Staff Report

Administration

Report To: Committee of the Whole
Meeting Date: February 22, 2017
Report Number: FAF.17.31
Subject: Municipal and School Board Election 2018 – Alternative Voting Methods
Prepared by: Corrina Giles, Town Clerk

A.   Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.17.31, entitled "Municipal and School Board Election 2018 – Alternative Voting Methods"; and

THAT Electronic Voting – Internet and Telephone, be approved as the voting method for the 2018 Municipal Election and School Board Election.

B.   Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding alternative voting methods for the 2018 municipal and school board election.   A by-law is required to implement any alternative voting methods and / or the use of tabulating equipment.

C.   Background

The 2018 municipal election is October 22, 2018. The Clerk, as Returning Officer, is responsible for preparing for and conducting local elections under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, S.O. 1996, c.32 as recently amended by Bill 181 ("Act").

Alternative voting methods (where electors are not required to attend at a poll) and the use of vote counting equipment, are authorized by subsections 42(1) and (2) of the Act. If an alternative voting method or the use of vote counting equipment or tabulators is contemplated, each must be approved by by-law before May 1, 2017.

The Blue Mountains 2006, 2010 and 2014 municipal elections utilized the vote-by-mail method of voting, using vote-counting equipment (tabulators), and achieved the following voter turnout:

2006   34.24%
2010   38.81%
2014   37.85%

Given the use of alternative voting methods for the previous three elections, two alternative voting methods are being considered in this report, Option 1 Electronic Voting (Internet and Telephone) and Option 2 Vote by Mail.

Option 1:   Electronic Voting (Internet and Telephone)

Eligible electors receive a voter package in the mail that includes instructions, voter's identification number, voter's unique personal identification number (PIN) to vote using either the Internet or Telephone, the URL, and the telephone number for the voting system. Voters also receive the list of candidates, legal requirements to vote, and how to receive more information.

The voter requires the PIN as well as a second piece of information, usually, date of birth, in order to proceed to complete a ballot. A declaration must be acknowledged by the voter confirming that the elector meets the eligibility requirements to vote and understands offences under the Act.

Voters can vote at any time within the authorized voting period (generally seven to ten days), by telephone, hand held device, tablet or computer until the close of the election.

Should this method be selected, help centres would be set up to provide information and assistance to electors that do not have access to a computer to vote by internet if they wish.

The ballot information is stored in a secure database and tabulated at the end of Election Day. The system is designed to ensure there is no link that connects the voter with his or her ballot. Automatic tabulators would not be required for this method.

Internet voting is on the rise for Ontario municipalities with 12 municipalities using internet voting in 2003 and 97 municipalities using internet voting in 2014.

Option 2:   Vote by Mail with Tabulators

If this option is selected, staff propose to run the 2018 election exactly as in the 2014 election, being vote by mail with tabulators. Voting kits are mailed to eligible electors, the ballot is completed by the elector, a declaration is signed by the voter confirming that the voter meets the eligibility requirements to vote and that they understand the offences under the Act, and the ballot is returned via mail or dropped off at the Town Hall.

The use of vote counting equipment would also be utilized as in past elections.

If Option 2: Vote by Mail with Tabulators is the preferred method for the 2018 municipal election, Council should consider the following recommendation:

> THAT vote by mail with vote-counting equipment (tabulators), be approved as the voting method for the 2018 Municipal Election and School Board Election.

D.   Analysis

In the 2014 election, the majority of Grey County municipalities used vote by mail (some utilized tabulators), while Owen Sound, Southgate and West Grey continued to use paper ballots/poll attendance.   Meaford used electronic voting (telephone and internet) in its 2014 election. In discussion with the former Meaford Clerk, he advised that Meaford's post 2014 election review confirmed that telephone and internet voting was successful and comments received were generally positive.

Staff have reviewed the "Internet Voting Project Report" authored by Nicole Goodman, The Centre for e-Democracy & The University of Toronto and Heather Pyman, Carleton University, published in August 2016. The report explains the effects of internet voting on elections. Attached as Attachment "1" is the Internet Voting Project Report, Executive Summary dated August 2016. Attachment "2" is the complete Internet Voting Project Report.

The project surveyed 47 municipalities, and some of the key findings are as follows:

- the study finds support among stakeholders for internet voting in local elections
- when offered alongside other voting methods, internet voting is Ontario voters' preferred method for municipal elections
- municipalities primarily adopt internet voting to enhance voter accessibility and convenience
- internet voting is preferred for those who are unable to make it to a physical polling station
- older electors are the biggest users of internet voting
- education and outreach are the biggest challenges for implementation
- additional resources may be required in the advance polling periods, but are not required on election day
- internet voting can reduce election costs, or keep costs the same as in previous elections

Opportunity for Collaboration

The Grey County Clerks group have been meeting to prepare for the 2018 municipal election. Discussions have included opportunities for joint communications, advertising, and procedures, when the same alternative method of voting is chosen.

To date, the municipalities of Meaford, Owen Sound, West Grey, Grey Highlands and Hanover have confirmed internet and telephone voting as the alternative voting method for the 2018 municipal election. Town staff are proposing the use of alternative voting method, via internet and telephone voting, for the 2018 municipal election.

The Town's Purchasing Policy will be followed to purchase the services required for the option selected by Council.

E.   The Blue Mountains Strategic Plan

Goal #4:   Promote a Culture of Organizational and Operational Excellence
Objective #3:   To Consistently deliver Excellent Customer Service

F.   Financial Impact

On an annual basis, Council transfers $12,000 into the election reserve, for a total of $48,000 for each election.

Option 1 - The estimated cost for electronic voting (internet and telephone) voting in 2018 is $50,000. This includes a significant amount of training, staff time, communications and advertising of the new voting method to voters.   There is potential for collaboration with other Grey County municipalities to share costs of advertising, training and development of policies.

Option 2 - The cost of the 2014 municipal election was $45,759.56 based on 10,794 electors. The estimated cost for the 2018 municipal election is $50,000.

G.   In consultation with

Troy Speck, CAO
Ruth Prince, Director of Finance and IT Services

H.   Attached

1.   Attachment 1: Internet Voting Project Report, Executive Summary dated August 2016
2.   Attachment 2: Internet Voting Project Report, dated August 2016

Respectfully Submitted,

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Corrina Giles
Town Clerk

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Troy Speck, CAO
Chief Administrative Officer

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Internet Voting Project Report

Executive Summary
August 2016

VOTE

Authored by:
Nicole Goodman, The Centre for e-Democracy & The University of Toronto
Heather Pyman, Carleton University

The following are key findings from the research, which are explained more fully in the report.

INTERNET VOTERS' SURVEY

The Online Voting Process

- There is strong satisfaction with online voting as 95 percent of respondents report being satisfied
- Online voters said that casting a ballot online was "easy", "simple", "straightforward", "private", and "convenient"
- 95 percent of online voters say they would recommend the voting method to others
- Internet voting was the preferred voting method for voters in 93 percent of the communities that participated in this research
- Voting from home is the preferred remote voting location (88 percent of respondents said they voted from home)

Why are Voters Drawn to Online Ballots?

- **Convenience is the primary reason voters decided to vote online**
- Younger voters (aged 18-24) are more likely than any other group to say the top reason they voted online was because of accessibility

Reported Use in Future Elections

- A strong majority of online voters say they would use the voting method in a future election:
  - o 98 percent say they would likely use it a future municipal election
  - o 95 percent report being likely to use it in a provincial election
  - o 94 percent indicate they are likely to use it in a federal election

Online Voter Profile

- **The typical online voter is older, educated and wealthier.**
- **The average age is 53.**
  - o Of all age groups, those aged 55-64 years were the biggest users of online voting in the 2014 municipal election.
- **Has an annual household income of $80,000 or more before taxes.**

- **Resides in an urban or suburban area.**
  - o However, rural voters were more likely to choose online ballots than to vote by paper at the polls.

Online Voter Profile (Cont.)

- Reports having voted in most of the past elections they were eligible to participate in
- **Has a fast Internet connection at home and uses the Internet frequently** (93 percent say they use it everyday)
- **Is interested in politics (89 percent)**

PAPER VOTERS' SURVEY

Satisfaction with the Paper Voting Process

- **68 percent of paper voters are satisfied with the voting method.**

Knowledge and Opinions of Internet Voting

- A majority, 89 percent, were aware of online voting.
- Among paper voters the **top concern about Internet voting is security of the voting process**, 37 percent.
    - o The second largest group, 32 percent, report having no concerns about the technology.
    - o This latter group did not use it because they 'forgot', 'waited too long', for reasons that are administrative in nature, or because they had not decided whom to vote for in time.
- **Internet voting is perceived to be the safest remote voting option.**
    - o 66 percent believe telephone voting to be less than safe than voting by Internet.
    - o 54 percent believe voting by mail to be less safe than online voting.

Using Internet Voting in the Future

- **78 percent would use online voting in a future election.**
    - o 47 percent of this group would do so under special circumstances such as inclement weather or illness.
    - o 30 percent would do so 'no matter what'.
- **'Convenience'** is the primary reason paper voters would vote online in a future election.

Paper Voter Profile

- **Average age: 44 years**
    - o Voters under 44 years of age were more inclined to vote by paper, while those over the age of 45 years voted more frequently by Internet.
- **Annual household income of $60,000-$79,999 before taxes.**
- **Resides in an urban or suburban area.**
    - o Paper voters were more likely to live in an urban area than Internet voters, and less likely to live in a rural one.

- They are committed voters.
  - o Report having voted in most of the past elections they were eligible to participate in.
- **Have fast Internet connections and go online everyday.**

CANDIDATES' SURVEY

Candidates' Satisfaction with the Online Voting Process

- **A majority of candidates (64 percent) are satisfied with online voting**
- Similar levels of satisfaction are reported for the security of the election (73 percent) and the posting of election results (64 percent).

How Candidates Learnt about Internet Voting

- **Candidates were most likely to have heard about online voting via municipal-led information initiatives.**
- Specifically, the municipal website, Voter Information Packages, candidate information sessions, and local newspaper notices were the top sources that informed candidates about Internet voting.

Influence on Candidates' Campaigns

- **A majority of candidates (64 percent) say that Internet voting affected their campaign.**
- Popularly cited impacts include: making the beginning of campaign more crucial for attracting and mobilizing supporters, increased voter turnout, a larger number of young voters, talks with electors focusing on the voting method instead of election issues, and a negative impact on older electors.
- Candidates encountered many more electors that had already voted than in previous elections.
    - o 91 percent of candidates said that more than half of those who had voted before Election Day reported voting online.

Candidates' Overall Opinions of Internet Voting

- **80 percent of candidates feel favourably about having Internet voting as an additional voting method.**
- **A majority of candidates (64 percent) is against having Internet voting as the only voting method in elections.**

ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

Satisfaction with the Online Voting Process

- **96 percent of administrators report being satisfied with Internet voting**
- **97 percent of respondents say they would recommend using Internet voting in the 2018 municipal election**
- 96 percent feel it should be offered as an option in provincial elections
- 95 percent believe it should be used in federal elections

Why Internet Voting?

- **Accessibility for electors is the top reason administrators cite for adopting Internet voting**
- Improving voter turnout and convenience are other common rationales
- The **top three benefits** of Internet voting from an administrator's point of view include: **convenience, accessibility, and counting efficiency.**
- **Public education and outreach, negative media, and potential for fraud are the biggest challenges.**
- Administrators believe the biggest benefits for electors are: convenience, accessibility, and government keeping up with technological change.
- They see the biggest challenges for electors as being familiarity with computers, learning a new voting method, and access to a computer or Internet connection.

Impacts of Internet Voting

- The costs of introducing Internet voting vary depending on the municipality and the approach used.
- Although many administrators say they are unsure of the cost impact, there are more respondents who say that Internet voting decreased the cost of the election than those who believe there was an increase.
- A majority (58 percent) agree voter turnout was positively affected by Internet voting.
- 74 percent agree the **tabulation of election results is more efficient with Internet voting.**
- A majority of respondents do not believe Internet voting has more risks than other remote voting options such as voting by mail (71 percent) and telephone voting (53 percent)