



TOWNSHIP OF NORTH HURON

REPORT

Item No.

REPORT TO: Reeve Vincent and Members of Council
PREPARED BY: Richard AI, Manager of Employee and Business Services/Deputy Clerk
DATE: 17/10/2016
SUBJECT: Election 2018 – Alternative Voting Methods
ATTACHMENTS: N/A

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Council of the Township of North Huron hereby receive the Manager of Employee and Business Services/Deputy Clerk's report regarding Alternative Voting Methods for the 2018 Election for information purposes;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize the use of internet and telephone based voting for the 2018 Election;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff to participate in a County-wide elections working group to establish policies and procedures, and investigate potential group pricing for internet and telephone based voting in conjunction with staff representatives from other Huron County municipalities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Statistics indicate that internet and telephone based voting is a rapidly growing alternative voting method for Municipal and School Board Elections. In 2014, the Township of North Huron opted to utilize the vote by mail alternative voting method with great success, garnering a 54.35% voter turnout. In 2018, utilizing internet and telephone based voting could continue the trend of engaging North Huron electorate while increasing efficiency of the election process.

DISCUSSION

Moving from paper ballots to the vote by mail alternative voting method in 2014 was a significant step for the Township of North Huron. Prior to the 2014 Election, Council was presented with options to maintain the historical paper ballot voting method, switch to the vote by mail alternative voting method or opt to utilize internet and telephone voting. Internet and telephone voting was still somewhat new at that time but much has changed since then.

Increasing utilization

The use of internet and telephone voting by municipalities has increased drastically from 44 municipalities using the method in 2010 to 97 municipalities in 2014. In 2014 it was reported that over 1.8 million voters cast their votes using an internet or telephone based method, this upward trend is expected to continue in 2018 as adoption increases. It is important to note that although a significant number of voters utilized internet and telephone voting in 2014, reliability was a non-issue with no reported delays, system failures or security issues.

Security and Integrity

The security and integrity of the voting process is a concern shared by Council, staff and the electorate. The Clerk is responsible for the conduct of the election and ultimately must ensure that privacy and security is maintained throughout the process. Paper ballots cast at a poll as well as vote by mail ballots are both manual processes that require significant human intervention and in turn increase the potential for human error. Internet and telephone voting reduces the amount of human intervention required so in essence one could consider the security and integrity of the voting process to be increased when using this method. In addition, the following points detail some of the technology in use by various providers to ensure the security and reliability of their internet voting systems

- Voters who bypass authentication or have already voted are denied access to the ballot
- One-vote-per-voter is guaranteed even if a voter submits multiple votes from different devices simultaneously
- Ballots are rigorously checked for validity before being accepted
- Communications between the voter's computer and the voting website is encrypted
- Voting website servers undergo daily PCI compliance testing
- Voting website systems are tested by security firm penetration testing audits
- Various layers of security are in place to eliminate any potential denial of service (DoS) attacks

Spoiled ballots

The 2014 Post-Election Report to Council noted that 20 spoiled ballots were received in 2014. Ballots are considered spoiled for a number of reasons such as an elector forgetting to sign the declaration form. Due to the nature of the system verifications and checks in place, internet and telephone voting eliminates the potential for spoiled ballots as voters are unable to submit a vote that is not completed correctly.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an important topic that must be incorporated in all areas of municipal operations including elections. When considering the historical paper ballot voting method selected voting locations may require special considerations to address any potential accessibility concerns. Likewise, the vote by mail voting method can present challenges to accessibility, for example vote by mail ballots are not typically sent including braille and so an individual with vision loss may require assistance from a proxy such as family, friends or authorized municipal staff to help them complete their ballot. Internet and telephone based voting provides resolutions to these challenges by offering accessible ballots which have passed WCAG Level 2 requirements and are fully supported by screen readers for those with vision loss. Additionally, individuals with reduced mobility are able to cast their vote from anywhere, eliminating the need for them to attend a polling location.

Device support and optimization

Personal computers are no longer the only method to access the internet and in fact usage of mobile devices surpassed that of desktop devices in 2014. In today's world it is expected that access to information and services will be available and optimized for smartphones, tablets and other devices with varying input mechanisms and screen sizes. Internet voting providers recognize this requirement and have optimized their voting websites to address this growing segment. By

supporting a vast range of devices, the electorate have options. An individual may choose to cast their vote by using their desktop computer in the comfort of their home or by their iPhone while enjoying a cup of coffee at a local establishment.

Cost

In 2014 the cost to operate a vote by mail election was \$18,302.39. It is expected that a vote by mail election with a similar electorate will cost more to operate in 2018 due largely in part to increased postage costs. After discussions with staff from Huron County municipalities who conducted an internet and telephone based election in 2014, it is unlikely that there will be a cost savings to utilizing internet and telephone voting versus vote by mail. Staff have received some rough preliminary pricing which would support this statement as well. That being said, the staff time requirement to operate a vote by mail election was significant and not accounted for in the \$18,302.39 cost previously mentioned. Staff representing the Huron County municipalities who utilized internet and telephone voting in 2014 have indicated that the staff time requirement is substantially less than other voting methods which would equate to cost savings through efficiency. Representatives from each Huron County municipality have met to begin discussions on the 2018 Election. If Council authorizes staff to proceed with the internet and telephone alternative voting method staff could continue to work with representatives from the other Huron County municipalities to establish procedures, consider a shared Compliance Audit Committee and endeavour for the most economical price available by investigating group purchasing options for internet and telephone election services.

Voter turnout

The Township of North Huron achieved an impressive 54.35% voter turnout in 2014. There are many factors that play a part in voter turnout for example a race for position such as Head of Council or public interest in current issues/initiatives. Staff from other Huron County municipalities who utilized internet and telephone voting in 2014 indicated that although they did not see an increase in voter turnout, some noted that did not have a race for Head of Council and attributed some of the voter turnout to that reason. Other municipalities outside of Huron County have indicated that voter turnout increased slightly by switching to internet and telephone voting so it is difficult to gauge whether the voting method has a significant effect on the voter turnout or if public interest at election time is the primary factor. In either instance internet and telephone voting, while particularly appealing to younger voters, has a proven track record in terms of ease of use for eligible voters of all ages.

Choice and convenience

Choice refers to being able to vote anytime or anywhere that is convenient, for example the parents of young children do not need to hire a babysitter to allow them to vote, they can do so in the evening when they are able. Choice also refers to devices, as previously mentioned an individual can cast their vote on any one of a number of supported devices from anywhere at any time during the voting period.

Benefits to candidates

Conducting an internet and telephone based election offers benefits to candidates which warrant discussion. Although each internet and telephone voting platform differs slightly, many offer candidates with the ability to log into the system using a special candidate account. When logged

into the candidate account, the individual has the ability to gather real time voter turnout statistics which can allow adjustments in a candidate's campaign efforts.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The total cost to operate a vote by mail election in 2014 (not including staff time) was calculated to be \$18,302.39 and it is estimated that number will increase for the 2018 election due to increased postage costs. Although the cost to operate an internet and telephone based election in North Huron has not been fully determined, based on conversations with other municipal staff and through a preliminary pricing estimate, the cost appears to be comparable to that associated with operating a vote by mail election.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Some Huron County municipalities used internet and telephone voting for the 2014 Election and it is possible that more may consider the option for the 2018 Election. Should Council decide to utilize internet and telephone voting for the 2018 Election in North Huron, a Huron County Elections Working Group has been formed to share knowledge, policies and procedures as well as investigate group buying options for election services. This group will be a tremendous resource and will continue to promote the ideal of sharing services while increasing consistency among Huron County municipalities.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

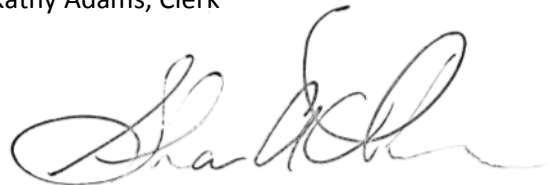
Goal #2 – Our residents are engaged and well informed

Goal #4 – Our administration is fiscally responsible and strives for operational excellence



Richard Al, Manager of Employee and
Business Services/Deputy Clerk

Kathy Adams, Clerk



Sharon Chambers, CAO