

2022 Municipal and School Board Election

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Report Summary

This report provides information regarding the upcoming 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP).

Financial Implications

All Municipal and School Board Election and Governance related activities carried out in relation to the Municipal Election will be funded through the Municipal Election and Governance Reserve.

Background

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (the Act) governs the conduct of all Municipal and School Board Elections held within the province of Ontario and establishes that the conduct of the Municipal and School Board Elections is the responsibility of the Clerk of the municipality.

The next Municipal and School Board Election will be held on Monday, October 24, 2022, and nominations for the offices of Mayor, Councillor and School Board Trustee will open on Monday, May 4, 2022 and will close at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, August 19, 2022. The City of Greater Sudbury's election website is in the process of being updated to include information and resources for candidates such as key dates and candidate's guides provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

On April 9, 2019, City Council passed resolution CC2019-114 approving the return to a hybrid voting model for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. As a result of this decision internet voting will be available to Greater Sudbury voters throughout the entire voting period, including on Election Day. Paper ballot voting will be used on Election Day and voters will be able to vote at the voting location of their choice.

This report will provide City Council and members of the public with a general overview of the conduct of the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election as well as the upcoming work of the Election Team.

Method of Vote

In order to implement the Council approved hybrid model, in the Fall of 2020, the Election Team, with the assistance of IT and Purchasing Services staff prepared an RFP requesting proposals for the delivery of voting and vote counting services for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

Submissions were received by reputable election services providers. Following the evaluation process in accordance with the City of Greater Sudbury's purchasing policies, Scytl was awarded the contract, which was signed in the fall of 2021.

As per the provisions of the executed contract, Scytl will be responsible for the delivery of the internet voting portion of the vote, which will run throughout the duration of the voting period, up to and including the close of polls on Election Day. In order to deliver the required paper ballot/tabulator count services, which will run exclusively on Election Day, Scytl partnered with Clear Ballot.

This hybrid model is similar to the method of vote that was used during the 2014 Municipal and School Board Election. City of Greater Sudbury voters will be able to cast their online vote from their own device at any time during the advance voting period and until the close of polls on Election Day. On Election Day, those voters who prefer the traditional paper ballot method will be able to visit a voting location of their choice throughout the City and will cast their ballot in a similar fashion to the way in which they do during a provincial or federal election.

In hybrid voting models used across the province there has been a significant shift in the way in which voters are choosing to cast their ballot, with a decline being seen in the number of ballots cast in the traditional paper method and an increase in the use and acceptance of internet voting. The pandemic has further shifted the way people conduct their daily routines and voting is not immune to this change.

Many people have come to rely more heavily on internet-based services and voting is no exception. Many people are still wary of gathering in large public spaces and have been seen to vote in other methods when they are available to them rather than attending a physical voting location. This was seen during recent pandemic held elections where there was an alternative method to in person voting offered.

In the 2021 Federal Election the use of mail-in ballots increased substantially compared to previous pre-pandemic elections, and while overall voter turnout reached 62% in the Sudbury riding and 65% in the Nickel Belt riding, nationally, attendance at physical voting locations dropped significantly. Almost half of all ballots cast in the election were cast in advance of Election Day and by mail.

Voting Locations

Since the 2014 and 2018 Municipal and School Board Elections the way in which municipalities and other levels of government have run their elections has changed significantly. Advancements and greater acceptance of the use of technology in the voting process coupled with an increased number of election equipment and internet voting service providers breaking into the Canadian electoral market has allowed election organizers at all levels of government to broaden their use of technology and offer voters more ways in which to cast their ballot. Throughout the pandemic there has been a rise in the use of voting technologies and methods that do not require a voter to attend in person to cast their ballot.

Additionally, the COVID-19 Pandemic has added a layer to the planning and execution of elections. Social distancing and PPE requirements have had an impact on the way voting locations are organized and the space requirements within them.

When selecting voting locations, the Election Team has an established set of evaluation criteria that is used to determine whether the location is suitable and accessible. This criterion includes but is not limited to whether a site is accessible, how close or far the location is to a main roadway or bus stop, the number of potential voters in the catchment area of the voting location, and whether the location has the required power and internet access to support the use of the live electronic voters' list. Given the challenges and new requirements presented to municipal election organizers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic these criteria have been supplemented with new criteria for space and social distancing requirements. This has resulted in the need for a review of voting locations used in previous elections and changes to some locations.

In the interim period between elections, staff conducted a review of the voting locations used in previous elections and determined that several locations would not meet the needs of a pandemic election or were no longer suitable for use. Historically, local schools have been used as voting locations, and have made up the bulk of the locations. However, over the years these sites have presented some challenges in terms of parking, traffic control and security. As such over the last few election cycles, the Election Team has slowly been winding down their use of schools and finding alternative locations where possible. Throughout the pandemic, school boards have also restricted community use and rental of schools, making it challenging to use them as voting sites.

In order to fill the gaps left behind by the removal of most schools from the list of voting locations, staff reviewed additional sites throughout the City including those used in provincial and federal elections. Staff also conducted an overview of the geographic and community-based location of the sites throughout the city and made the decision to add or shift locations to new areas where opportunities for voting may have been impacted by the lack of an in person voting location in that area.

For voters who do not have access to the technology required to cast an internet ballot, or who prefer to vote in the traditional paper ballot method, in person paper ballot voting will be available at 25 vote anywhere voting locations on Election Day. In person paper ballot voting will also be available at 23 Long Term Care and Nursing homes throughout the City where residents of those sites will be able to cast their ballot. In person internet voting will not be available at voting locations on Election Day.

Voting at the physical voting locations on Election Day will be conducted by way of paper ballot and voters will be able to attend the voting location of their choice on Election Day to cast their ballot consistent with the vote anywhere model first implemented in 2014. Ballot on demand printers and a live electronic voters' list will facilitate this process.

Following the close of polls on Election Day, ballots will be transported from voting locations to Election Headquarters for central tabulation. Procedures will be enacted for central count processes and to permit scrutineers to view the counting process based upon the best practices of other Ontario municipalities and the approval of the City Clerk.

Results from internet voting will be tabulated and released shortly after the close of voting, followed by the paper ballot results once tabulation is complete later in the evening. High speed and capacity image cast tabulators provided by Clear Ballot will tabulate the paper ballots. Based on the high level of acceptance of internet voting seen in prior elections it is anticipated that a significant proportion of ballots will be cast using that method and the number of paper ballots will be modest by comparison.

Voters' List

For the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election voters' lists for all Ontario municipal elections are mandated to be generated and provided to municipalities by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Commencing in 2026, voters' lists for municipal and school board elections will be prepared and maintained by Elections Ontario.

MPAC's voters' list information is generated through a combination of responses to enumeration forms that are sent to property owners and property owners contacting MPAC directly to make changes to their information prior to the generation of the Preliminary List of Electors (PLE).

Should MPAC implement their voter look up tool again, the City of Greater Sudbury will make this tool available to voters on the City of Greater Sudbury's election website and will encourage voters to use the tool to ensure that they are on the voters' list and that their information on the list is correct and up to date.

The Preliminary List of Electors will be received by the municipality in August of 2022, at which time the municipality will review the information on the voters' list that has been flagged for attention such as: potential duplicates, invalid roll numbers, incorrect mailing address and name anomalies. The list of changes made to the voter's list is then sent back to MPAC for the formulation of the final voters' list.

The official revisions period as outlined in the Act, will begin on September 1, 2022. At this time, voter's will be able to use the City of Greater Sudbury's own "Am I on the Voters' List Tool" to ensure that they are on the voters' list and that their information was correct.

During the revisions period voters whose information is incorrect or who are not on the list will be given the opportunity to have their information updated or their name added to the voters' list. Procedures will be put in place to ensure the security and validity of the voters' list and voters will be advised of the information that is required of them and the process they must follow in order to have their information updated and added to the list.

As in previous elections, Voter Information Letters will be sent to those voters found on the voters' list. These letters will contain important and confidential information for the intended voter regarding how to cast their online ballot, the different in-person voting location options available, voter eligibility and their credentials required to access the online voting platform.

Omissions, duplicates or incorrect voter information on voters' lists are common and historic problems experienced in every election, at all levels of government. It should also be noted that municipal, provincial and federal elections do not currently share a voters' list and the generation process of these lists are different for each.

Due to the number of voters within a jurisdiction, often the municipality is unaware of changes that are required to be made to voter information outside of those that are highlighted upon receipt of the Preliminary List of Electors from MPAC. As such, voters are and will continue to be strongly encouraged to verify their information on the list and report any required changes to the municipality so the corrections can be made.

In terms of revisions that were required to be made to voter information, in 2018 there were a total of 20,132 changes made compared to 34,759 changes made in 2014. This represents a 17.38% change of the list in 2018 vs. a change percentage of 29.53% in 2014. It is anticipated that a significant number of changes to voter information will once again be required for the upcoming election.

The Election Team will make use of the tools at their disposal to update the list and educate voters of the importance of ensuring that they are the list and that their information is correct.

Voter Engagement and Communications

The Elections Team will be working in partnership with the Corporate Communications team on a rebranding of the Municipal and School Board Election, which includes a new logo and strategies to increase voter engagement, turnout and education.

Information for voters, candidates and third parties will be communicated to the public through the City of Greater Sudbury's website which will be continuously updated throughout the election cycle and various other media channels to ensure that both candidates and voters have all of the information necessary to run for office and make an informed choice come voting time.

Conclusion

As the Election Team continues to work through the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election cycle information will be added and updated on the election website.

Resources Cited

Municipal Elections Act, 1996 - <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96m32>

April 9, 2019 Report to City Council, Method of Vote: 2022 Municipal and School Board Election - <https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=3565>