



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
Office of the City Clerk  
Elections

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members of Council General Issues Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	July 5, 2021
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	2022 Municipal Election: Communication Plan (FCS21071) (City wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Aine Leadbetter, Manager, Elections and Print/Mail
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Andrea Holland, City Clerk
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATION**

- (a) That a one-time increase of \$56,000 be added to the Election Expense Reserve (112206) from the Tax Stabilization Reserve to support an enhanced communication plan for the 2022 municipal election;
- (b) That the annual contribution to the Election Expense Reserve (112206) be increased by \$14,000, to cover the increased costs to deliver an enhanced communications strategy regarding Municipal Elections for the City of Hamilton and that this request be referred to the 2022 Operating Budget deliberations for consideration;
- (c) That a one-time increase of \$40,000 to the Election Expense Reserve (112206) be funded through the Tax Stabilization Reserve to allow for the hiring of four summer students to support the Election communication and outreach plan; and
- (d) That the outstanding business item from report GIC 19-016, item 1(b) requesting that the City Clerk establish a communications strategy to assist in ensuring residents check and are listed on the municipal elections voters list be considered complete

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In preparation for the next Municipal Election to be held on October 24, 2022, City Staff will be developing a comprehensive and proactive communications plan. The plan will be focused on communicating and addressing challenges posed by the voters list in

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advance of election day, building awareness of the election and election processes, and engaging with residents who may face barriers to engagement in the electoral process.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

To support the roll-out of the 2018 Municipal Election and to align with the principles of the *MEA*, the City embarked on a communications campaign entitled “Your Hamilton, Your Vote.” The campaign was launched in April 2018 and ran until the election in October, with the purpose of engaging with candidates, informing residents of elections-related information, providing information on ward-boundary changes, and targeting youth at post-secondary institutions. This communications plan intended to enhance transparency and accountability, increase the level of information shared by the City, encourage greater voter turnout, and build greater trust and confidence in the voting process. A variety of tactics were used including advertisements, media releases, social media posts, posters and banners and was implemented on a limited budget of \$42,390. The campaign proved to be successful, and efforts led to increased rates of voter turnout in a number of poll locations across the City.

At the September 9, 2019 General Issues Committee meeting, the City Clerk brought forward a report providing information on the Ontario Government’s plan to modernize Ontario’s Electoral Process including a recommendation to harmonize the development of a centralized voters list for use in both provincial and municipal elections ([Municipal Voter List – Elections Ontario \(CL19009\)](#)). Much discussion at GIC focused on the Voter’s List, maintained by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and the challenges presented during the 2018 Election day. As amended on September 11, 2019, Council recommended that the City Clerk look at developing a Communications Strategy directed to residents to check that they are on the voters list and if not, add themselves to the voters list, prior to the next Municipal Election.

Under the *MEA*, as amended, authority is provided to MPAC, to maintain owner and occupancy and school support information in order to produce the preliminary list by which the municipality creates the final voters’ list. MPAC maintains public information in non-election years through regular updates applied to the property assessment database, land titles/land registry changes, and mailing address changes. All Ontario municipalities have been challenged with the inaccuracies of the voters’ list and most have attempted to mitigate the risks involved by implementing unique processes based on the needs of the electorate in addition to utilizing MPAC’s initiatives (online voter lookup tool and registration process). Since 2010, MPAC’s enumeration methods have changed, they are no longer conducting enumeration through mass mail out or physically attending buildings which has furthered the challenge of accuracy.

In Oct 2019, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced measures to make Ontario Municipalities stronger. *Bill 204, Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020* received Royal Assent and became law on October 1, 2020. The Act amends various other pieces of legislation to create a single registry of electors for municipal

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and provincial elections, managed by Elections Ontario. The changes take effect January 1, 2024, ahead of the scheduled municipal elections in 2026. Unfortunately, this change will not be in effect for the 2022 election and MPAC will retain authority for the voters list in the upcoming Municipal Election.

As outlined in the information report to Council at the General Issues Committee meeting of December 4, 2019 ([2018 Municipal Election Summary \(CL19011\)](#)) summarizing the 2018 Municipal Election, City Clerk's staff worked to produce a final voters list with the preliminary list of electors' data received from MPAC and within the legislated parameters. In addition to data cleansing of the list, which is done every election, MPAC's voter registration tool voterlookup.ca, was promoted on the City's website and in both social and traditional media. MPAC also put out a multi-faceted outreach campaign for their voterlookup.ca tool. The City intends to follow similar approaches to validating the voters list for the 2022 and intends to supplement this process with an enhanced communication plan to address voters list issues well in advance of the election.

## **INFORMATION**

With the 2022 Municipal Election on the horizon, City Staff see an opportunity to build on the previous elections communication plan to enhance tactics to proactively address voter list issues and to achieve a number of additional objectives including building awareness about the municipal election and clarifying election processes for candidates and residents, and engaging with groups in our community that have traditionally faced barriers to voting. Staff believe that the implementation of a broad and multifaceted communication and engagement strategy will enhance fairness and consistency, build knowledge, and increase access for our residents to engage with our democratic process. A strong communication campaign also has the potential to further increase voter turnout from the gains made in the 2018 Municipal Election.

To support the communications plan, a temporary Elections Coordinator funded through existing reserves will be dedicated specifically to communications and outreach during the 2022 election. This position will be responsible for the development and implementation of the communication plan, the creation of supporting resources, and for engagement with the community, including exploring opportunities and new initiatives to engage and collaborate with community groups and organizations. The Coordinator will work as a part of elections team to ensure that the priority of this initiative is maintained and will collaborate closely with the City's Corporate Communication Team including a dedicated Communication Specialist and the Web Team.

Similarly, to the 2018 election, staff will be employing a wide variety of tactics and approaches to communication ensuring that multiple venues and methods are employed. The 2022 communication plan will be expanded to include more points of communication, more targeted approaches, and greater use of multimedia including

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videos, an enhanced web page including resources and guides, and an enhanced candidate portal. A broader communication approach will require additional funds to support.

### **Proactively Addressing the Voters List**

As MPAC will retain authority over the voters list for the 2022 election, a key feature of the 2022 Municipal Election communication plan will involve messaging and tactics focused on all eligible electors with information on how to check and update the voters list to ensure that they are accurately listed in advance of the election. Secondary objectives of this component are to build general awareness of the list to provide context for discrepancies, and to provide explanation and direction for addressing commonly experienced issues.

This component of the communications strategy will focus on three approaches:

1. **Education**, featuring a broad public education campaign for residents and candidates including information about the voters list and who is eligible to vote and run as a candidate.
2. **Targeted outreach for tenants** of rental properties, including location-based advertisement and engagement with property managers to post information
3. **Broad community outreach**, facilitated through advertisements, website banners and the employment of a summer student Elections Ambassador Team. The Ambassador Team will be charged with attending festivals and events throughout Summer 2022 to draw awareness to the upcoming election and to provide opportunity for residents to search and update their information on the voters list immediately on site.

As all Ontario municipalities similarly face challenges with the current voters list, City staff will engage with other municipalities to share ideas and to understand approaches being taken to address voter list issues and to enhance communication and accuracy. Staff will also engage with internal and external City of Hamilton stakeholders understand unique challenges within our community to be addressed in relation to the voters list.

While communication efforts are rolled out, Staff will continue efforts to validate the list and will take on a shared responsibility and accountability in ensuring as much accuracy as possible through working collaboratively with MPAC.

### **Building Awareness of the Municipal Election**

The 2022 Municipal Election will come on the heels of the Provincial election in June 2022, and likely a Federal Election in the Fall or Winter 2021. This increases the potential for confusion around the various elections and levels of government and may additionally result in election fatigue. In addition, it cannot be assumed that all residents are familiar and experienced with municipal elections and the specific electoral processes at the City of Hamilton. As such, it is critical that the communications campaign distinguish the municipal election from the other earlier elections. It is also important to communicate transparently about the election and to provide supports and resources to enhance all residents' knowledge and awareness in advance of the municipal election.

To build awareness of the municipal election, to enhance understanding of election processes, and to generate interest in the local level of government, Staff will work with Corporate Communications to ensure that the communication campaign focus on awareness through:

1. Distinguishing the Municipal from Provincial and Federal Elections; identifying the importance of the local level of government; and expressing the importance of engaging in the local democratic process.
2. Providing educational resources and supports in easily accessible and understandable formats. This will include the dedication of an education section on the Elections webpage at hamilton.ca, and the creation of tools, guides and videos for residents on potential topics such as various ways to vote in Hamilton, and a walk-through of the voting process at the poll.
3. Information and supports for Candidates, including hosting of candidate's nights with the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, and the development of resources to support Candidates in addressing questions from the electorate on the municipal election.

### **Engaging with the Community to Understand and Address Barriers**

In 2018, approximately 38% of eligible voters turned out to vote in the Municipal Election. Despite this figure showing an increase from previous election years, municipal voting rates in Hamilton and across the province are traditionally low with the majority of eligible voters not engaging in the municipal electoral process. To enhance access and increase fairness in the electoral process, election staff will engage within the community to understand barriers and constraints to voting and to collaborate with community partners to develop strategies and approaches to reach residents where they are.

Staff will be employing a number of approaches to better understand the barriers to participation faced by members of our community. The City will be sponsoring a CityLab project in the Fall of 2021 where students will be analysing voting data against

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City demographics, engaging directly with the community to get feedback and ideas, and will provide suggestions to the City on what can be done to improve access and encourage participation in the next municipal election. The Elections Coordinator will engage in outreach directly with community organizations and groups to identify and understand barriers to voting and to solicit feedback and advice on how best to address these challenges. Staff will further seek to explore and assess communications barriers, and in collaboration with the City's Communications Team will look to creative and inclusive methods to ensure that electorates receive information and support in a manner that is accessible to them. Working together with the community, we will identify possible solutions and begin to craft a targeted plan to engage and provide greater access.

Some early consultation work has already begun with Staff engaging with Council's Citizen Advisory Committees to get feedback and recommendations for the 2022 Municipal Election. Early consultations have identified some key areas of focus, barriers, and potential solutions, and staff is committed to continuing these consultations throughout the planning phase of the election. All community consultations and feedback will inform the final communication plan.

## **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial:**

The cost to enhance communications to meet our objectives is estimated to be \$100,000, which would require an additional \$56,000 added to the existing communication budget for 2022.

To sustain an enhanced communication strategy and approach for future elections beyond the 2022 municipal election, annual contributions to the Election Expense Reserve would have to be increased by \$14,000.

To support a program to have Elections Ambassadors in the community in the Summer of 2022, the City is recommending hiring four summer students for a three-month period. The cost of hiring these employees is estimated to be approximately \$40,000.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

The City Clerk is responsible for running and overseeing municipal elections, ensuring that elections meet the requirements set out by the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (the *MEA*) as amended, and its associated regulations. This includes ensuring that the principles of the Act are upheld, including 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; and
- (g) the proper majority vote governs by ensuring that valid votes are counted, and invalid votes are rejected so far as reasonably possible

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

### **Internal consultation**

Consultation for this report was received from:

- Corporate Communications
- Finance and Administration

### **Community consultation**

Staff has engaged with Council's Citizen Advisory Committees to get feedback and suggestions for improvement for the 2022 Municipal Election.

### **Municipal Benchmarking**

Surrounding and comparative municipalities have been consulted for information on their communication plans and approach for the 2022 Municipal Election.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recognize that there is work to be done to improve communications regarding the municipal election, particularly with regard to the voters list and in ensuring that voters are aware of election dates and processes. There is also an opportunity to engage with the community to a greater degree to provide information and to identify and address barriers to voting in advance of voting day. Through consultation with Council's Citizen Advisory Committees, members of Council and municipal counterparts and through assessing previous approaches and best practices, staff believe that expanding communication efforts and engaging directly with the community will enhance awareness and improve access for the 2022 municipal election. By shifting from a traditional top-down method to a more inclusive and consultative approach, staff believe that trust and confidence in municipal government and the election process will be enhanced.

To ensure the execution of an enhanced communications plan, an Elections Coordinator will be dedicated to oversee and implement this work. A dedicated resource will ensure that communication and outreach efforts are prioritized and

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adequately supported. This resource will be tasked with developing and implementing an outreach strategy, will connect directly with the community, will work with the City's communications team, and will additionally oversee student ambassadors who will be conducting more targeted outreach tactics in the summer of 2022. Additionally, this resource will supervise and participate in the planned City Lab project and will further coordinate public engagement efforts.

To inform the development of a strategy to address barriers and increase communication, staff is proposing direct engagement with our community to fully understand barriers and to collaborate on solutions. Public engagement efforts will ensure that tactics and approaches used in communications are appropriate, reflective of need, and that issues and barriers identified by the community are documented and included as a part of the overall election strategy. Working collaboratively with student researchers through the City Lab project will be a key component in the engagement strategy. Students will be assessing demographic and previous voting information and will be engaging with community members to understand barriers, and staff will additionally be reaching out to key community groups and organizations in addition to advisory committees to inform our understanding and to jointly consider solutions. A collaborative approach will help to build trust and confidence in our elections, enhance our relationship with the community, and could have an impact on voter turnout through increasing education and generating greater buy in from the community.

Enhanced communications will help to inform the community about the election and election processes and will greatly assist in educating the electorate and addressing issues, such as the voters list, well in advance of the election. Staff has recommended the use of multiple tactics to broaden the City's reach and to engage people at multiple levels. This will include direct communications and engagement, including the use of Student Ambassadors at key events to provide information about the election and to encourage residents to update their voter list information. Presence at festivals and events to communicate and generate excitement has been a tactic that has been successfully used in past City projects, including Our Future Hamilton, and has proven to be an effective means of connecting with the community.

## **ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **Community Engagement and Participation**

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

### **Our People and Performance**

Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

## **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES REFERENCED**

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General Issues Committee Report CL19009– Municipal Voter List – Elections Ontario.  
September 9, 2019

General Issues Committee Report CL19011 – 2018 Municipal Election Summary.  
December 4, 2019