



Staff Report CL2022-031

Title of Report: CL2022-031 – Post Election and Accessibility Report
Department: Clerks
Branch: Legislative and Council Services
Council Date: December 21, 2022

Recommendation:

Be it resolved that Council receive Staff Report CL2022-031 for information.

Background:

The conduct of municipal elections is governed by the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (The Act), supplemented by such policies and procedures as required by The Act, or as deemed necessary by the Clerk of the municipality, who is legislatively responsible for the conduct of the election.

The Act further requires that the Clerk of each municipality provide a report to Council, detailing the election and any identified accessibility barriers in accordance with Section 12 (3) of The Act.

Staff Comments:

Amendments to the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, via Bill 218: Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, 2020, introduced new timelines associated with elections procedures, including:

Procedure	Prior to Bill 218	After Bill 218
Ranked Ballot Voting: Ranked ballots allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference – first choice, second choice, third choice, etc. – instead of just voting for one candidate.	Permitted through O.Reg 310/16.	Not permitted. Bill 218 removed the option for ranked ballot elections by revoking O.Reg 310/16 and repealing Sections 41.1 and 41.2 of the Act.
Nomination Day	Fourth Friday in July	Third Friday in August
Alternative Voting Methods: Changes the timeline for passing a by-law authorizing the use of	By-laws authorizing the use of vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods to be	By-laws authorizing the use of vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods to be

voting and vote-counting equipment or alternative voting methods.	passed on or before May 1 in the year <u>before</u> a regular election.	passed on or before May 1 in the year of the election.
Creation of procedures and forms for alternative voting methods: Changes to the timeline for Clerks to establish procedures and forms for voting and vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods.	December 31 in the year before the year of the election.	Before June 1 in the year of the election.

The amendments reverted elections timelines to those observed prior to the 2018 cycle and overall, extended the nominations period, shortened the campaigning period and decreased administrative preparation timelines. With the amended timelines in mind, the following key dates were applied to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election:

May 2, 2022	Nominations opened – Candidates and Third Party Advertisers were able to file their nomination/registration papers.
August 19, 2022	Nominations closed – last day for Candidates to file nomination papers
August 22, 2022	Received Preliminary List of Electors from MPAC / Commencement of data cleansing by the Clerks Dept
September 1, 2022	Beginning of Voters' List revision period (to close of voting)
October 14, 2022	Internet and Telephone Voting Opened
October 24, 2022	Election Day – voting closed at 8:00 pm
October 25, 2022	Official Declaration of Results
November 21, 2022	Council Inauguration
January 3, 2023	End of Campaign Period
March 31, 2023,	Deadline for Candidates to file Financial Statements

Upon the closing of Nominations, 2 candidates were certified for the role of Mayor, 2 candidates were certified for the role of Deputy Mayor and 9 candidates were certified for the role of Councillor.

Internet/Telephone Voting:

The township opted to use internet and telephone voting only for the 2022 election, as was the method of voting for the 2018 election. Positive feedback was received in 2018 following the election that supported staff's recommendation to continue with internet and telephone voting in 2022.

This voting method best supports greater convenience by providing the most flexibility and opportunity for participation. Internet and telephone voting provides improved accessible voting options, facilitation of participation by non-resident electors and improved cost effectiveness.

Voting in the Township of Southgate opened on October 14, 2022, at 10:00 am and ran continuously through to 8:00 pm on October 24, 2022.

To assist with voters casing their ballot, staff hosted Help Centres throughout the Voting Period at the Municipal Office in Hopeville, the Frank Macintyre Building in Dundalk and the Council Chambers in Holstein as follows:

Municipal Administration Office 185667 Grey County Road 9, Dundalk Friday, October 14th to Monday, October 24, 2022, During Regular Office Hours

Dundalk Frank Macintyre Building 220 Owen Sound Street, Dundalk Saturday October 22, 2022 – 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Southgate Council Chambers – Holstein 123273 Southgate Road 12, Holstein Saturday, October 15 – 10:00 am to 2:00 pm Monday, October 24 – 10:00 am to close of voting at 8:00 pm

There was also an internet terminal available at the Southgate Public Library in Dundalk during their regular hours of operation for anyone just needing an internet connection to cast their ballot.

Voter Turnout/Statistics

At the close of voting, there were 6,568 authorized voters for the Township of Southgate. Of the authorized voters, a total of 1,786 votes were cast, resulting in a total voter turnout rate of 27.19%, slightly less than the 31.3% turnout in 2018. While the turnout was less than that of the previous election cycle, that seemed to be the trend throughout the province and Grey County in 2022.

The received 1,786 votes were cast in the following method:

Internet	1469
Telephone	181
Help Centre(s)	136

As demonstrated above, the majority of votes were cast by internet voting, in considering the voting patterns observed through the 2018 and 2022 cycle, it will

likely be staff's future recommendation to continue with online and telephone voting in 2026 or possibly explore dropping the use of the telephone voting method. Most of the inquiries received during the voting period, unrelated to the voters' list were surrounded around confusion with the telephone voting system. Staff also note that the telephone system is much more cumbersome to use compared to the online option with both providers we have worked with in 2022 and 2018.

Overall, feedback received by staff regarding the 2022 Municipal and School Board election was positive, with the majority of voters commenting on the simplicity of the online voting system. The Township's election provider, Scytl Voting Systems, was responsive, assistive, and developed a simple, easy to use platform for Township constituents. Scytl has administered hundreds of elections throughout North America and is the dominant election services provider within Ontario.

There were no discrepancies identified between the unofficial and official results declared on October 25, 2022. There were no requests received for a re-count.

Financial Implications:

The projected total cost of the 2022 Municipal Election is \$35,851.11.

Breakdown:

Contracted Services (DataFix & Scytl): \$31,174.79

Advertising: \$2,226.07

Materials and Supplies: \$450.25

General Election Accessibility

Section 12.1 (1) of The Act places responsibility on the Clerk to have regard to the needs of the electors and candidates with disabilities. Accessible Customer Service Standards must be followed when conducting municipal elections. Section 12.1 (2) of The Act requires that the Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election. Section 12.1 (3) of The Act requires that within ninety (90) days of voting day the Clerk who is responsible for conducting the election shall prepare a report regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public. Section 45 (2) states that in establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

The Clerk prepared and made public an [Election Accessibility Plan](#) to ensure candidates and electors with disabilities had full and equal access to all election information and services, including Help Centres.

The 2022 Election was conducted over an eleven-day voting period as a vote-anywhere, vote-anytime, paperless election. Voters were not required to attend a

specific voting location based on their eligibility to vote, and instead could vote at any of the provided voting help centres during hours of operation or remotely by telephone or online 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Such provisions supported increased accessibility, convenience, and sustainability throughout the voting process.

All information pertaining to the Municipal Election including method of voting, how to vote, help centre information, candidate information, etc. was all included on the Township of Southgate Election website www.southgatevotes.ca. If anyone required the information to be available in an alternate format, staff were prepared to assist candidates and electors in anyway necessary to ensure they received the information.

Help Centre locations were identified in the early stages of election planning as being the most accessible locations that the Township has to offer. When preparing each day to open the help centres, staff made sure to set up the centre with adequate space between voting stations, doors remained unobstructed, all technology cords were taped down to prevent tripping hazards and stylus pens were provided to assist with touch screen tablets.

Entrance routes to all help centres were unobstructed and provided appropriate width for mobility device entry. All help centre locations were equipped with an automated power door opener as well as designated accessible parking spaces.

Internet/Telephone Voting Accessibility

Eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online using a number of personal devices, including but not limited to tablets, computers, smart phones and gaming systems, alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software required. Such methods supported independent, private and convenient voting anytime throughout the voting period and eliminated the need to visit a voting place location in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those with mobility impairments.

Scytl Voting Systems is compliant with WCAG 2.0 level AA standards as required by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005* and supported the use of screen-magnifiers and screen-readers for voters with disabilities.

Additionally, Scytl's online voting technology successfully integrates with computer aid devices for disabled or physically impaired voters such as sip & puff devices and head-controlled mouse.

Persons with disabilities and those who did not wish to or have access to the internet voting options, were able to access voting over the telephone. Scytl Voting Systems created a telephone voting service that was offered on all types of touchtone phones and wireless devices. The service used typical English language

and menu options were presented in an organized and easy-to-follow order, advising voters when to select options and provide confirmation of one's selections.

For those voters without means to access telephone or online voting opportunities, or those who sought assistance from election officials, help centres were provided during the voting period which were opened to provide access to tablets, internet connectivity and election staff. Each location was equipped with two or more 10.1" touch screen iPad kiosks which provided screen imaging and required lesser keyboard dexterity to complete an online ballot.

Voters were permitted to be accompanied by service animals at all locations pursuant to provincial legislation and the Township of Southgate Corporate Customer Service Standards. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could be administered the "Friend of the Voter Oath" by an election official in order to grant them authority to accompany and assist a voter in casting their ballot. Election Officials were also authorized to provide assistance to any voter upon request, with casting their ballot.

Overall, election officials strived to conduct the municipal election in a manner that ensured candidates and electors with disabilities had full and equal access to all election information and services. Staff recommend that all Township facilities continue to be monitored and evaluated for accessibility to ensure continued compliance with these requirements in the future.

Communications & Community Action Plan Impact:

This report has been written and presented to Council to communicate accurate information to the public.

Concluding Comments:

This report is provided to Council as a follow up to the 2022 Municipal Election as well as reporting out on Accessibility related to the 2022 Municipal Election and to satisfy Section 12 (3) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dept. Head: **Original Signed By**
Lindsey Green, Clerk

CAO Approval: **Original Signed By**
Dave Milliner, CAO

Attachments: None