therefore the first possible day to hold an advance vote is Saturday, September 24, 2022.

Staff are planning to hold four (4) advance voting days. Staff recognize the importance of offering a safe opportunity to vote early, if desired by residents.

The MEA provides that the municipal Clerk is responsible to establish advanced voting opportunities and set the dates, there is no need to pass a by-law in this regard. Rather, public notification and advertisements will be used to broadcast these opportunities.

Hybrid Voting Approach – In Person and Special on Demand Mail In Ballots

Staff recommend implementing a hybrid voting approach for the 2022 municipal election comprising of both in person voting and residents being able to pre-register to receive a 'special on demand mail in ballot'. This approach was adopted during the Town's 2020 Ward 1 By-election and was successful.

This approach respects the Town's history of traditional in-person voting while respecting a residents choice to vote, not in person. The special on demand ballot option was implemented by the Town during the 2020 Ward 1 By-Election to afford resident's affected by COVID-19 the opportunity to vote. However, there are many reasons a resident may wish to use the special on demand mail in ballot other than health precautions or concerns, such as: increased accessibility (access to personal support tools), business or pleasure travel, unable or unwilling to appoint a proxy or simply wishing to mark their ballot and return at their convenience. Residents may mail their ballots back to the Clerk at Town Hall or drop their ballots off at a ballot drop off locked box location. It is intended that a locked ballot drop box will be situated at Town Hall, Maple Acres Library and the Meridian Community Centre.

Staff believe this hybrid voting approach will be both successful and cost efficient for the Town.

Financial Considerations:

For Council's information, the 2018 Municipal Election cost a total of \$59,381.78. Staff expect an increased cost due to COVID-19 and potential additional health precautions being taken, such as: hiring a poll cleaner position, cleaning supplies, sanitizer, personal protective equipment, single use pens, additional staff hires to ensure a backup election working team is available and potentially additional advance poll locations.

As staff have recommended using the Town's current vote tabulator machines there are no technology-based financial costs to be considered, other than the regular maintenance of the machines. This cost is dramatically lower than purchasing new or leasing machines.

Special on-demand Mail-in-Ballots are packaged and created *in house*, and therefore the only additional cost associated is the postage to mail the ballot to the elector and pre-postage return envelopes (\$4 each). During the 2020 Ward 1 By-Election, twenty (20) residents voted through this voting method. Staff estimate, it is unlikely the Town will receive more than fifty (50) residents in each ward requesting this method, therefore it is estimated one-hundred-fifty (150) packages will be created at an approximate cost of \$600.00 (excluding the value of staff time).

Alternatives Reviewed:

The Clerk's Department has received rough estimates from third parties to determine a potential, high level, cost associated with running the 2022 Municipal

Election completely by Vote by Mail or Internet and Telephone Voting.

It is noted, there was 14,264 registered electors during the 2018 Municipal Election and therefore, this number was used in the below calculations.

Vote By Mail	
Vendor Set Up Fee	\$800.00
Vote By Mail Kits (\$1.85-\$2.10)	\$26,388.40 – 29,954.40
** Additional costs for replacement kits and for ballots which can be counted via vote tabulator**	unknown
Total Base Cost (extra fees will apply)	\$30,754.40

Vote By Internet and Telephone Voting	
Vendor Set Up Fee	\$3,550.44
Swiss Print (\$0.27) per voter	\$3,851.28
Internet and Telephone Voting Kits (\$1.50)	\$21,396.00
Vendor Suggests Budget \$2,000 for additional professional services	\$2,000.00
Total Base Cost (extra fees may apply)	\$30,797.72

These options, although possible, are not recommended as the Town has a long history of in-person voting and a dramatic change to vote by mail or internet and telephone only voting may be unwanted by the electorate.

If Council wishes to further explore these options, a motion directing the Clerk to conduct further research would be required.

Strategic Plan Relationship: Build Strong Communities and Cultural Assets

A municipal election is a significant community event which encourages active civic engagement. It is important that the Clerk offer a fair, safe and accessible election to the Town of Pelham residents. Holding such an election builds community

strength by encouraging residents to stay informed about local affairs and participate in the democratic process.

Consultation:

None.

Other Pertinent Reports/Attachments:

None.

Prepared and Recommended by:

Holly Willford, B.A.
Town Clerk

Sarah Leach, B.A.
Deputy Clerk

Prepared and Submitted by:

David Cribbs, BA, MA, JD, MPA
Chief Administrative Officer