



## REPORT

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**TO:** Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

**FROM:** Valerie Petryniak, Town Clerk & Director of Legislative Services

**DATE:** January 14, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** ADMIN-2025-002

**SUBJECT:** Alternative Voting Methods for the 2026 Municipal Election

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### RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2025-002 dated January 14, 2025 regarding Alternative Voting Methods for the 2026 Municipal Election be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the Manager of Purchasing be authorized to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Voting and Vote Counting equipment and Alternative Voting Methods;

AND FURTHER THAT upon successful award of the RFP the Manager of Purchasing be authorized to execute the necessary agreements for Voting and Vote Counting equipment and Alternative Voting Methods;

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute the necessary By-law which authorizes the use of online voting for the advanced polling period and the use of vote tabulators on voting day in the 2026 Municipal Election.

### KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Online voting was introduced in 2022 for the advanced voting period allowing voters to cast their ballots from any electronic device with internet capabilities.
- Staff are recommending the use of online voting for the advanced voting period and vote tabulators for Election Day at the 2026 Municipal Election.
- Dominion Voting Systems has been our equipment provider since 2010, however will not be offering online voting in 2026.

## **BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:**

The Municipal Elections Act, S.O. 1996 as amended, outlines the requirements for a by-law to be passed by Council authorizing the use of voting and vote counting equipment and for alternative voting methods for municipal elections. Voting and Vote Counting equipment can be voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators. Alternative voting methods are methods of voting that do not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote, such as phone, mail-in ballots or online voting.

Dominion Voting Systems' vote tabulators have been utilized by the Town of Halton Hills since 2010 for vote counting at our municipal elections. Vote tabulators are devices which scan and count all ballots at voting locations after a voter has filled in the paper ballot behind a privacy screen. Some of the benefits to using vote tabulators include:

- Fast and accurate voting results on election night;
- Reduction in staff time required on voting day to count ballots;
- Use of accessible vote tabulators offering more choices to vote for those with a disability;

In 2022, staff introduced online voting for the advanced voting period as a method of alternative voting. Electors could place their votes through any electronic device with internet capabilities at any time in the 2 weeks preceding Election Day, allowing them to vote from the comfort of their own homes. The elector was mailed a voter information card which gave them a PIN and instructions on how to cast a ballot. The elector was able to verify their selections before casting their vote. Once cast, each ballot was encrypted and anonymized for additional security. On election night, staff downloaded the encrypted files into the Result Tallying reporting system and the online votes were calculated immediately.

In 2022, 28.09% of eligible voters in Halton Hills cast a ballot with 49% of those being online votes.

Both the vote tabulators and online voting were provided by Dominion Voting Systems. Dominion has advised they will not be providing online voting for the 2026 municipal election.

### 2026 Municipal Election

Plans for the 2026 municipal election are similar to the methods used in 2022. Staff are seeking authorization to run online voting during the two week advanced voting period and vote tabulators at voting locations throughout town on election day.

Offering online voting for the two week advanced voting period allows residents to vote from anywhere and at a time that is convenient for them. Throughout the advanced voting period staff will be available at kiosks located on certain days and locations throughout town to allow residents to learn more about how to vote online and will be able to cast their ballot if they wish to do so. This will be the only method of voting during the advanced period to encourage residents to vote online.

Any voter who chose not to vote online will be given the opportunity to cast their ballot on Election Day at any of the voting locations in their wards.

Vote tabulators will be used on Election Day giving any voter who chose not to vote online the ability to vote in person.

#### Request for Proposal

Should Council authorize the use of vote tabulators and online voting for the 2026 municipal election, staff will be looking for companies that provide both services. This reduces the number of systems required to run the election and provides one point of contact for all equipment used.

The evaluation of proposals will ensure the election requirements are met and are within the budget allocated to run the municipal election. If the proposals for both the vote counting equipment and online voting are not within our budget, staff will not proceed with the online voting method and will make use of vote tabulators for the advanced polling period and election day.

#### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report is administrative in nature and does not have an impact on the Town's Strategic Plan.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:**

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

#### **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:**

Public Engagement was not needed as this report is administrative in nature.

#### **INTERNAL CONSULTATION:**

The Manager of Purchasing was consulted to guide staff through the RFP process.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

This report will be funded through an existing approved budget source.

Reviewed and approved by,

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer