
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CLE-02-2023 Municipal Election Summary

For Consideration by Council in Committee on February 7, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To provide a summary of the administration of the 2022 municipal election, being the first election to provide internet voting, and to suggest an updated annual contribution amount to the Elections Reserve Fund going forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CLE-02-2023 Municipal Election Summary be received;
2. AND THAT the anticipated shortfall of expenditures related to the 2022 Municipal Election be funded from the Contingency Reserve Fund.

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Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The 2022 Municipal Election was a successful event, particularly as it was the first time that internet voting was made available to Haldimand County voters. In light of the successful implementation, it is recommended that internet voting be used again in future elections and that other aspects of election administration be adjusted to account for online voter participation. As the 2022 election was planned without being able to predict online uptake, expenses were slightly higher due to the redundancy of internet voting costs and status quo in-person voting arrangements. The shortfall from the Elections Reserve Fund for 2022 election expenses is recommended to be funded from the Contingency Reserve Fund. In addition, a new initiative will be presented as part of the 2023 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget to increase the Elections Reserve Fund annual contributions by \$15,000 to \$65,000 per year.

BACKGROUND:

Municipal elections occur every four years in Ontario and the parameters and timelines for administering the elections are outlined in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA). A number of administrative facets of the 2022 election were similar to how elections have been run over the past several years, however, the option of internet voting was provided for the first time in 2022. This report provides a general summary of the election and focuses on the effectiveness of internet voting and the potential budgetary impact for future elections.

ANALYSIS:

With approval to move forward with internet voting for the first time during the 2022 election, staff planned in-person voting to occur status quo, in addition to providing internet voting as an alternative voting method. As it was difficult to predict what the uptake would be on internet voting, planning proceeded with some redundancy with election arrangements and related expenses. Once there was at least one election experience in place with online as well as in-person voting, changes could be considered in terms of reducing expenses related to in-person voting.

Voter Turnout

There are a number of factors that can influence voter turnout for municipal elections: competitive races and an interest in change from the status quo; name recognition and awareness of municipal issues; voter fatigue if multiple other government elections have recently taken place, and ease and accessibility of the voting process. Based on previously conducted studies, internet voting does not necessarily contribute to an increase in voter turnout as quite often it is just a transfer of voters who prefer the online method rather than attending in person.

Anecdotal evidence from the 2022 election suggests that some voters who would not have taken the time to attend a voting location in person, did utilize internet voting, so it seems that the additional voting method may have contributed somewhat to voter turnout. In general, most municipalities reported moderate to significant decline in voter turnout last year. While Haldimand County's turnout was up only slightly in 2022, comparatively speaking, it was a successful turnout. The table below shows voter turnout based on figures from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

General Voter Turnout – 2022 Municipal Election

	2018	2022	Change
Province of Ontario	38.29%	36.30%	-5.20%
Haldimand County	36.05%	36.50%	+1.25%
Brant County	35.90%	26.54%	-26.07%
City of Brantford	36.74%	27.01%	-26.48%
City of Hamilton	38.12%	35.38%	-7.19%
Norfolk County	41.05%	36.33%	-11.50%

Advance Voter Turnout

In order to ensure a successful pilot, internet voting was only made available during the advance period so as to not to add new complications on Voting Day, which can be a very hectic day. Internet voting was made available at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, October 7th and closed at 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, October 23rd, providing 17 days for voters to vote online. This allowed for voters who were sure of their choices to vote early, and also allowed others to attend all-candidate sessions and study election material, and vote online right up until the day before Voting Day. On average, approximately 300 voters used internet voting each day, except for the last day when 1200 voters voted online. Ultimately, online votes accounted for just over 40% of total votes cast.

Advance Voter Turnout – 2022 Municipal Election

Year	Advance votes cast in person	Advance votes cast online	Total	Total advance votes as a percentage of eligible voters	Total advance votes as a percentage of total votes cast
2006	1936		1936	5.01%	12.03%
2010	1677		1677	4.71%	10.78%
2014	1542		1542	4.2%	11.65%
2018	1868		1868	5.0%	14.23%
2022	1394	6074	7468	18.24%	50.07%*

*Online votes accounted for 40.72% of the total votes cast in 2022

While there were fewer in-person advance voters, it was still an option that was utilized, and for future advance votes, it is recommended that fewer staff are necessary.

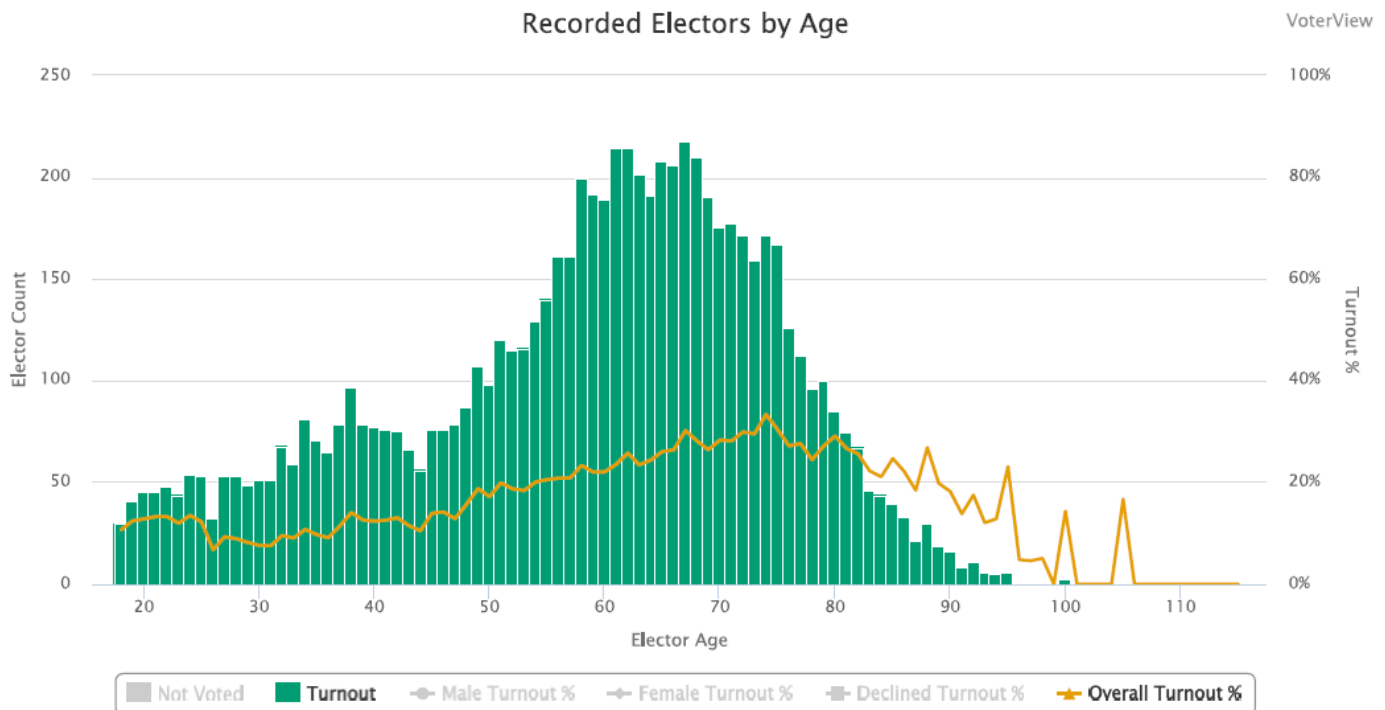
Internet Voters

It was interesting to note the average age of voters who voted online. The chart below shows recorded electors by age, and as over 81% of advance voters used internet voting, one can infer that the majority of voters who voted online were between 50 and 80 years of age. Again, this supports the fact that internet voting may have simply transferred the method of voting, however, it is possible that some voters may have opted for internet voting rather than in-person voting, due to accessibility factors which may have prevented them from previously attending a voting location.

Also, the use of proxies was down significantly from 2018, with 3 certified proxies rather than 43. Proxies were only utilized in extenuating circumstances where internet voting was not feasible.

Based on the comments from online voters, there were a few issues encountered with the process. In some cases, the birthdates that were required for input, were incorrect in the MPAC database, so further follow-up with staff was necessary to correct the situation. Some individuals were unfamiliar with text verification (Captcha) and called to ask about that function. Some voters were unsure about submitting their vote while having undervoted for a certain office i.e. voted for Councillor but not for Mayor, or, voted for only one school board trustee where two votes were allowed. Additional wording is recommended for future internet voting in order to provide further clarity on some of these situations.

Recorded Electors by Age After Close of Advance Voting prior to Voting Day



Voting Locations

If both internet and in-person voting continue in future elections, it is recommended that Voting Day locations be reduced. It is likely that more voters will take advantage of internet voting in future, and with less than 60% of voters attending in person on Voting Day, it does not make sense to operate as many locations as was done prior to offering internet voting as an option. While there will always be a desire to ensure that voting locations are distributed geographically throughout the municipality, typically two locations have been operated in each of Caledonia and Dunnville, and those may be reduced to one location in each. On Voting Day, Gateway Church had significantly fewer voters than Caledonia Lions Community Centre, and Grandview Lodge had significantly fewer voters than Dunnville Lifespan Centre (see table below), so limiting each centre to one location on Voting Day should not cause significant impact to voters.

Vote Anywhere

As has been done since 2014, Vote Anywhere continued to be provided for in-person voting, at advance polls as well as on Voting Day. This is a convenience and provides for additional access to voters who may benefit from choosing their voting location rather than being assigned one specific location to vote. In order to ensure that all voters have the opportunity to vote at any location, additional ballots need to be ordered, and the number distributed to each location is calculated based on past attendance from voters in specific areas of the County. With fewer in-person voters, the number of ballots ordered can be reduced in future if Vote Anywhere continues to be utilized in addition to internet voting. The table below shows how voters from various wards attended voting locations throughout the County.

Ward Specific Voters at Each Location – 2022 Municipal Election

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Total Votes Cast
Caledonia Lions	11	10	1217	170	0	0	1408
Cayuga Arena	18	555	9	370	7	5	964
Dunnville Lifespan	0	119	0	12	842	787	1760
Gateway	3	2	275	145	3	2	430
Grandview Lodge	2	12	1	4	58	270	347
Hagersville	147	15	2	729	0	0	893
Jarvis	720	2	2	2	2	3	731
Selkirk	405	414	0	14	1	0	834
Subtotal	1306	1129	1506	1446	913	1067	7367
Advance In-Person + Roving	179	246	315	308	148	279	1475
Online	720	887	1737	1163	705	862	6074
Total	2205	2262	3558	2917	1766	2208	14916

Election Staffing

The increased use of technology has changed the face of election work from the fairly manual process that it was 15 to 20 years ago. A recruitment initiative was undertaken as a pilot project in 2022 to encourage County staff to assist as election workers and volunteer as working teams during in-person voting. The initiative was successful as there were almost three times as many staff sign up to help out in 2022 as did in 2018 and this was extremely helpful in making election administration more efficient. The benefits in having County staff work is that they are familiar with the regular use of laptops and multiple types of software, and they are accustomed to working with the public, providing customer service and explaining processes and procedures. It is recommended that similar recruitment initiatives be utilized in future elections. Many municipalities are moving towards maximizing internal staffing as much as possible to efficiently manage the election.

In previous elections, the temporary Election Assistant position was filled for 6 to 8 months. Due to restructuring of the Clerks Division in 2021, the Election Assistant position was filled for 11 months in 2022 as additional support was required, and it is recommended that a similar approach be taken for future elections.

Accessibility

According to the MEA, Clerks responsible for conducting elections shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. For the 2022 election, an Accessibility Plan was established, and as required by the MEA, a report on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers was also prepared after the election. Both the plan and the report are available on the [Election webpage](#).

Internet voting was a significant factor in providing increased accessibility for voters. As noted above, fewer proxies were issued, thus presuming that internet voting addressed most situations where proxies would have been required in the past. Also, as noted above, it is felt that the increased accessibility through internet voting may have contributed to a better voter turnout than in some other municipalities.

Over the years, staff have been able to take advantage of using newer facilities as they have become available in order to ensure accessibility for in-person voting. The Hagersville Arena is likely the least accessible voting location that was used this past election, however, it is hoped that the new

Hagersville Library + Active Living Centre will be available for use in the next regular election in order to ensure better accessibility for voters.

Voters' List

As with previous elections, the quality of the Voters' List was problematic in 2022. Many municipalities experienced the same issues that Haldimand County experienced in this regard. The MEA was amended in 2021 and going forward, Elections Ontario, rather than MPAC, will be providing municipalities with the Preliminary List of Electors. The presumption is that by managing both the provincial and municipal voters lists, there should be increased accuracy in the quality of the list. Staff are not yet aware of processes or details that will relate to this new aspect of administering municipal elections, and will provide updates when they become available.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Elections are administered as efficiently as possible, however, due to the unpredictable nature of voter turnout, candidate races, potential emergency or pandemic situations, etc., planning for elections must often take multiple scenarios into account in the preparation stage and costs will reflect those factors.

Since 2011, annual contributions of \$50,000 have been made to the Elections Reserve Fund in order to cover an anticipated cost of each election of approximately \$200,000. The cost for the 2014 election was approximately \$182,000 and the 2018 election was \$181,000. Election costs include associated costs for the Municipal Election Compliance Audit Committee (MECAC) which at the very least include minimal costs for a training session and potential costs for any meetings that are required to be held to consider reports or applications regarding possible contraventions of the MEA. If an audit is required, those costs would also be funded from the Elections Reserve Fund.

The majority of 2022 municipal election expenses have been processed and a general overview is provided in the table below. For clarity, contracted services include multiple items such as tabulator rental, the online voting system, software licensing and integration, ballot printing, ballot boxes, voter list management and associated modules (online voter registration software, candidate access portal, etc.). Expenses related to MECAC will not be incurred until spring 2023 at the earliest. It is also important to note that numerous costs were higher than anticipated, most likely due to inflation as is being experienced in many sectors both locally and globally.

The 2022 costs specifically attributable to internet voting were the online voting system itself and increased postage. The online voting system cost was \$53,000 and is based on number of eligible electors. Postage fees were more than double what was spent in 2018 (\$17,000). This is partly because for previous elections voter notification letters were sent to a single household in 1 envelope whereas internet voting required that each voter receive a separate, sealed voter notification letter.

2022 Municipal Election Expenditures

Salaries & Benefits	\$54,278.00
Operating Supplies	\$2,205.00
Meeting Expenses	\$158.00
Travel Expenses	\$843.00
Inaugural Expenses	\$2,096.00
Postage	\$38,604.00
Advertising	\$3,000.00
Contracted Services	\$144,245.00
Election Worker Honoraria	\$4,010.00
Facility Rentals	\$1,100.00
Compliance Audit Committee	\$0.00
	\$250,539.00

As noted above, if the 2026 election involves in-person as well as internet voting, staff recommend a reduction in the number of ballots ordered, reduced facilities on Voting Day, some reduced numbers of workers at advance polls, and other efficiencies. With such changes it is anticipated that the budget for the next election could be reduced by approximately \$13,000 over what was spent in 2022. Given the likelihood of an increasing number of electors due to population growth as well as increasing costs due to inflation, it is recommended that the budget not be reduced at this time.

While the actual costs for the 2022 election are greater than \$200,000, there was a balance in the Elections Reserve Fund of \$40,837, over and above the annual contributions for the 2022 election, so the majority of current expenditures are covered within the reserve fund balance. The shortfall of approximately \$10,000 should be funded from the Contingency Reserve Fund. When additional costs are incurred later in 2023 related to compliance audit matters, they will also be funded from the Contingency Reserve Fund.

With costs to-date of just over \$250,000 and some costs related to MECAC yet to be expended, it is recommended that annual contributions to the Elections Reserve Fund be increased from \$50,000 to \$65,000 to cover an estimated cost of \$260,000 for the 2026 election. A new initiative in the 2023 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget will reflect this recommendation. It is also recommended that the annual reserve contribution be reviewed after each regular election so that if in future, election administration changes significantly (i.e. internet voting only) the necessary changes can be accounted for in annual reserve fund contributions.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: Yes

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

1. [Haldimand County Election Webpage.](#)

ATTACHMENTS:

None.