



To: Mayor Cornell and Members of Council
From: Sue Walton, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk
Clerk's Department
Report Number: CR-043-21
Meeting Date: 24 Nov 2021
Subject: **Alternative Voting Methods for the 2022 Municipal Election**
Our File No: C07-74034

Recommendation

THAT Clerks Report CR-043-21 regarding the Alternative Voting Methods for the 2022 Municipal Election be received;

AND THAT Council adopt the preferred alternative voting method for the 2022 Municipal Election.

Background/Analysis

The purpose of this report is to set the voting method for the 2022 municipal and school board elections. Alternative voting methods continue to be a viable option for the Township due to its seasonal/permanent population. In the current climate of COVID-19, alternative voting methods by their nature eliminate safety and health concerns as electors can vote in the comfort and security of their own homes.

Bill 218, Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, 2020, has removed the option for Ontario municipalities to consider a ranked ballot.

A by-law for the use of alternative voting, aside from VBM (Vote-by-Mail), must be passed by May 1, 2022. When considering other methods of voting, thought must be given to accessibility, voter authentication and authorization, security, voter privacy and results validation.

The Township currently conducts its municipal election using the Vote-By-Mail (VBM) voting method. This method has proven to be effective in managing the permanent/seasonal nature of the Township's residents and has been used successfully since the 2006 elections.

In 2018, a two-election contract with Dominion Voting was approved by Council with the understanding that whether the Township continued with VBM or chose to move to Internet Voting, the 2018 rates for either of these methods would be realized in the 2022 Municipal Election.

With respect to issues that Dominion Voting encountered in the 2018 Municipal Election, they have advised that they have taken extensive measures to ensure proper bandwidth for future elections. The most impactful change focused on migrating the Internet Voting application from a physical co-location model to a secure, cloud-hosted infrastructure on Microsoft's Azure platform. This change

gives more control over the distribution of resources and allows the ability to make real-time adjustments as needed.

Dominion Voting no longer provides telephone voting as a voting method as it has been deemed to be cumbersome for electors especially in the event there are numerous candidates to select from. The voter would interact with an audio recording which cannot not be sped up or slowed down to accommodate voters' needs individually and no assistive devices or software could be used by the voter. This method could also present a barrier for voters who speak English as a second language.

In considering alternative voting methods, the principles of the Municipal Elections Act must be upheld, including:

- maintaining the secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process and individual votes;
- providing an election that is accessible to voters;
- providing an election that is fair and non-biased;
- ensuring the integrity of the process is maintained throughout the election;
- ensuring the results of the election reflect the votes cast and that valid votes can be counted and invalid votes be rejected so far as reasonably possible; and
- ensuring voters and candidates are treated fairly and consistently within the municipality.

Voting methods used in 2018 Municipal Election by the 16 Simcoe County Municipalities are indicated as follows:

- 10 utilized internet voting
- 2 utilized VBM
- 4 traditional

VBM - How it works:

VBM is a paper-based alternative voting method in which a package containing instructions, a ballot and a voter declaration form is mailed to every qualified elector on the Voters' List. The elector mails back their completed ballot and declaration form, each in a separate prepaid postage envelope. On voting day, the municipality tabulates the ballots using a central count tabulation system, with results being transferred to an election reporting system. This method of voting provides for the ability to start tallying votes through the tabulators early on Election Day resulting in the delivery of unofficial election results more quickly.

Benefits of VBM method:

- Easy, convenient and accessible.
- Privacy of vote at home without having to travel.
- Anytime, anywhere voting until 8:00 p.m. on October 24, 2022.
- Longer voting period.
- Effective method to capture both permanent and seasonal residents.
- Repeated use may increase elector confidence (familiarity).
- Eliminates need for advance vote.
- Eliminates voting by proxy.
- Fewer election staff required.
- Paper audit trail.
- Elector can also drop off ballot at central location (municipal office).

- Eliminates concerns related to COVID-19 and costs associated with safety measures.

Drawbacks of VBM method:

- unsupervised voting.
- potential for postal disruptions
- risk of spoiled ballots.

Internet Voting has not been utilized by the Township to date but has been considered by Council in the past as an alternative voting method.

Internet Voting - How it works:

A qualified elector will receive a voter notification letter by mail containing information on how to access and complete their ballot via the internet. The information includes the voter's ID number, unique PIN to vote and voting information.

The elector connects to the voting website from their computer, iPhone, android phone or tablet. The elector is required to enter their provided PIN and then to authenticate their identity (i.e. through the entry of their date of birth) and to verify that they are a qualified elector (similar to signing the declaration form provided in the VBM kit). If authentication is successful, the elector will obtain access to an electronic ballot. The elector may then complete, review and verify their completed ballot to make any changes prior to submission. Once submitted, the results are encrypted and kept anonymous. The elector is issued a receipt and is now blocked from voting again.

Once voting has ended, the results are immediately tabulated and transferred to a results reporting system. The results can be viewed in the Election Manager along with various reports on voting activity before publishing them. Results can be verified by downloading a file containing votes and receipt codes. A central count tabulation system would not be required.

Benefits of Internet Voting method:

- Easy, convenient and accessible.
- Privacy of vote at home without having to travel.
- Anytime, anywhere voting until 8:00 p.m. on October 24, 2022.
- Longer voting period.
- Effective method to capture both permanent and seasonal residents.
- Eliminates need for advance vote.
- Eliminates voting by proxy.
- Eliminates the possibility of spoiled ballots.
- Fewer election staff required.
- Eliminates concerns related to COVID-19 and cost of associated safety measures.
- Help centre would be provided at Township Hall or other suitable location.

Drawbacks of Internet Voting Method:

- unsupervised voting.
- potential for postal disruptions.
- problems with access - digital divide.
- method has not been used in the past and may impact voter confidence (lack of familiarity).
- security risks.
- lack of paper trail.
- difficulties with technology.

Other Considerations:

Dr. Essex, Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Western University, co-authored a cybersecurity study of online voting use in the 2018 Ontario municipal election titled the Online Voting in Ontario’s Municipal Election. Despite the increase of internet voting amongst municipalities, the study recognizes that no technical standards currently exist within Canada for designing, testing, or certifying online voting systems or auditing or otherwise independently verify the result they produce, nor do the federal or provincial governments provide guidance on the procurement and operation of such systems. In light of the risks, and until cybersecurity standards for online voting can be developed to implement the assurances, the report's primary recommendation is that Ontario municipalities do not offer online voting in the 2022 Municipal election.

There are inconclusive results about the impact of internet voting on voter turnout. Regardless of the voting method, voter turnout can be influenced by a number of factors and include the competitiveness of the election, candidate campaign mobilization efforts, issues at stake, voter fatigue and the weather, among other considerations that may vary from one election to the next.

Any method chosen and accompanying systems must integrate with our current electoral data management software as contracted through DataFix.

Reviewed By Other Departments

Not applicable.

Options/Alternatives

- 1. Select VBM as the method of choice for the 2022 Municipal Election.
- 2. Select Internet Voting as the method of choice for the 2022 Municipal Election.

Financial Implications

The budget for the 2022 Municipal Election is \$80,000 as allocated from the Election Reserve.

VBM Costs:

Vote-By-Mail Kits including List Management (VoterView) - Estimate cost for 2022	\$40,360 (\$2.20 per kit x 18,300)
Central Count Tabulators including software and support (Dominion) – 2022 cost	\$20,800
Postage (outgoing and Business Reply Mail)	\$26,820 - 2018 actuals
Total Estimate	\$87,980

As a result of the estimated cost for VBM, it would be necessary to increase the Election Reserve for 2022 by an additional \$20,000 to ensure the costs of this voting method are adequately covered and to allow for additional elections costs, advertising, supplies, training, staffing, candidates' portal, voter registration and online voter services.

Internet Voting Costs:

Internet Voting	\$27,450
Internet Vote Mail Out	\$9,150

(\$0.50)	(\$0.50 per elector)
Postage (outgoing)	\$14,700 - based on 2018 actuals
Total Estimate	\$51,300

Despite the voting method selected, additional costs will include advertising, supplies, training, staffing, candidates' portal, voter registration and online voter services.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

- Deliver Exceptional Municipal Services
- Create an Engaged, Informed & Connected Community

Conclusion

Alternative voting has proven to be effective for the permanent/seasonal nature of the Township's population. It is recommended that Council adopt an alternative voting method for the 2022 Municipal Election, with either the VBM or Internet Voting to be utilized as approved. Staff do not recommend combining two voting methods due to additional costs and added complexity of managing two voting methods.

Haley Leblond, Director of
Finance/Treasurer

Approved - 15 Nov 2021

Robert Lamb, Chief Administrative
Officer

Approved - 15 Nov 2021