



## City of Hamilton Report for Consideration

**To:** Chair and Members  
Audit Finance & Administration Committee

**Date:** July 10, 2025

**Report Number:** FCS25025

**Subject/Title:** Alternative Voting Methods and Vote Tabulation  
Technology for City Elections and By-elections

**Ward(s) Affected:** City Wide

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### Recommendations

- (a) That the use of optical scanning vote tabulators **BE AUTHORIZED** for the purpose of counting votes for the City of Hamilton elections and by-elections;
- (b) That the use of online voting **BE AUTHORIZED** as an alternative voting method in accordance with Section 42(1)(b) of the *Municipal Elections Act* for the City of Hamilton elections and by-elections;
- (c) That the necessary by-law **BE PREPARED** and **PROVIDED** to Council for consideration and approval;
- (d) That the City Clerk **BE AUTHORIZED** to conduct a single source procurement, pursuant to Procurement Policy #11 – Non-competitive Procurements, for the lease of optical scanning vote tabulators and that the General Manager, Corporate Services Department be authorized to negotiate, enter into and execute a Contract and any ancillary documents required to give effect thereto with Dominion Voting Systems, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor; and
- (e) That the City Clerk **BE AUTHORIZED** to conduct a single source procurement, pursuant to Procurement Policy #11 – Non-competitive Procurements, for the provision of Voter Strike-off Software, with the option of Online Voting Services and where applicable, the General Manager, Corporate Services Department **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate, enter into and execute a Contract and any ancillary documents required to give effect thereto with Neuvote Systems Inc., in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

### Key Facts

- The next municipal election will be held on October 26, 2026 and the by-election to fill the Ward 8 Councillor vacancy will be held on September 22, 2025.

- The purpose of this Report is to obtain Council's authorization to use vote tabulating equipment, and the authorization to use of Online Voting as an alternative voting method, in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.
- This Report is also seeking approval for two single source procurements; the first for the lease of vote tabulators from Dominion Voting Systems, and the second for use of Neuvote's voter strike-off software and supporting technology (rental of ePoll books, laptops, etc.).
- Council authorized the use of online voting as an alternative voting method for the 2025 Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Ward 4 by-election.
- Based on the by-election experience and the feedback received, Online voting is an alternative voting method that provides a safe and accessible method of casting a ballot.

## **Financial Considerations**

The largest cost associated with conducting a general election is attributed to human resources (temporary core staff, poll staff, support staff and training costs). The 2022 Municipal Election human resource costs amounted to \$1.27 million, or 47% of the total cost of the election. The remaining costs (approximately \$1.5 million) are associated with voting technology (tabulators, e-poll books, software), poll location costs, supplies, postage, printing (voter cards and ballots), and other facility fees.

This totalled \$2.7 million for the 2022 Municipal Election.

## **Optical Scanning Vote Tabulators for 2026**

The lease of vote tabulators would include an accessible voting unit for each physical voting location to support paper ballot tabulation for the 2026 Municipal Election is estimated to cost \$400,000. This estimated cost includes software and technical support throughout the election period. Dominion Voting Systems provided the tabulators used in the recent Ward 4 By-election, the previous 2022 Municipal Election, and will provide the tabulators for the upcoming Ward 8 By-election being held in September 2025.

## **Voter Strike-Off Software and Online Voting Services**

Neuvote Systems Inc. was utilized for Voter Strike-off and the online voting pilot during the Ward 4 By-election in 2025. Staff are looking to again use Neuvote's voter strike-off program for the 2026 Municipal Election. If authorized the software usage includes the ability to manage Online Voting as an alternative voting method for the City. Neuvote Systems Inc. would also provide the required hardware (laptops) and on-site support to facilitate the voter strike-off software with an estimated cost of \$850,000.

There may be cost savings found as a result of online voting by reducing the need for as many staff and polling locations on election day. The City's election team plan to better utilize advance polling dates, special polling sites and Online Voting to reduce the costs where possible. There would also be less of a cost associated with ballot printing and voter-card mailouts with Online Voting.

## Background

Municipal and School Board elections are planned and delivered in accordance with policies and procedures that are necessary to conduct an election in a manner that reflects the principles of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended, and its regulations. The City Clerk is responsible for administering municipal elections in a fair and objective manner and strives to deliver progressive and innovative elections that support the democratic voting process. The team prioritizes the voting experience and strives to make it accessible and convenient, while maintaining the integrity of the election process. Staff continuously monitor legislative updates and municipal trends and practices.

Section 42 (1) of the *Municipal Election Act, 1996* (the *MEA*) allows the council of a local municipality to pass a by-law “authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators” and “authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method, such as voting by mail or by telephone, that does not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote”. Should Council decide to support any complementary alternative voting method for the Ward 8 By-election, Council must pass a by-law by July 22, 2025.

The City of Hamilton piloted online voting for the 2025 Ward 4 Trustee by-election. Although the overall turnout was extremely low for this election, more than 45% (or 213 of 473) of the votes were cast online. The rigorous testing and implementation phases that were accomplished were instrumental in increasing access to voting opportunities for Ward 4 electors throughout the holiday season, and despite extreme cold weather on voting days. Staff recommend the use of online voting for the City’s municipal election and by-election for the purposes of increasing accessibility and providing alternative voting methods to voters.

## Analysis

The way in which electors choose to cast their votes has continued to shift towards technology-based methods. More than half (58%) of Ontario municipalities used internet voting in the 2022 municipal election, which marked an increase of 16% from the 2018 election.

Vote tabulators continue to be a valuable tool for counting votes as well as getting expedient and accurate results. They are commonly used to support municipal elections in Ontario as they significantly increase the efficiency of election administration. Their use has also enhanced the verification of voter intent as well as elevated the accuracy and security associated with ballot tabulation. Staff recommend authorizing the use of vote tabulators for the City's municipal elections and by-elections.

The addition of online voting in 2025 allowed for valuable data collection and provided staff with experience working with a vendor to facilitate an alternative voting method. The insights gained through this effort, as well as municipal scans of best practices, and review of Digital Governance Standards Institute’s (DGSI) Online Voting Standard, were considerations in staff’s recommendations.

As offered in previous elections, curbside voting will be offered for the 2026 municipal election and does not require the passing of a by-law. Curbside voting allows voters who are unable to go inside the voting place to request to have a paper ballot brought to their vehicle, outside of the building, or to another area within the voting place. This will not be a drive-through voting option and will be limited to those who are not able to enter the voting place due to barriers of unreasonable difficulty, injury, or disability. An option such as curbside voting is an imperative option to offer voters for both accessibility and convenience reasons.

Alternative voting methods like online, telephone, and mail-in ballot have been offered by many Ontario municipalities for well over 20 years. Despite unsupervised voting not being directly addressed in the *MEA*, local municipalities within Ontario and across the country have become local leaders in digital elections in an effort to increase voter accessibility and convenience. There is a desire to stay current with technology, meet the demands for convenience, and ensure voting options are accessible. Staff support the use of technology as a resource and encourage innovation, with the support of appropriate privacy protective and security measures in place.

## **Alternative Voting Methods**

Election administrators must continue to evaluate, revisit and rethink the concept of voting to ensure that the principles of democracy and electoral integrity are achieved and that electors can confidently, and conveniently cast their ballot. An accessible electoral process is inclusive and meets the needs of electors so that they can exercise their democratic rights to vote equitably and without undue barriers or interference. Leading practices have been observed and will continue to be monitored in providing alternative voting options. Due to this, the following alternative voting methods are recommended in addition to in-person voting.

### **Online Voting**

More than half (58%) of the municipalities in Ontario used electronic voting in the 2022 Municipal Election, which marked an increase of 16% from the 2018 election. While research has not concluded that alternative voting methods increase voter turnout, the convenience and accessibility that it allows electors is a major factor for consideration. Statistics gathered from the 2025 Ward 4 Trustee By-Election indicated that 45.03% of all votes were cast online via the internet voting system. For this pilot, in order to cast a ballot online, voters were required to register to vote online by setting up an account with their own email address, verify that account and sign in using multi-factor authentication, and then complete a registration process where all registrations go through an approval process with Elections Staff.

If Online voting were approved, each person who casts a ballot online receives a unique vote verification code that they can use to confirm that their vote was accepted and legitimate. For the 2026 General Election, Neuvote will also offer an additional service where each online ballot that is cast is printed directly into a secured voting box, monitored by City Staff in a secured facility. In the case of a recount, City staff could count the printed ballots from online votes to verify the results.

The 2025 Ward 4 Trustee By-Election allowed the City to pilot and thoroughly assess the vendors' voting platform while also ensuring the fundamental principles and requirements for a fair democratic election.

## **Procurement Process**

Pending Council approval, staff propose to undertake a single source procurement, pursuant to Procurement Policy #11 Non-Competitive Procurement for the provision of voter strike-off software, which has the ability to utilize online voting and optical scanning tabulators for paper ballots.

Due to tight timelines to assess and implement an online voting platform for the Ward 4 by-election held in January 2025, an expeditious review of multiple online voting platforms was performed. Following this, it was decided that The City of Hamilton's Information Technology (IT) Department should proceed with an assessment of Neuvote Systems Inc.. The IT Department conducted this review and concluded that Neuvote Systems Inc. met requirements.

A single source procurement is recommended to ensure that the City proceeds with a vendor that meets prior initial requirements. Noting that as part due diligence and industry best practice City IT and Clerks recommends ongoing internal and external third-party review of Neuvote Systems Inc. to further inform alignment to industry best practices for voting platforms.

## **Alternatives**

### **Special Vote by mail**

A special vote by mail option may provide voters with the ability to mark their ballot from home at their convenience and may allow increased rights of privacy to voters who may find voting at traditional paper-based voting places more difficult. Voters would be required to apply and register for a vote by mail kit.

The City piloted this initiative in 2022 in an effort to offer an alternative to in-person voting, however there was a delay experienced in the Vote by Mail approval process and a federal holiday that impacted the mailing date of the packages resulting in them being mailed out a week later than originally guaranteed. While this delay should have seen packages delivered to residents in advance of the October 13, 2022 mailing deadline based on established Canada Post delivery timelines, the Elections Team received feedback that packages were received much later than anticipated.

Additionally, a strike action against Canada Post by the national membership of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) during the 2025 Ward 4 Trustee By-Election negatively impacted the City's ability to notify electors, contributing to an extremely low voter turnout.

Due to concerns over postal service reliability, and the ability to provide sufficient time for voters to receive and return packages, City staff do not recommend this alternative voting method.

## Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

While the actions of the City's Election team and the recommendations in this Report support modernization of City systems, prioritizing customer service and getting more people involved in decision making, this report does not specifically address the priority projects contained therein. Rather, this is a legislative requirement under the *Municipal Elections Act*, for Council to approve the use of vote counting technology and alternative voting methods.

## Previous Reports Submitted

[FCS24053 - English Public School Board By-Election: Voting Methods and Tabulating By-law \(Ward 4\)](#) – Council, October 9, 2024

## Consultation

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Tina Iacoe, Director, Procurement.

## Appendices and Schedules Attached

None

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