Presented To:	City Council
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Request for Decision

Citizen Focused Election - 2010

Recommendation

That Council accept the report from the Executive Director, Administrative Services, dated September 4, 2009 and that Council pass the by-law authorizing the use of vote tabulators for the 2010 Municipal Election and other election related by-laws as they are presented over the next few months.

Finance Implications

There are sufficient funds in the 2010 operating budget to provide for expenses related to the election.

Signed By

Report Prepared By
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City Clerk
Digitally Signed Sep 17, 09

Recommended by the Department
Caroline Hallsworth
Executive Director, Administrative Services
Digitally Signed Sep 11, 09

Recommended by the C.A.O.
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Digitally Signed Sep 17, 09

Summary

This report summarizes how polling locations, the method of vote and communications strategies will be used to hold a citizen focused election in 2010.

Background

Elections and Voter Turnout:

"A healthy democracy – one that has the active engagement of all of its citizens, both at elections and between elections – is the key to any Government's legitimacy."

Voter turnout is and remains a challenge for all elections, in many jurisdictions and most particularly for municipal elections, where voter turnout tends to be lower than for provincial and federal elections. The most recent federal election held in October 2008 had a voter turnout of 58.8% and the October 2007 Ontario provincial election set a record low for voter turnout at 52.8%

of eligible voters. According to AMCTO, the average voter turnout among their member municipalities during the 2006 Ontario municipal elections was 41.9%. In 2006, Greater Sudbury had a voter turnout within its municipal boundaries of 43.2% which was a slight increase over the 42.6% turnout in 2003.

There are numerous factors which can affect voter turnout, factors ranging from voter apathy to weather on election day. The reasons why people don't vote can generally be divided into categories, including demographics, reasons related to perceptions about the political environment and practical considerations associated with the voting process and how voting interacts with everyday life.

A 2006 survey completed in the United Kingdom found that while disinterest was a top factor in the decision not to vote, 10% of those surveyed would not vote if it was raining heavily on election day and 12% would not vote if they were tired from work. Amongst voters in the 18-34 age group, 27% would not vote if they had a social engagement which conflicted with election day. The survey summarizes that matters of convenience strongly impact on voter turnout and the report suggests that *"voters need choice when it comes to how they interact with the electoral system and they need to trust that their votes will be counted."*

A report recently released by Elections Canada in follow-up to the 2008 Federal Election includes a section on voter turnout. *"Among the public overall, the single biggest issue identified by non-voters can be grouped into everyday life situations (57%)."* Included in this grouping were 16% who were travelling, 15% who were too busy and 11% who had work or school schedules which made it difficult to vote. ' *'It would appear voting competes with other daily priorities for a substantial number of electors"*.

Ensuring that the 2010 Municipal Election is as convenient and easy for voters as possible is a factor over which the municipality has some control and which may encourage higher levels of voter turnout. Accordingly, the 2010 Municipal Election is being planned with voter convenience and voter confidence in mind and with an emphasis on tackling the very factors which deter voting. This report describes some of the plans for the 2010 Municipal Election.

Polling Locations:

The Election team has begun a review of polling locations, which includes an analysis of the number of votes cast in each location and any access challenges experienced at locations used in 2006. This review allows us to ensure that polling locations are well used and to better balance resources between polling locations with different activity levels. As part of the selection process for 2010, staff will be looking for locations which are community gathering points, places where the public may already be going to, or travelling near.

For the 2010 Election, staff are investigating using an Electronic Voters List for the first time. The Electronic Voters List is a database, accessed over a secure connection and one in which the voter's name can be "crossed off" electronically once the ballot has been issued. This means that during advanced polls, voters would have the option to either cast their ballot at their specified advanced poll location or to vote at common voting locations for all citizens located in high pedestrian traffic locations, such as a shopping malls. On election day, citizens will be required to vote at their designated poll.

As in previous years, electors will be able to request amendments to the voter's list at the City Clerk's Office as well as all of the Citizen Service Centres prior to election day and at their polling location on voting day. Proxy voting for those who are unable to attend at the polls will also be permitted again in the 2010 Municipal Election.

Following the practice now used in federal and provincial elections, identification will be required from all voters. The requirement for identification enhances voter confidence as citizens see that the identity of each voter is checked against the voters' list.

Method of Vote:

In selecting a method of vote for the 2010 election, consideration has been given to a number of factors. Voter confidence comes when an election system is accurate, accountable and transparent and which voters easily understand. It is important that voters are assured that each vote cast is cast by an authenticated elector, and counted. An election voting system should be cost effective and affordable and most of all secure, with built in redundancies to protect each vote.

In both the 2003 and 2006 municipal elections, the City of Greater Sudbury utilized paper ballots together with a tabulator count. The voter is provided with a paper ballot at the polling location and votes by marking the ballot. The ballot is then inserted in a tabulator which uses optical scanning technology to read the marked ballot and tabulate the results.

All public interfaces, including equipment, instructions, ballots and related materials are available in both English and French in compliance with the City of Greater Sudbury French Language Services Policy. Finally, a system which alerts voters to under or over votes and which affords voters the opportunity to make corrections before casting the final ballot further supports the voter in making their decisions at the polls.

Paper ballots counted by tabulator have proven to be effective and easy to use. The tabulators have been found to accurately count the votes, allow for reporting in a timely fashion on election night and provide an effective audit trail. This method of voting is known to voters in our community. According to an exit poll conducted at the 2006 Municipal Election, 93% of those surveyed felt that the ballot was easy to use. Additional resources and arrangements are required to enable voters with disabilities to vote without assistance as is required by legislation.

In terms of voter convenience, voting systems need to be flexible, accessible and enable persons with disabilities to vote independently, meeting requirements under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 as amended and the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The voting system should be easy to use and easy to understand for election workers and for all voters, regardless of literacy and language skills.

As a point of reference, the chart below is drawn from the "2006 Ontario Municipal Elections AMCTO Post-Election Survey, Final Report". The majority of municipalities continue to use paper ballots.

Method	Advance Vote	Voting Day	Response Total

Paper Ballot	213	222	222
Touch Screen	17	6	18
Mail-in Balloting	43	108	109
Vote by Phone	14	18	18
Vote by Internet	16	18	20
Other	3	4	4
TOTAL RESPONDENTS			344

The AMCTO survey of the 2006 election practices also lists those municipalities which use manual counts and those which use tabulators or other counting methods reveals that there are no medium or large sized municipalities which conduct a manual ballot count. This is likely because each ballot contains votes for the offices of Mayor, Ward Councillor and School Board Trustee(s) and manual counts are labour intensive and time consuming as each ballot would have to be counted between three to eight times, depending on the school board support.

Vote tabulators are well accepted by electors. The City of Greater Sudbury 2006 Election exit poll found that 83% of electors trusted the vote tabulators to count their ballots. When asked about their preferred method of voting in future elections, the majority of those surveyed (55%) indicated that their preference was for paper ballot counted by a vote tabulator. The second most preferred method, at 17% was paper ballot with a manual count.

Over the summer, staff in Clerk's Services and Information Technology conducted an extensive review of internet voting in particular. While this is a technology with great potential for the future, and as internet based voting has not yet been used widely enough, there is a level of risk associated with this technology and internet voting will not be considered for the 2010 election.

In the fall of 2007 Elections Canada completed a strategic planning exercise, which included a survey of Canadians, both those who voted and those who did not. The Report to Elections Canada on the Survey of Electors notes that " *It is apparent . . . that there is quite strong interest in on-line registration and voting, but it is far from clear if the use of such technologies will lead to enhanced levels of voting*. " Elections Canada will be requesting parliamentary approval to conduct some electronic voting in a by-election by 2013. Some municipalities are exploring using some form of internet voting for the 2010 municipal elections. CGS staff will monitor the use and success of internet voting both in the municipal, provincial and federal elections and will review this opportunity for 2014.

After reviewing the methods of voting, it is recommended that paper ballots counted by vote

tabulators be used for the 2010 municipal election.

Communications Plan:

The Elections Team and Corporate Communications are developing a communications plan for the 2010 election. As part of the strategy to reach out to those who don't vote, a review of the media used to promote the election is underway. In past elections, advertising has been heavily print-based and primarily in newspapers with some radio spots just prior to advanced polls and election day.

For the 2010 election, emphasis will be on frequency of message and audience appropriateness. In order to reach a more diverse audience, it is anticipated that resources will be shifted somewhat from print to other forms of media. Communications will include ten second closed captioning spots and five second weather spots on television, as well as radio and is exploring opportunities to use new media including social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to reach a broader demographic of potential voters. The election will be promoted in each of the 2010 Quarterly CGS newsletters and as in previous years, a special newspaper insert and a Municipal Election website will be used.

The content of the communications will aim to address directly the reasons why people do not vote, as for example due to weather, being too busy or finding voting inconvenient.   As part of the communications strategy emphasis will be placed on encouraging residents to vote at the advance poll. Staff has had discussions with another similarly sized municipality which is also looking to revamp its Election Communications Strategy and we may be able to share ideas and tools for a new campaign and some clever messaging to address the inconvenience factors head-on.

By-laws related to the method of vote are including in this Agenda for approval and it is expected that the RFP on election equipment will be issued within the next month.