



City of Hamilton

Report for Information

To: Chair and Committee Members

Date: April 15, 2026

Report No: FCS26023

Subject/Title: 2026 Municipal Election and Municipal Use of Resources Policy

Ward(s) Affected: City Wide

Recommendations

That Report FCS26023, respecting 2026 Municipal Election and Municipal Use of Resources Policy (City Wide), **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The next Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled for Monday, October 26, 2026, with voting opportunities throughout the month of October.
- Nomination and registration period opens May 1, 2026 and closes August 21, 2026.
- Members of Council, Candidates and Staff should be aware of the requirements under the Use of City Resources During an Election Policy.
- All Candidates Information Session with Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing staff is scheduled for May 6, 2026, at 6 p.m.

- The new term of Council begins on November 15, 2026.
- All motions need to be approved prior to August 31 in an election year. For the 2026 Election year that would require all motions to be brought forward at the Council meeting on Aug 5, 2026.

Financial Considerations

There are no financial considerations and budgetary impacts associated with this Report, which is submitted to Committee for information purposes only. This aligns with the City's Policy and Guidelines for Eligible Expenses for Elected Officials, which establishes that only valid municipal expenditures incurred while conducting official City business are charged to the approved annual budgets for the Office of the Mayor, the Legislative Budget, and Councillor Ward Office Budgets. Because this Report does not introduce new activities, obligations, or expenditures beyond existing administrative responsibilities, it does not trigger any costs under these established budget frameworks.

Background

This report provides Council with an overview of preparations for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election and outlines key requirements and implications of the Use of City Resources During an Election Policy. The intent is to ensure clarity, compliance, and operational readiness as the City enters the 2026 election period.

Analysis

Overview of the 2026 Municipal Election

The next Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled for Monday, October 26, 2026. Key dates include the nomination and registration period beginning May 1, 2026, advance voting dates in early October, and the commencement of the 2026–2030 Council term on November 15, 2026.

For the 2026 Municipal Election, we are advancing a significantly enhanced and equity- focused voting model that will meaningfully strengthen accessibility, convenience, and voter experience across the City of Hamilton.

New for 2026, we are tripling the number of community polling locations, ensuring far greater access in high- density buildings and equity- deserving neighbourhoods. These locations are selected to reduce travel barriers, improve accessibility for equity- deserving and high- density communities, and ensure that electors have convenient, familiar, and welcoming places to cast their ballots during an election. This expansion directly supports our commitment to removing barriers and meeting voters where they are. Additionally, we will increase the number of advanced voting opportunities and have expanded Ballot- on- Demand locations across the city. This will give electors more flexibility, shorter wait times, and greater convenience than ever before.

Voters will now benefit from polling location flexibility within their ward, meaning electors can cast their ballot at any voting location that best suits their needs, rather than being restricted to a single assigned poll.

To ensure every eligible voter has the information they need, Voter Information Cards will be delivered to every household in Hamilton, including addresses that may not appear on the Voters' List. This universal outreach ensures no community is overlooked. While the Voter Information Card provides helpful details about voting locations and ward information, it is not required in order to vote. Electors may cast their ballot without a Voter Information Card as long as they bring one piece of acceptable identification showing their name and qualifying address.

Candidate support has also been strengthened for the 2026 election with the addition of a dedicated staff resource assigned to assist candidates throughout the entire campaign period. As part of this support, an All-Candidates Information Session with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is scheduled for May 6, 2026 at 6 p.m. This session will provide candidates with a comprehensive overview of the legislative framework governing municipal elections, clarify statutory requirements and compliance obligations, and offer guidance on key topics such as campaign finance rules, nomination procedures, advertising regulations, and the role of third-party advertisers. Candidates will have an opportunity to receive authoritative information directly from provincial officials and ask questions to ensure they are fully prepared, informed, and compliant throughout the election process. Along with improved guides, tools, and communications designed to support compliance and transparency, our goal is to make it easier for candidates to navigate the election process.

Internally, we have formalized a comprehensive staffing strategy to build strong, effective poll teams, and we have fully modernized our training program to ensure staff are confident, knowledgeable, and prepared to deliver a consistent, voter-centred experience at every location. This will include both traditional policy and guidelines training, along with hands on, in-person mock poll training simulations for workers.

Collectively, these improvements represent one of the most significant service enhancements to municipal election delivery to date for the City of Hamilton, with the

goal of providing a more accessible, equitable, and responsive election for all participants.

Legislative and Policy Context

Municipal Elections Act Requirements

Section 88.18 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* requires municipalities to establish rules and procedures governing the use of municipal resources during an election period. These rules must be in place before May 1 of an election year.

Use of City Resources During an Election Policy

The City of Hamilton maintains a dedicated Use of City Resources During an Election Policy (Policy No. EO 02 21), which outlines restrictions regarding the use of:

- City facilities, equipment, and supplies
- City staff time
- Technology, infrastructure, and information
- City organized events or communication channels

The policy applies to:

- Members of Council
- Candidates
- Registered third-party advertisers
- Local boards
- City staff during the election campaign period

The campaign period for municipal elections runs from May 1 until Voting Day.

Council Code of Conduct

Sections 6 and 7 of Council's Code of Conduct (By-law 16 290) prohibits Members of Council from using City property, services, or staff for campaign purposes. The policy

clarifies that using corporate resources for campaigning constitutes a contribution under the Act, which is expressly prohibited.

Key Provisions of the Use of Resources Policy

Prohibited Use of Corporate Resources

Examples include:

- Use of City email, phones, or electronic devices for campaign activity
- Campaign-related postings on City managed websites or social media
- Use of staff time to support campaign tasks
- Displaying campaign signs or materials in City facilities (except permitted public areas, if applicable)

Advertising and Communications Restrictions

During the election period:

- Corporate communications must remain non-partisan
 - Non-partisan communications are neutral, fact-based election materials produced by the municipality that provide essential information without showing support for or opposition to any candidate, campaign, or political issue. Their purpose is to inform voters about the election process - such as dates, locations, and eligibility - while ensuring fairness, transparency, and impartiality in the administration of the municipal election.
- Members seeking re-election must use campaign communication tools, such as elect JohnDoe@gmail.com, and not use City accounts when engaging in campaign-related discussion or correspondence.

Staff Responsibilities

City staff are expected to maintain neutrality, refrain from participating in campaign activity while representing the City, and ensure they understand their obligations under both the Use of City Resources Policy and the Code of Conduct.

- A Summary of the Use of City Resources During an Election Policy (EO-02-21) can be found in the Appendix “A”.

Election Administration and Operational Planning

The Election Office is responsible for:

- Establishing voting places
- Recruiting and training election workers
- Facilitating advance voting and accessible services
- Maintaining voter lists and election records
- Managing vote-tabulating equipment

The scale of the election requires hundreds of temporary staff. Recruitment planning begins well in advance to ensure adequate staffing levels for voting days and advance polls.

The City’s experience administering the 2022 Municipal Election, including staff training, technology deployment, and expanded advance- vote hours, along with the findings and recommendations from the 2022 Municipal Election Administrative Audit, provides essential insights and direction for planning the 2026 election. These lessons learned also inform the development and application of the 2026 Guidelines for Eligible Expenses, ensuring that the rules governing campaign spending are clear, transparent, and aligned with modernized election practices. By connecting administrative improvements with updated expense guidelines, the City supports a fair, accountable, and well- regulated campaign environment for all candidates.

Guidelines for Eligible Expenses – Operating Budget

During an election year, consistent with past practice, the Operating budget is pro-rated at 10.5 months for current administration, and 1.5 months for new administration. In addition, there are restrictions to sponsorships, and ticket purchases for events that occur during the period between nomination day and election day. Donations are eligible provided there is confirmation from the Elected Office that there will be no public recognition or acknowledgement of the elected officer's contribution.

It is expected that the elected officer will continue to support residents through regular communication channels during an election year. However, such communication should not be campaign related and must be completed by August 31 of an election year. All Office equipment (office furniture and furnishings, computer and communications equipment) must be returned to the City when the elected officer is no longer in office.

Ensuring Compliance and Readiness for 2026

Communication to Council and Staff

Consistent with past practice, the Clerk's Office will provide clear guidance to Members of Council and staff regarding:

- Restrictions on the use of corporate resources
- Differentiation between corporate and campaign communications
- Rules for attending City events during the campaign period

Training and Awareness

Targeted training sessions and information resources will ensure that staff, candidates, and third-party advertisers understand both legislative and policy requirements.

Monitoring and Support

The Clerk's Office will continue to respond to inquiries, support compliance, and provide transparent processes for any concerns raised related to the use of City resources.

Conclusion

The 2026 Municipal and School Board Election requires a coordinated and policy-compliant approach to ensure fairness, transparency, and effective service to Hamilton residents. The Use of City Resources During an Election Policy provides the framework necessary to safeguard the neutrality of City operations and uphold the integrity of the election process.

The Election Office will continue preparations, provide timely updates, and ensure that all members of Council, candidates, staff, and third-party advertisers understand their responsibilities throughout the 2026 election cycle.

Alternatives

There are no applicable alternatives to this Report as it is only presented for information purposes.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This Report does not specifically support a Council Priority or outcome measure, but it speaks to the importance of priority 3 Responsiveness & Transparency. The work of the Election team this year is to prioritize customer service and proactive communication for all eligible voters and candidates, in an effort to get more people involved in decision making by participating in the electoral process (as a candidate or a voter).

Consultation

Finance and Administration Division, Corporate Services

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix "A" to Report FCS26023: Policy EO-021-21: Use of City Resources During an Election Policy

Appendix "B" to Report FCS26023: Summary of Policy EO-021-021

Appendix "C" to Report FCS26023: Policy and Guidelines for Eligible Expenses for Elected Officials: Office of the Mayor, Legislative and Councillor Ward Office Budgets

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