



Staff Report

Administration – Town Clerk

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: January 13, 2025
Report Number: ADM.25.003
Title: 2026 Municipal Election- Selection of Method of Voting
Prepared by: Corrina Giles, Town Clerk

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report ADM.25.003, entitled “2026 Municipal Election -Selection of Method of Voting”;

AND THAT Council direct that Internet and Telephone Voting, be approved as the voting method for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election, and direct staff to provide a by-law to a future meeting of Council for enactment.

B. Overview

This staff report is seeking Council direction on the preferred method of voting for the 2026 Municipal Election.

C. Background

The next municipal election is Monday, October 26, 2026. This staff report is provided to Council to seek direction on the preferred method of voting for the 2026 Municipal Election.

Municipal and school board elections must be held every four years and are administered by the Clerk as Returning Officer, pursuant to the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, S.O. 1996, C.32.

The *Municipal Elections Act* permits municipalities to make use of alternative voting methods and vote-counting equipment such as internet, telephone, vote by mail or optical scanning vote tabulators for its municipal election. To authorize an alternative voting method and the use of voting and vote-counting equipment, Council is required to pass a by-law by May 1, 2026 setting the method and manner of voting.

For reference, the number of authorized voters, the election turnout, and the method of voting of previous elections in the Town of The Blue Mountains is provided below:

- 2006 Vote by Mail using vote-counting tabulators
 - 10722, 34.24% turnout
- 2010 Vote by Mail using vote-counting tabulators
 - 10569 voters, 38.81% turnout
- 2014 Vote by Mail using vote-counting tabulators
 - 10794 voters, 37.85% turnout
- 2018 Internet and Telephone
 - 12066 voters, 39.6% turnout
- 2022 Internet and Telephone
 - 13903 voters, 29.3% turnout

Commencing in 2024, the Chief Electoral Officer (Elections Ontario) has assumed responsibility for the management of the voters list, from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Elections Ontario will manage a single register of electors for both provincial and municipal elections. The voters list for each municipal election will be prepared from the Provincial Register of Electors. Staff will be working with Elections Ontario to review and update the voters list, as required, in preparation for the 2026 municipal election.

Staff continue to recommend offering both internet and telephone voting for the 2026 municipal election. In the 2022 municipal election, just under 10% of the votes cast utilized the telephone to vote.

D. Analysis

This report provides information regarding the alternative voting methods previously used in The Blue Mountains.

1. Vote by Mail, with Tabulators

Electors are required to confirm they are on the Voters List in advance of the mailout of the Voter Kits. Electors receive a Voter Kit in the mail that will include an instruction sheet, a ballot with the list of candidates, a secrecy envelope, a voter declaration form with a bar code, and a return envelope. Electors are required to complete the declaration, mark the ballot, place the ballot in the secrecy envelope, then place the secrecy envelope and the declaration in the return envelope, and then mail or drop it off to the Clerk's office. There is a guaranteed mail return date, after which electors are advised that they must drop their return envelope off to the Town Hall by the close of voting on election day. On election day, the return envelopes are opened, declarations scanned to strike voters from the voters list, and the ballots are counted by a tabulator. When all ballots have been scanned, the tabulators are closed, and the election results are tallied.

Those that are not on the Voters List when the initial mailout occurs, are required to attend the Town Hall with identification to be added to the Voters List and receive a Voter Kit. Vote by mail offers a shortened voting window to electors that are unable to drop their return envelope off to the Town Hall. Vote by mail is reliant on the postal system for the voter kit mailout, and the return of the return envelopes.

2. Internet and Telephone Voting (recommended)

Electors on the Voters list receive a personal voter identification letter by regular mail containing information on how to access the voting system, including a unique identification number and PIN, the URL and telephone number for the voting system, a list of the candidates running for office, legal requirements to vote and the contact information and location of the Help Centre. Electors access the voting system by telephone or internet, confirm they are entitled to vote, enter their access credentials, follow the prompts to vote, and confirm their selections.

The ten-day advance voting period allows electors to vote 24 hours a day, from anywhere in the world. The Help Centre is available in the Town Hall, Council Chamber that allows electors to vote using the internet or telephone, and to receive assistance, on request. Electors are also able to be added to the voters list and to vote up until the close of voting, on election day.

Given the positive experience of the 2022 municipal election, staff are recommending internet and telephone voting for the 2026 municipal election. Internet and telephone voting is convenient for electors, increases accessibility, eliminates spoiled ballots, provides an accurate ballot count, allows for quick reporting results and is cost effective in terms of budget and efficient use of staff resources.

As in previous elections where the use of alternative methods of voting were used, the Town's Information Technology division will have an important role in the municipal election, in coordination with the Returning Officer, to ensure the security and confidentiality of the voting process.

In both the 2018 and 2022 elections, electors had the option to vote by telephone or internet, or in person using an electronic device or telephone at the Help Centre at the Town Hall during the advance voting period when the Town Hall was open during normal office hours, or during specific extended periods. Providing a Help Centre, in the Town Hall, satisfied the need or wish of those that prefer to vote in person, and/or required assistance to be able to vote electronically or by telephone. In 2022, the advance voting period was ten days, 24 hours per day, commencing Friday, October 14, 2022 to election day, Monday, October 24, 2022. Electors were able to vote from home or from anywhere in the world.

Under the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Clerk is required to establish the number and location of voting places for an election as the Clerk considers most convenient for the electors, and in establishing the locations of voting places shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. The LE Shore Library staff were trained to provide assistance to patrons attending the library to use the Library's technology to vote.

As is required under the Act, the Clerk's office works closely with Errinrung Long Term Care and Retirement Community to provide a voting place in Errinrung, with assistance provided by the Clerk's staff, to allow its residents to vote.

Allowing electors to vote electronically or by telephone also allowed those that were not on the voters list or had misplaced their voter kit, an opportunity to be added to the voters list, and be able to vote. Staff confirm that numerous in-person enquiries and calls were received in the days leading up to the election, and also on election day, from those that had misplaced their voter kit, or were not on the voters list, and were unable to attend the Town Hall to obtain a replacement voter kit. Subject to the process established by the Clerk's office, these same electors were able to receive their voter kit electronically if they were unable to attend the Town Hall in person and allowed them to receive a voter kit, and to vote.

Clerk's staff were available in person, by telephone and by email to answer all election related enquiries. As additional staff are not required for internet and telephone voting, and with lower postage costs (requires just one mailout), staff estimate the cost of the 2026 municipal election will come in under the budget allocated for the election as referenced in the "Financial Impacts" section of this report.

Question on the Ballot

The *Municipal Elections Act* states that Council of a municipality may pass a by-law to submit a question to the electors by March 1 in the year of the election, subject to a specific process as outlined in the *Municipal Elections Act*. The results of a question authorized by by-law are binding upon the municipality if at least 50% of the eligible electors have voted on the question, and if more than 50% of the votes on the question are in favour of those results.

The relevant sections of the *Municipal Elections Act* are provided below for reference:

Submission of by-laws and questions

- 8(1)** The council of a municipality may pass a by-law to submit to its electors,
- (a) a proposed by-law requiring their assent;
 - (b) subject to section 8.1, a question not otherwise authorized by law but within the council's jurisdiction;
 - (c) subject to section 8.1, a question, the wording of which is established by an Act or a regulation under an Act.

Notice to electors

Conditions re: submitting a question

- 8.1(1)**A by-law to submit a question to the electors under clause 8 (1) (b) or (c),
- (a) shall be passed on or before March 1 in the year of a regular election at which it is intended to submit the question to the electors;
 - (b) cannot be amended after the last date referred to in clause (a); and
 - (c) despite clause (b), can be revoked on or before nomination day and, if the election does not include an election for an office, on or before the 31st day before voting day.

8.1(2) A question authorized by by-law under clause 8 (1) (b) shall comply with the following rules:

1. It shall concern a matter within the jurisdiction of the municipality.
2. Despite rule 1, it shall not concern a matter which has been prescribed by the Minister as a matter of provincial interest.
3. It shall be clear, concise and neutral.
4. It shall be capable of being answered in the affirmative or the negative and the only permitted answers to the question are “yes” or “no”.

Notice of intent

- (3) Before passing a by-law under clause 8 (1) (b) or (c), the clerk shall give at least 10 days notice of the intention to pass the by-law to the public and the Minister and hold at least one public meeting to consider the matter.

Notice of by-law

- (4) Within 15 days after a municipality passes a by-law under clause 8 (1) (b) or (c), the clerk shall give notice of the passage of the by-law to the public and the Minister.

Contents

- (5) A notice under subsections (3) and (4) shall include,
 - (a) the wording of the question;
 - (b) in the case of a by-law under clause 8 (1) (b), a clear, concise and neutral description of the consequences of the question if it is approved and the consequences if it is rejected with the special majority under section 8.2, including an estimate of the costs, if any, that the municipality may incur in implementing the results of the question; and
 - (c) in the case of a by-law under clause 8 (1) (b), a description of the right to appeal under subsection (6) including, in the case of a notice under subsection (4), the last day for filing a notice of appeal.

Results

8.2 (1) The results of a question authorized by a by-law under clause 8 (1) (b) are binding on the municipality which passed the by-law if,

- (a) at least 50 per cent of the eligible electors in the municipality vote on the question; and
- (b) more than 50 per cent of the votes on the question are in favour of those results.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

None

G. Financial Impacts

The method of voting selected will result in a financial impact to the municipality. The cost of the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election was \$72,000, this does not include any allocation of Clerk's staff time. The Town has transferred \$30,000 in 2023; \$35,000 in 2024 and expects to transfer \$35,000 in 2025 to the municipal election reserve, and it is anticipated that these funds will cover the costs of the alternate voting method recommended above. At this time, staff do not have an estimate of the cost for a vote-by-mail election.

H. In Consultation With

Adam Smith, Acting CAO and Director of Planning & Development Services
Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services
Monica Quinlan, Director of Corporate and Financial Services
Will Wray, Manager of Information Technology

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required.

Comments or questions regarding this report should be submitted to Corrina Giles, Town Clerk townclerk@thebluemountains.ca .

J. Attached

None

Respectfully submitted,

Corrina Giles
Town Clerk

For more information, please contact:
Corrina Giles, Town Clerk
townclerk@thebluemoountains.ca
519-599-3131 extension 232

Report Approval Details

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| Document Title: | ADM.25.003 2026 Municipal Election - Selection of Method of Voting .docx |
| Attachments: | |
| Final Approval Date: | Jan 3, 2025 |

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

No Signature - Task assigned to Shawn Everitt was completed by delegate Adam Smith

Shawn Everitt - Jan 3, 2025 - 12:02 PM