

2026 Municipal and School Board Election

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Report Summary

This report provides a recommendation regarding the use of voting and vote-counting equipment in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.

Resolution

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury directs staff to implement the use of electronic voting throughout the entire voting period with in-person paper ballot voting opportunities during the advanced voting period and on Election Day for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Climate Action Plans

This report refers to operational matters.

Financial Implications

All activities related to the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election will be funded from the Election Reserve Fund.

Background

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (the Act) governs the conduct of all Municipal and School Board Elections held within the province of Ontario. Municipalities must pass by-laws authorizing the use of voting and vote counting equipment and alternative voting methods by May 1st of the year before an election.

Review of 2022 Municipal and School Board Election

The Voting Period

In April of 2019, a report was presented to Council recommending a combined voting solution for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. The option approved directed staff to implement electronic voting during the entire voting period in combination with paper ballot voting at Election Day voting locations. Central tabulation of all paper ballots was to be conducted at Election Headquarters following the close of voting on Election Day.

The voting period for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election began at 10:00 a.m. on October 14, 2022, with the opening of the electronic voting platform. The platform was open to voters for a two-week period, during which time voters could cast a ballot anytime from anywhere provided they had access to the internet and their Voter Information Letter.

Several opportunities were available to voters who preferred the traditional paper ballot voting method. Paper ballots were available at three locations on two advance voting days on Saturday, October 15, and Saturday, October 22, 2022. On Election Day, voters had the choice of casting an electronic ballot or attending a voting location to cast a paper ballot.

Paper ballot voting locations opened at 10:00 a.m., and voting was held at 26 Regular Election Day Voting Locations and 25 Long-Term Care / Nursing Home Voting Locations. The vote anywhere model, which has been used since 2014, was once again implemented. This permitted voters to vote at any Regular Voting Location of their choosing, regardless of the Ward they reside in.

The voting period ended at 8:00 p.m. on October 24, 2022. All paper ballots were then transported to Election Headquarters for central tabulation.

The breakdown of total ballots cast by location during the voting period is as follows:

Ballots Cast by Location	
<u>Voting Method</u>	<u>Total Number of Ballots</u>
Online (No Location)	75.00%
Long-Term Care/Nursing Home	3.00%
Advance & Election Day Paper Ballot Voting Location	22.00%

Post Election Data

To assist with future election planning and resource assignment, staff review post-election statistical information and voter data to determine when and how voters cast their ballots.

In addition to the information in the chart above, a further breakdown of voting data shows when voters are choosing to cast their ballots during the voting period:

Ballots Cast by Voting Period	
<u>Voting Period</u>	Ballots Cast (%)
Paper Ballots Cast at Advance Voting Location	3.00%
Paper Ballots Cast at Election Day Voting Location	22.00%
Online Ballots Cast During Advance Voting Period	53.00%
Online Ballots Cast on Election Day	22.00%

As evidenced in the post-election data, electronic voting remained the preferred method of vote for Greater Sudbury voters in 2022, and its use and acceptance have continued to grow with each election. Additionally, most voters opt to vote online during the advance voting period.

Post-election data gathered by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario supports the voting trends in Greater Sudbury and demonstrates that municipalities are continuing to move towards the use of technology-based voting methods. In Ontario, 217 municipalities used an electronic method of vote, 42 more than in the previous election.

2026 Voters' List

Traditionally, the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) prepared and provided municipalities with voters' lists. Information for the voters' list was generated through a combination of responses to enumeration forms sent to property owners, information from real estate transactions, and property owners contacting MPAC directly or using the voter look-up tool to make changes to their information.

The information used by MPAC to prepare the voters' list was generated based on property-centric details and property owner information, as opposed to voter-centric information and datasets. Due to the nature of the information, previous lists failed to accurately capture name and address changes, new voter additions, and tenant information. A significant number of revisions were required to the list during each election cycle.

During the 2022 Election, Citizen Service Centres and Libraries were used as Voter Registration Centres where voters could attend during regular hours to update their voter information. During the Revisions

Period, 21,739 changes were made to voter information, and Election Team staff made 3,575 updates to voter information during the post-election revisions period.

As a result of changes to the Act, Elections Ontario assumed responsibility for the production and maintenance of the voters' list for Municipal and School Board Elections in Ontario as of January 2024. Elections Ontario continually updates the Register using information from federal, provincial, and municipal data sources, such as the National Register of Electors maintained by Elections Canada. Elections Ontario also has agreements to receive periodic updates from other provincial government agencies and ministries, such as the Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, that are used to update voter information.

In addition to the periodic updates to the Register, voters can confirm, update, add, or remove their voter information and property information or remove deceased voters from the Register at any time by accessing Elections Ontario's voter registration portal.

While Elections Ontario is responsible for most voter information on the list MPAC will remain responsible for school board support designations. To assist with updating school board support designations, MPAC has launched an online portal. Through this portal, property owners or tenants registered with MPAC can update or select their school board support at any time.

The election website has been updated with information and links to the Elections Ontario and MPAC portals to ensure that voters are aware of these changes and the tools available to them.

Communication and Voter Engagement

The communication needs of an election are unique and highly demanding. The success of an election hinges on correct information being provided to voters in a timely and understandable fashion. It is essential that voters understand the voting process and are confident in it.

Leading up to 2022, the election was rebranded, including a new distinctive logo and tag lines. Additionally, with the return to using a combined voting solution, a greater focus was put on communicating where, when, and how to vote.

A second key area of focus of the Election Communications Plan was to ensure that voters understood the importance of being on the voters' list and that their voter information was correct and up to date.

Voters, candidates, and the media were identified as key targets, and distinct messaging was created and provided to each stakeholder across a wide range of channels in both official languages. The 2022

strategies and rebrand proved successful and will continue to be built upon in 2026.

Conclusion

The City of Greater has conducted the last three Municipal and School Board Elections using electronic voting as a sole method of vote or together with a paper ballot option. Electronic voting has been accepted by the community and many others across the province as a method that provides electors with security and convenience. As a result, it is recommended that voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election be conducted using the same method of vote used in 2022 being electronic voting during the entire voting period combined with paper ballot voting opportunities during the advanced voting period and on Election Day. Paper ballots would once again be tabulated at a central location after the close of voting.

Resources Cited

Municipal Elections Act, 1996 - <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96m32#BK60>

April 9, 2019 Report, Method of Vote: 2022 Municipal and School Board Election <https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=30453>

Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2022 Municipal Elections
<https://elections2022.amo.on.ca/web/en/home>