



*The Corporation of the Municipality of Wawa
Staff Report*

Clerk

Prepared For: Council	Report No.: CC-2022-01
Agenda Date: February 1, 2022	File No.: C07

Subject

The subject of this report is the use of Telephone and Internet Voting for the upcoming Municipal Election, which is scheduled to be held on October 24, 2022.

List of Stakeholders

The list of Stakeholders includes:

The Municipality of Wawa
Ratepayers and Electors
Mayor and Council

Summary of Recommendation

RESOLVED THAT Council of the Municipality of Wawa hereby:

1. Direct the Clerk to prepare a by-law to permit telephone and internet voting as the voting method for the 2022 Municipal and School Board election; and
2. Research and select a Single source election voting method provider and Datafix as the voter list management provider.
3. Direct the Clerk to prepare the necessary by-law for electronic voting for the June 1, 2021 Regular Council meeting.

Respectfully Submitted By: Cathy Cyr Clerk	Reviewed By: Maury O'Neill CAO-Treasurer
Name/Signature/Title 	Supervisor's Name/Signature/Title 

Background

In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*, municipal elections are to be held every four years with voting to be conducted on the 4th Monday in October *in the election year*. The next municipal election will be held on **Monday, October 24, 2022**.

The Clerk of every local municipality is responsible for preparing and conducting all municipal and school board elections as prescribed in the *Municipal Elections Act*. Further, it is the responsibility of the Clerk to ensure that all eligible electors are given every opportunity to vote in the municipal election and that the voting process is as accessible and accountable as possible.

Changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* in 1996 allows for alternative voting methods for Municipal Elections in Ontario. The Municipal Election of 1997 saw 24 municipalities across Ontario use Vote-by-Mail as their selected method of voting. By 2000, the number of municipalities that used Vote-by-Mail had increased to 70 municipalities and by 2003, 109 of the 417 municipalities in Ontario planned to use Vote-by-Mail; Wawa was one of those municipalities. This number did not include School boards that were located in unorganized areas. The percentage of municipalities using Vote-by-Mail was highest in the northern and rural areas of the Province.

Wawa recognized Vote-by-Mail as a trusted and secure method of distributing ballots for a municipal election, and the municipality used this method of voting from 2003-2014, and includes one by-election. The use of this method has saved time, costs and resulted in a higher voter turnout that had been experienced with the traditional one-day election method. The following are the turnouts of each of those elections as compared to the 2000 election:

Year	Eligible Voters	Voter Turnout #	Voter Turnout %	Mayoral Race	Voting Method
1997	2,775	1,501	54.09%	Yes	Traditional
2000	2,863	1,462	51.07%	Yes	Traditional
2003	2,669	1,617	60.58%	Acclaimed	VBM
2006	2,292	1,376	60.03%	Acclaimed	VBM
2010	2,292	1,404	61.26%	Yes	VBM
2014	2,263	1,505	66.53%	Yes	VBM
2018	2103	837	39.80%	Acclaimed	Internet/ Telephone

** 1997 and 2000 were traditional elections with polling stations

2003-2014 were vote by mail (VBM)

2018 was telephone and internet voting

Subsequent changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* have now provided for a variety of Alternative Voting Methods that continue to provide the following three (3) main benefits:

1. Improved convenience for voters
2. Enhanced accessibility for voters
3. The opportunity for increased voter turnout

Pursuant to *Section 42(1) of the Municipal Elections Act*, the Council of a local municipality may pass a by-law authorizing the method of voting and the use of vote-counting equipment and for electors to use an alternative voting method. The *Act* provides that the subject by-law must be passed on or before May 1st in the election year.

The use of alternate, remote methods of voting in municipal elections in Ontario are now common place and many communities are discontinuing the traditional method of voting.

Remote voting offers electors convenience, choice and greater access to participate in the election process. Of the alternative voting methods available, internet and telephone voting offer the greatest flexibility of use by the voter.

With the changing demographics of our society, it can be expected that the number of people with disabilities or mobility issues will steadily increase. The provision of remote voting for this population ensures that nobody will be disenfranchised. The availability of current technology offers many individuals with a range of disabilities to vote via an alternative method just as those who are able bodied.

Policies & Plans Affecting Proposal

The recommendations in this report fit within the recommendations of the Wayfinders Transformational Review under Topic AC-06: Internet and Telephone Voting, and the Wawa Strategic Plan 2021-2025. In 2018, the Municipality of Wawa introduced internet and telephone voting. There are many benefits to this type of voting, including enhanced accessibility, reliability of data, accelerated outcomes and less need for resources on Election Day. The Municipality undertook a new approach for the 2018 Elections, and provided in-person Voter Help Stations on various days and locations throughout the community during the voting period, which included the Lady Dunn Health Centre, Mountainview apartment complex, Seniors Centre, and Wawa Food Bank. On Voting Day, the Municipality opened the Community Centre and provided in-person Voter Help Stations. Again, very few people utilized this option.

The Wayfinders report indicated there is one opportunity for improvement being to increase the number of voters, which is 50% lower than in previous years. While this may be partly beyond the control of the Municipality because of voter apathy, but it is still important for voters to exercise their democratic right to vote.

It was recommended by Wayfinders, that the Clerk conduct a best practice review of municipalities who have been successful in attracting more voters, and implement voter attraction strategies.

The Clerk's department will utilize the options available through Internet Voting to promote the candidate module so that residents would have quick access to the candidates' platform. Further, the Municipality will undertake a more strategic approach and provide short videos for public viewing on the voting process.

Options

This report considers the following three (3) options:

Option 1

Vote by Mail. This is the same process and procedures that have been used since 2003 to 2014.

Option 2

Vote by Mail with the use of Tabulators

Option 3

Electronic Voting (Internet and Telephone)

Recommendation

Option 1 would see the Municipality of Wawa use the Vote-by-Mail system that has been used since 2003 to 2014. This method uses voting kits that are mailed to eligible electors. The ballot is completed by the elector, a declaration signed by the elector confirming that the elector meets the eligibility requirements to vote and that they understand the offences under the Municipal Elections Act. The ballot is then returned via mail or dropped off at the Municipal Office.

The voting procedures developed by the Clerk and according to the Municipal Elections Act are then used to handle, store and subsequently count the ballots after the close of voting on voting day.

While this method was a definite improvement over the traditional method of election and served Wawa well, it has 'worn out its welcome' due to the availability of other options. The cost of using this method is around \$17,000. For these reasons, **Option1 is not recommended.**

Option 2 is a hybrid of Option 1. This Option would see the Municipality of Wawa use the Vote-by-Mail system that has been used since 2003. This method uses voting kits that are mailed to eligible electors. The ballot is completed by the elector, a declaration signed by the sector confirming that the elector meets the eligibility requirements to vote and that they understand the offences under the Municipal Elections Act. The ballot is then returned via mail or dropped off at the Municipal Office.

The voting procedures developed by the Clerk and according to the Municipal Elections Act are then used to handle and store the ballots until they are counted. This Option would vary from Option 1 in that when it came time to count the votes at the close of voting, two centrally located tabulators would be used to count the votes. Election staff would be required to feed each ballot into a tabulator that is connected to a desktop computer. As the tabulator reads the ballot, it would record the voter's choice in a central database on the computer. As the conclusion of processing the ballots, the results from each tabulator would be added together to arrive at a final count. The entire process would take less than two hours. The cost of using this method is predicted to be in the range of \$18,000-\$20,000.

Again this Option is a variation of Option 1. Although it would be marginally better than Option 1 it still maintains a similar degree of obsolescence as Option 1 and is therefore **Option 2 is not recommended.**

Option 3 makes use of up-to-date technology to complete the voting process. In the Electronic (Internet and Telephone) Voting process, eligible electors receive a voter package in the mail that includes instructions, a VIN (voters identification number), a voters 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 the ballot. A declaration must be acknowledged by the voter confirming that the elector meets the eligibility requirements to vote and understands offences under the Municipal Election 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. A Help Centre or Help Centres would be established 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 off-site database and tabulated by the system 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. Security reports are produced

based on a set of user-defined criteria to catch an abnormal number of votes coming from a single IP address. The cost for this option is expected to be in the range of \$18,000.

While the costs for all three options are very similar, only Option 3 offers a combination of increased access to the elector and a significant reduction in the amount of staff time in the election process.

For these reasons, **Option 3 is recommended.**

Further to this recommendation, the Municipal Clerk will undertake a best practice review of municipalities who have been successful in attracting more voters.

Candidates will be introduced to the Candidates Module for the Internet Voting to provide residents with their portfolio. Further, the Municipality will undertake a more strategic approach and provide short videos for public viewing on the voting process.