



Council report

Meeting date:	May 4, 2021
Title:	Alternative Voting Follow-up
Prepared by:	G. Scharback, Director of Administration/Clerk
Reviewed by:	L. Johnston, CAO

Recommendation

That council receives the report Alternative Voting Follow-up; and

That council directs staff to bring forward a bylaw to permit internet and telephone alternative voting methods for the 2022 municipal election; and

That council authorizes staff to proceed with the request for proposals process for an alternative voting method service provider for the 2022 municipal election.

Executive summary

Council directed that staff bring a report to council regarding the option of using traditional paper ballots for the 2022 municipal election.

Background and discussion

Council approved the use of internet and telephone alternative voting methods for the 2022 municipal election at the March 2, 2021 regular meeting. Council also directed that a follow-up report be provided exploring the option of using traditional paper ballots in conjunction with internet and telephone alternative voting methods.

Staff has considered a range of options to support access to election services in 2022.

The Municipal Election Act, MEA, permits voters to appoint and vote by proxy. A proxy allows a voter to assign a friend or family member to vote on their behalf by completing a statutory form and having the assigned proxy voter attend the municipal office to have the form commissioned. This option has not often been used in past elections, as it is often not convenient or secure. It is the most common opportunity for voter fraud. Methods that enable a voter to cast their own ballot, such as internet or telephone voting, are preferred.



May 4, 2021 (2)

Remote voting meets the principles of the MEA. All eligible voters should be enfranchised and have the opportunity to cast their own ballot if they choose to. Offering in-person voting as the only option does not meet this goal. Eligible voters may not be able to attend a voting location for many reasons.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for alternative voting options. Hopefully, COVID-19 variants will no longer be a threat in October 2022; however, the clerk's department must ensure that a voters democratic right to vote is not impeded by health concerns for themselves, their families or their coworkers.

The 2014 West Grey municipal election used traditional paper ballots only. There were no tabulators; all counts were completed by hand. The overall cost of that election was \$32,316.16. Poll Clerks were paid \$200, and Deputy Returning Officers were paid \$225 for attending approximately two (2) hours of training prior to voting day with a twelve (12) to fourteen (14) hour shift on voting day. That results in an hourly wage of \$12.50 for poll clerks and \$14.06 for deputy returning officers.

To carry out the same election in 2022 will cost significantly more than the 2014 election as the wages will be significantly higher, and training time may be longer to learn and practice on the software for the electronic voter's list required if electronic voting methods are offered. Using tabulators for the vote count will cost approximately the same as paying election staff to carry out a count by hand and provide much faster results. The use of tabulators must also be included in any bylaw permitting alternative voting methods.

Additional staff will be required if paper ballots are provided along with an electronic election to serve as greeters at polling stations and assist with directing traffic to the paper ballot polls or the electronic voting stations. Each polling station will require a secure internet connection and a computer to electronically strike off names from the voters list in real-time to prevent voter fraud. The cost of \$7,950 for DataFix voter list management software is an additional cost from the 2014 election.

The 2018 election was carried out using internet and telephone voting with an overall cost of \$44,214.69. In 2018, there was an increase in voter turn-out over 2014 of 13.4%.

Some costs, such as DataFix software, overlap; however, most of the cost of a paper ballot voting option will be in addition to the cost of internet and telephone voting.

Traditional and electronic voting methods may both be offered for the 2022 municipal election; however, both voting methods need to be offered with fairness to all West Grey voters. A single paper ballot poll or paper ballot polls offered in various locations on alternating days will not provide fair service to all West Grey voters. It will require significant staff resources as each poll will require the deputy returning officer and poll clerk to attend the municipal office at



May 4, 2021 (3)

the close of voting on election day to open their ballot boxes and proceed with the paper ballot count.

Staff recommend proceeding with electronic and telephone voting options for 2022 for the following reasons:

- It provides an accessible election with options to address visual, audio, intellectual and mobility-related disabilities;
- It allows the election to proceed as planned with no risk to election staff or voters regardless of any COVID-19 concerns;
- It is a proven method, West Grey voters are familiar with the technology and responded positively in 2018, as noted by the increased voter turn-out;
- Voters are much more knowledgeable and comfortable with electronic processes than they were in 2018, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- It allows eligible voters to vote from anywhere;
- It provides for fully accessible, 24 hours a day, advance voting;
- It has far less impact on the environment as voters will not need to drive to a polling station, there is a significant reduction in paper;
- It is a cost-effective method; and
- Election results are available promptly after the polls close.

A decision on vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods has previously been required by May 1 in the year before the election. Changes to the MEA allow this decision to be made as late as May 1 of the election year. Despite changes to the legislation, it is essential to move forward as soon as possible as it limits the perception that a sitting member of council is making an election-related decision so close to the opening of nominations which will take place on May 1, 2022. A timely decision will also prevent procurement delays that may result in necessary equipment and services being unavailable or available at a premium rate, closer to the election.

Legal and legislated requirements

Municipal Elections Act
AODA

Financial and resource implications

Election costs will be dependent on equipment and voting method decisions.



May 4, 2021 (4)

Staffing implications

Staffing requirements will be dependent on equipment and voting method decisions.

Consultation

AMCTO Election Working Group
CAO
Grey County Clerks

Alignment to strategic vision plan

Pillar: Work together
Goal: Build partnerships and clear communication
Strategy: Leverage partnerships with neighbouring municipalities and implement online services

Attachments

None.

Next steps

Staff will prepare a bylaw to permit alternative voting methods and/or vote counting equipment and voting methods for the 2022 municipal elections. Staff will investigate options for a shared RFP process with Grey County lower-tier municipalities to provide alternative voting services and/or vote-counting equipment.

Respectfully submitted:

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