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Town of Aurora

## Committee of the Whole Report

No. CS25-006

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**Subject:** 2026 Municipal Election – Methods of Voting

**Prepared by:** Michael de Rond, Town Clerk

**Department:** Corporate Services

**Date:** April 8, 2025

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### Recommendation

1. That Report No. CS25-006 be received; and
2. That the hybrid voting method, consisting of internet voting and traditional paper ballot counted by optical scan voting tabulators, be used for the 2026 municipal election; and,
3. That a bylaw to approve alternative forms of voting be brought forward for enactment

### Executive Summary

This report provides preliminary information regarding the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election while also recommending that the hybrid model of internet voting in conjunction with a traditional paper ballot counted by vote tabulator be the chosen voting methods.

- The principles of the Municipal Elections Act guide the administration of the election as well as the recommendations provided to Council
- Voting using a paper ballot, counted by a vote tabulator, remains a popular method of voting for electors in Aurora
- The Digital Governance Standards Institute (DGSi) has created standards for internet voting which will be in place for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election

- Should internet voting be adopted, staff are proposing a similar model as 2018 and 2022 with internet voting deployed in the advanced period and only a paper ballot available on election day
- Staff expect the election to cost between \$350,000 - \$400,000

## Background

The next Ontario Municipal and School Board Election will be held on Monday, October 26, 2026. The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the “MEA”) outlines the responsibilities of Council in preparing for an election, one of which is to approve the use of alternative voting methods by bylaw. Council is required to authorize, should they so desire, the use of alternative voting methods, such as by internet, mail or telephone, that do not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote. Although the MEA states that such a bylaw must be passed by May 1 in the year of a regular election, staff require significantly more lead time than provided by the MEA to ensure procurement of necessary systems and fulsome planning.

## Analysis

**The principles of the Municipal Elections Act guide the administration of the election as well as the recommendations provided to Council**

It is the role of the Clerk to ensure that policies and procedures that are necessary to conduct an election in a manner that reflects the principles of the MEA and its Regulations are in place. These principles are generally recognized as being that:

- a) the secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount
- b) the election shall be fair and non-biased
- c) the election shall be accessible to the voters
- d) the integrity of the voting process shall be maintained throughout the election
- e) there is to be certainty that the results of the election reflect the votes cast
- f) voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently
- g) the proper majority vote governs by ensuring that valid votes are counted
- h) invalid votes are rejected so far as reasonably possible

The recommendations and information provided within this report are consistent with the principles of the MEA.

**Voting using a paper ballot, counted by a vote tabulator, remains a popular method of voting for electors in Aurora**

During the 2018 election, 33.8 per cent of the total votes were cast using internet voting and all others using a traditional paper ballot counted by tabulator. The percentage of votes cast using internet voting in 2022 increased to 39.4 per cent.

As internet voting becomes more prevalent and trusted in Ontario municipal elections, it is expected that the percentage of votes cast using internet voting would rise. However, the percentage has not risen to a point where staff feel comfortable recommending an election comprised of only internet voting.

**The Digital Governance Standards Institute (DGSi) has created standards for internet voting which will be in place for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election**

Collaborating with experts, DGSi published [these standards in December 2024](#). The standards cover technical design, security, voter identity, verification, access, secrecy, ballot design, network capacity, election management, accessibility, roles of candidates, and transparency.

In previous municipal and school board elections, municipalities were left to create their own vendor standards for the implementation of internet voting. A collaborative approach was used, with municipalities working together to ensure similar, defensible standards were in place for municipalities using internet voting. The creation of the new standards by DGSi codify much of what has already been in place and ensures standardization across the many vendors now offering the service.

These new standards, accompanied with safety and security measures the Town puts in place through its policy and procedure documents, ensure that internet voting is a safe, secure way to cast a vote in 2026.

**Should internet voting be adopted, staff are proposing a similar model as 2018 and 2022 with internet voting deployed in the advanced period and only a paper ballot available on election day**

During the previous two elections, staff have successfully implemented the model of internet voting available for approximately ten days prior to election day (including paper ballot option on select nights at the Seniors' Centre) and only a paper ballot available at an elector's local polling station on election day.

For internet and paper ballot voting to be available simultaneously, a 'live' voters list must be used to prevent someone from voting multiple times (ex, in their car and then

walking into a polling station and voting again). A live voters list is connected to the internet in real time ensuring that as soon as an elector receives a ballot, whether online or at a polling centre, they are crossed off the list and counted as having voted. During the advanced voting period, staff are able to manage the live voters list without issue as the only voting location open is the Seniors Centre, which includes Town internet services.

Expanding internet voting to election day comes with significant logistical and security concerns. Staff would not recommend using internet voting on election day at this time. Historically, the Town has operated approximately 20 voting locations on election day, many of which are school gyms where internet services are not readily available. Assuming staff could overcome the logical challenge of outfitting these facilities with secure internet services, further concerns regarding the overall security of the election arise with these additional connections to the internet. Internet outages at any location would completely halt voting until restored and significant outages could result in the extension of voting past 8:00 p.m. at locations where problems are experienced.

#### **Staff expect the election to cost between \$350,000 - \$400,000**

The total cost of the 2022 election was \$310,000. Staff expect the 2026 election costs to rise as there is less certainty regarding the vendors that will be in place for this coming election.

During the previous two elections, the Town has used Dominion Voting Services (DVS) for both internet and tabulator voting. DVS no longer offers internet voting, and the Town is currently engaged with other York and Durham Region municipalities to jointly procure an internet voting vendor. Participating in this joint initiative should help the Town procure an experienced vendor in the most cost-effective way possible. After the procurement is complete, staff will ensure a tabulator vendor, able to integrate with the internet voting system, is acquired.

#### **Advisory Committee Review**

None

#### **Legal Considerations**

Subsection 42(1) of the MEA requires Council to pass a bylaw to authorize the use of an alternative voting method other than attending at a voting place and the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical

scanning vote tabulators. The by-law must be passed on or before May 1 of the year of a regular election in order for it to apply to the election.

## **Financial Implications**

Staff estimate that the 2026 election will cost between \$350,000 to \$400,000. There are presently sufficient funds within the Town's election reserve to fund this need which has a current balance of \$493,800.

## **Communications Considerations**

Communications will support the promotion of the municipal election through a comprehensive outreach strategy, including website updates, social media campaigns, e-newsletters, and traditional media releases. Efforts will focus on increasing voter awareness, highlighting key dates and voting options, and ensuring accessible and engaging information is available to the community.

## **Climate Change Considerations**

The use of a paper ballot, when safe and secure electronic options are available, could be seen as harmful to the environment. In 2022, 6,820 votes were cast using a paper ballot. To be prepared for an election using paper ballots, staff order approximately 25,000 – 30,000 ballots meaning the vast majority are recycled after the election has concluded.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

The adoption of a hybrid method of voting supports the Town of Aurora being an innovative community. A hallmark of innovation is developing new techniques for traditional processes, and the implementation of internet voting fits this description.

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

1. Council could remove the paper ballot option leaving an internet voting only election.
2. Council could direct that an alternative voting methods bylaw not be adopted, which would mean the 2026 voting method would be traditional paper ballot that is hand counted.

## **Conclusions**

This report suggests that the Town of Aurora will be best served continuing with the recent practice of adopting hybrid voting, consisting of internet voting and a traditional paper ballot counted by vote tabulator, for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections.

## **Attachments**

None

## **Previous Reports**

None

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on March 20, 2025

## **Approvals**

Approved by Patricia De Sario, Director, Corporate Services/Town Solicitor

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer