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# 2022 Municipal Election Review and Future Municipal Election Model Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2023-72

Department(s): Legislative Services

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Meeting Date: November 13, 2023

## Recommendations

1. That the report entitled 2022 Municipal Election Review and Future Municipal Election Model dated November 13, 2023 be received; and,
2. That Council adopt the Alternative Vote Methods By-law (**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:

1. Provide Council with an update on the 2022 municipal election; and,
2. Seek Council approval of an Alternative Vote Methods By-law to facilitate advance planning for elections.

## Background

### 2022 Municipal Election Review

This report provides a review of the 2022 Municipal Election and highlights the survey responses. Overall, the survey indicated that Newmarket voters were satisfied with both internet and paper voting.

## Future Municipal Election Model and the 2026 Municipal Election

Looking ahead to the next regular election, this report presents a By-law that provides the Clerk the flexibility to adopt any method of voting in an election. This removes the requirement for the Clerk to seek Council approval prior to each regular election or by-election. It allows the Clerk to begin preparing for the election in advance and removes Council from the awkward discussion of selecting the voting method, especially when re-election is being sought. This is a practice adopted by the cities of Toronto and Markham.

## Discussion

### 2022 Municipal Election Review

In 2022, voters were provided two options to cast their ballots: by internet or by paper. Internet voting served as the primary method for voters to use. Paper ballots was offered as a supplementary method.

Between October 15 and October 24, a total of 15,221 people voted in the 2022 Newmarket municipal election, representing 24.8% of eligible voters. Of those who voted, 15,007 cast their ballot by internet, representing 98.6% of all voters. 214 voters cast their ballot by paper, representing 1.4% of all voters.

**Table of Newmarket Voter Turnout from 2003 to 2022**

Year	Voter Turnout
2003	31.3%
2006	34.6%
2010	32.6%
2014	36.8%
2018	34.7%
2022	24.8%

**Based on election data reported through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the overall voter turnout in 2022 across all municipalities was down from 2018.**

The overall voter turnout across all Ontario municipalities was 38% in 2018, compared to 36.3% in 2022.

As with the 2018 municipal election, Newmarket took part in a research study by Dr. Nicole Goodman of municipalities that used internet voting. The survey was offered to voters regardless of whether they cast their ballot online or by paper.

3,324 surveys were completed out of 15,007 online voters. 9 surveys were completed out of 221 paper voters. This translates into a 22.15% response rate, and according to Dr. Goodman, anything above 15% is considered a great response rate.

The survey measured voters' overall experience, satisfaction levels, and rationale for using internet voting.

**When it came to satisfaction levels, Newmarket voters had overall strong satisfaction levels related to internet voting.**

In Newmarket, a majority of internet voters cited online voting to be easy to use, accessible and convenient. Voters agreed that the instructions were clear and easy to follow, and even older voters responded in this way. Newmarket voters appreciated the option to vote using the internet, which was a shared sentiment from internet and paper voters.

With respect to areas for improvement, the comments were grouped into two categories: 1) candidate information; and, 2) technical comments and concerns.

In both 2018 and 2022, staff requested all candidates share information on their platform and a short biography. This information was shared via printed posters in Town facilities and communicated on the Town's election website, [newmarketvotes.ca](http://newmarketvotes.ca). The goal of providing this neutral space to registered candidates was to provide both the candidates and voters with information on the registered candidates.

The Town will continue to use its election website as a primary source of information, and will be looking for different ways to make this candidate information known to the general electorate in 2026. For example, through this survey staff learned that the Voter Instruction Letter remains the number one source of information for voters. Staff will explore the opportunity to better utilize the space on this Letter to direct voters to the Town's election website to learn more about the registered candidates.

With respect to technical comments and concerns as another opportunity for improvement, Dr. Goodman advised that voters reported that they experienced issues accessing or locating the voting webpage, browser or service interruption, issues logging in, completing the captcha, and issues voting on particular devices.

Dr. Goodman reported that access to candidate information, and technical comments and concerns were the same two areas for improvement identified by voters in many other mid-sized to larger municipalities. She also suggested that in 2026, continuing with both internet and paper voting is recommended in order to accommodate all Newmarket voters.

## **Future Municipal Election Model and the 2026 Municipal Election**

The Municipal Elections Act requires the local Council to adopt a by-law to permit the use of any alternative voting method or vote counting.

In Newmarket, traditionally the Clerk has sought Council direction on the method in which voting will take place for each subsequent regular election or by-election. Instead, staff recommended that Council pass a by-law to permit the use of internet, at home voting and vote counting equipment (such as tabulators) and permit the Clerk to select the mode in which voting and vote counting shall occur for all regular elections and by-elections. Going forward, this will help to de-politicize the electoral process.

The cities of Toronto and Markham have adopted the same practice. It further removes Council from any real or perceived conflicts associated with an electoral process. This practice also supports the Clerk's statutory obligation under the Municipal Elections Act to prepare for the election in a way they deem appropriate. **Attachment 1** provides for a by-law that authorizes methods of voting and vote counting equipment including by internet, at home visits and using tabulators to count votes on paper ballots. This by-law will provide the Clerk the flexibility to choose and prepare for the election in the best way for the community.

As with past elections, staff prepare robust communication strategies to share and educate the community on the election process. Going forward, staff will continue to broadly communicate to the public (including Council) how and when voters will be able to cast their ballot prior to an election.

Further, following the conclusion of an election, the Clerk will continue to prepare a report on accessibility in the election and provide that report to Council and the public.

**Based on the survey data and recommendations from Dr. Goodman, at present, the Clerk plans for internet voting to be the primary method of voting, and paper voting to be the supplementary method of voting for the 2026 Municipal Election.**

Internet and paper voting seemed to provide the greatest access and convenience in the 2022 municipal election. The electorate was satisfied with the options provided, and even those who voted by paper appreciated the option to vote using the internet.

## **Conclusion**

Following Council adoption of the Alternative Vote Methods By-law (**Attachment 1**), staff will proceed with adopting a model for 2026, and communicate that to the public prior to the next regularly scheduled election in October 2026.

## **Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages**

This report aligns with the Town's mission of making Newmarket even better.

## **Consultation**

None.

## **Human Resource Considerations**

None.

## **Budget Impact**

None.

## **Attachments**

**Attachment 1** – Alternative Vote Methods By-law

## **Approval**

Lisa Lyons, Director of Legislative Services/Town Clerk

Esther Armchuk, Commissioner of Corporate Services

## **Contact**

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