



**Subject: 2026 Municipal Election - Voting Systems and Alternative Voting Methods**

**To: Council**

**From: Legislative Services Department**

Report Number: 2025-136

Meeting Date: June 24, 2025

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**Recommendation:**

That the Legislative Services Department Report 2025-136 be received; and

That Council approve the use of vote tabulators as the voting system in the 2026 municipal election; and

That Council approve the use of vote by mail on demand as an alternative voting method in the 2026 municipal election; and

That staff be directed to join the Joint Request for Proposal for the purpose of sourcing the most appropriate vendor(s); and

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute any agreements necessary to secure voting equipment for the 2026 Municipal Election; and

That the by-law to authorize voting methods and alternative voting methods for the 2026 municipal election be brought forward for Council approval.

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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the proposed voting method and alternative voting method for the 2026 municipal election, to gain Council approval on those proposed methods, and to seek approval to proceed with sourcing vendors through the request for proposal (RFP) process.

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## Background:

The City of Port Colborne (the City) has traditionally used paper ballots for municipal elections, and in recent elections, voting tabulators to count ballots. Counting ballots via tabulator is efficient and accurate. It also ensures reporting of unofficial election results can be provided on election night.

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (MEA) sets out the responsibility of conducting municipal elections to the City Clerk, but there are several items that require Council approval, including the setting of the voting methods. Section 42(1) of the MEA states that Council may pass by-laws authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, recorders, or scanning vote tabulators, and to authorize the use of an alternative voting method for the electors, including vote by mail or vote by telephone. These decisions are required to be made by May 1 of the election year. The draft by-law regarding voting tabulators and the alternative voting method is attached as **Appendix A**.

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## Discussion:

Staff are proposing that Council approve the use of vote by mail on demand as an alternative voting method for electors in the 2026 election and approve the use of voting tabulators. These methods have been successfully used by the City in past elections and serve as familiar methods for the electorate. Tabulators can enhance accessibility to electors who are casting a ballot and decrease counting errors. Alternative voting methods like vote by mail on demand allow flexibility for electors who may not be able to attend a physical polling location, and this offers a supplementary solution to the traditional in-person voting. Elections Canada and Elections Ontario both offer mail-in ballots and have reported success in providing the option.

Should this report be passed, the City Clerk in accordance with the MEA would build off the previously established procedures regarding the process for requesting, delivering, and submitting ballots through the mail. Any ballot used by this alternative voting method would need to be submitted by the end of the voting period. Staff recognize that any remote voting method is unsupervised and presents additional considerations associated with maintaining the integrity and security of the election process. This risk is present to different degrees with all voting methods, including in-person voting. Maintaining security and preventing fraudulent voting requires carefully developed and audited processes as well as voter responsibility which is addressed in the MEA and will form part of the Clerk's procedures. At this time, staff are not recommending internet voting be used as an alternative voting method.

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## **Internal Consultations:**

As the key access point for residents, Customer Service staff will work with Legislative Services staff to assist in facilitating the vote by mail on demand process.

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## **Financial Implications:**

As of December 31, 2024, the City has \$79,583.27 in the election reserves fund for the 2026 election. The 2022 election cost \$160,505.29. The City is looking to participate in a joint RFP with 11 other municipalities in the Niagara Region to rent voting tabulators and to procure the ballots. This process is being led by the Town of Lincoln and the Niagara Region, and the City's Senior Procurement Officer has been looped into the preliminary discussions. If approved by Council, the City Clerk will proceed to add the City of Port Colborne to this joint RFP. This RFP is an opportunity to collaborate with the other municipalities and will ease some of the logistics and costs associated with securing vendors for voting tabulators and ballots.

Vote by mail on demand is expected to have a cost of approximately \$5 plus staff time per ballot cast via this method. With an estimate of 200 people requesting this service, a total cost of \$1,000 will be absorbed through the current election budget. The rental fee for vote counting equipment has previously been included in the election reserve budgeting process.

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## **Public Engagement:**

If approved, the City Clerk would work with Communications staff to advertise the voting options to the public. In addition, all eligible voters receive a voter notification card that outlines voting options and provides necessary information.

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## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
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## **Conclusion:**

Staff are recommending Council approve the use of voting tabulators to count ballots, and the vote by mail on demand method to provide increased accessibility and

convenience for the electorate. Staff are also recommending Council approve the City's participation in the joint RFP process for the tabulators and ballots. Participation in this process would demonstrate cross municipal cooperation and assist in alleviating challenges associated with securing voting tabulators and ballots.

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**Appendices:**

- a. Draft By-law - Alternative Voting Methods for the 2026 Election

Respectfully submitted,

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**Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.