



Town of Newmarket
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Online and Telephone Voting in the 2022 Municipal Election

Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2021-20

Department(s): Legislative Services

Author(s): Kiran Saini, Deputy Town Clerk

Meeting Date: March 22, 2021

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled Online and Telephone Voting in the 2022 Municipal Election dated March 22, 2021 be received; and,
2. That Council approve the use of online and telephone voting for use in the 2022 Municipal Election and any by-elections for the 2022-2026 term of Council (**Attachment 1**); and,
3. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to use online and telephone voting for the 2022 Municipal Election.

Background

As part of the 2022 Municipal Election planning process Council is required to pass a by-law to determine its voting method (**Attachment 1**). This report provides information on why Town Staff are recommending the use of online and telephone voting for the 2022 Municipal Election, and any by-elections for the 2022-2026 term of Council.

Discussion

Online and Telephone Voting were used in the 2018 Municipal Election

For the 2018 Municipal Election Newmarket was the first community in York Region to adopt a fully electronic model during an election. This was the first time Newmarket voters used a method other than paper to vote during a Municipal Election, and 19,992 voters successfully cast their ballots electronically (91% used online and 9% used telephone). Following the 2018 Municipal Election, staff [reported to Council](#) on the successes, challenges and future improvements during a special Committee of the Whole meeting.

Survey to Understand Online Voting

To understand how online and telephone voting was received by voters in 2018, the Town partnered with Dr. Nicole Goodman to undertake a survey. The survey results were also [presented](#) to Newmarket Council at the special Committee of the Whole meeting. Dr. Goodman is working on developing a comprehensive report on the analysis of the 2018 election with the municipalities who participated in the Internet Voting Study in the coming months.

Online Voting Survey Highlights

Highlights from the 2018 Newmarket survey included:

- The Town received an extremely high response rate of 39.43% (7,048 of 17,871 online voters);
- 94% of survey respondents were 'satisfied' with online voting and of that 77% were 'very satisfied';
- The majority of respondents cited 'convenience' as the rationale for having used online voting.

These highlights align with increasing accessibility in the Municipal Election.

Complaints received in 2018 regarding Online and Telephone Voting

Between August and October 2018, the Town received a total of 80 complaints, and of that:

- 34 in relation to telephone voting including low volume, bad audio connections, or not understanding how to use the system.
- 24 general complaints that included matters related to disenfranchisement, privacy concerns, or that the voter did not like the voting methods offered.
- 18 complaints related to the internet voting process, which included those who felt the system was not secure, they were not comfortable with technology, process was tedious, or their date of birth was incorrect.
- 5 complaints including where to find candidate's information, automated telephone calls, and where to vote in person.

As part of the planning process for 2022, the Town will use the concerns and complaints to make continuous improvements for the next Municipal Election. Privacy and security were the main concerns that were identified and staff have been working on ways to address these accordingly.

Addressing privacy and security concerns

As part of the 2018 Municipal Election [report to Council](#) in May 2019, staff identified a number of future considerations in relation to online and telephone voting. One such area was regarding security and privacy of voter information. Town Staff are in the process of completing a Privacy Impact Assessment of the software used to store voter information in collaboration with the other Greater Toronto Area municipalities. It is expected that this Assessment will be completed by the end of the year. Additionally, the group is investigating the completion of a Security Assessment of the software used to store voter information.

Support legislative reform for operational and technical standards for online voting was another area identified by Town Staff as a future consideration. The Municipal Elections Act does not have any standards, and in the absence of any standards, it means many municipalities rely heavily on vendors and best practices learned from other municipalities to create the voter experience.

Dr. Nicole Goodman, an e-democracy academic, and Dr. Aleksander Essex, an academic in cybersecurity, cryptography and secure computation are leading the development of technical standards for online voting. Their draft series of standards supporting the implementation of online electoral voting in Canada has been submitted to the Standards Policy Committee of the CIO Strategy Council (“CIO”), a group of Chief Information Officers and Executive Technology Leaders across Canada. The CIO’s mandate is “to focus on collectively transforming, shaping, and influencing the Canadian information and technology ecosystem”¹. The Standards Policy Committee is comprised of volunteer technical and subject matter experts and are responsible for: “1) Developing and approving a standard or standards assigned to it, including requests to revise or amend existing standards; 2) Interpreting the standard; and, 3) Reviewing standard(s) to ensure they are kept current.”² Once the standards are reviewed and established, they will act as guidelines to assist municipalities in developing their online voting models. It is anticipated that the standards will be published by the end of the year.

Town Staff will continue to support voters without technology

As with the 2018 Municipal Election, Town Staff will implement a model to support and provide access to voters without technology. A Voter Assistance Centre equipped with technology for voters to vote online will be established. The Town will also spend more time promoting the ‘election street team’, which was a service Staff provided upon

¹ CIO Strategy Council. Retrieved March 3, 2021, from <https://ciostrategycouncil.com/about/>

² Ibid. Retrieved March 10, 2021, from <https://ciostrategycouncil.com/standards/#how>

request of a voter who wanted Staff to visit their home and provide technology for them to vote. Town Staff will once again support long-term care and retirement homes to assist voters by providing access to technology. Another successful aspect of the Town's administration of the 2018 Municipal Election was in relation to the dedicated call centre which provided voters with over the telephone assistance.

Uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic has created new challenges in which the way elections are administered. As many services and institutions shifted their services online during the Pandemic, it resulted in many more individuals being required to conduct business online. The Municipal Election is in October 2022, however, there is significant planning including vendor selection that is completed in the year prior. At this time we are not able to predict the continuing impact of COVID-19 and what restrictions may still need to be in place in 2022. To support a voting model that has the potential to significantly reduce the number of in-person contacts, Town Staff recommend that Newmarket Council approve the use of online and telephone voting for the 2022 Municipal Election, and any by-elections for the 2022-2026 term of Council.

Conclusion

Following Council's approval for the use of online and telephone voting, Town Staff will work on securing a vendor through the Request for Proposal process.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This report aligns with the Town's mission of making Newmarket *even* better by implementing accessible voting solutions.

Consultation

Finance was consulted as part of this report.

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

The election will be delivered within the 2022 operating budget allotment.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Online and Telephone Voting By-law

Approval

Lisa Lyons, Director of Legislative Services/Town Clerk

Esther Armchuk, Commissioner of Corporate Services

Jag Sharma, Chief Administrative Officer

Contact

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