



## Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of May 24, 2018

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** May 11, 2018  
**From:** Chris Coates, City Clerk  
Bill Eisenhauer, Head of Engagement  
**Subject:** 2018 Municipal Election Update

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### RECOMMENDATION

1. That Chris Coates be appointed Chief Election Officer and Christine Havelka be appointed Deputy Chief Election Officer for the 2018 Municipal Election.
2. That Council give introductory readings to Election Procedures Amendment Bylaw No 18-070 at the May 24, 2018 Council meeting.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Local Government Act* requires each municipality in British Columbia to hold a municipal election every four years. General Voting Day for the 2018 Municipal Election will be held on Saturday, October 20, 2018, between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Advanced voting days will also be held in October, with dates and locations to be confirmed.

This report provides an overview of changes recommended to the Election Procedures Bylaw resulting from the experiences of the 2014 municipal election as well as providing an overview of the City's plans for engagement to encourage voter turnout.

After the municipal election in 2014 Council received a Lessons Learned report from staff outlining issues for consideration in the 2018 election. That report is attached as Appendix A. During the 2018 Financial Planning process, Council directed staff to report back on the implications of allocating resources to notify residents of the 2018 general election and how they can participate, including the option of a mail-out to each household and online advertising in social media platforms. These are included as part of the voter engagement strategies noted in this report.

Changes proposed to the Elections Bylaw address:

- Expanding additional voting opportunities at the discretion of the Chief Elections Officer
- Repealing municipal voting divisions, due to the use of electronic voting machines that enable the "vote anywhere" model.
- Establishing special voting opportunities for care Homes with more than 50 residents
- Changes to the application and voting procedure for mail ballots
- Campaign Signage regulations

The Bylaw amendment incorporating these changes is attached as Appendix B. The current Elections Procedures Bylaw is attached as Appendix C.

Building on the successful engagement strategy from 2014, the City will continue to refresh its now established communications tools to support awareness and voter engagement during the 2018 municipal election. In 2014, the City undertook a progressive communications strategy with a view to increasing voter turnout in the local election. Although not all attributable to the City's engagement efforts, voter turnout at the 2014 election increased from 26% in 2011 to 39% in 2014.

The 2018 election communication plan builds on the statutory requirements outlined in the Local Government Act, and includes a number of activities to increase awareness and understanding of the election process and encourage voter turnout. These activities involve household mail outs, social media, and an elections "app" among other promotions to heighten community awareness of the election.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of proposed changes to the Election Procedures Bylaw, and voter engagement strategies for the upcoming municipal election.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Province of British Columbia requires each municipality in British Columbia to hold a municipal election with a General Voting Day of October 20, 2018. The local election is regulated by the Elections Procedure Bylaw and under the authority of the Chief Election officer, appointed prior to the municipal election. The Local Government Act prescribes the minimum and statutory requirements for municipalities to advertise the upcoming election. Provincial legislative changes have advanced the date of general voting day across the Province by one month. General voting day in 2018 is October 20<sup>th</sup>.

In addition, local governments are required to appoint a Chief Election Officer and Deputy Chief Election Officer to oversee the election process. All aspects of municipal election are under the management authority of the Chief Election Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act* and the Election Procedures Bylaw. The exception being campaign financing requirements for candidates which are managed by Elections BC under the *Campaign Financing Act*.

After the 2014 election, a Lesson's Learned report was presented to Council highlighting experiences and suggesting amendments to the Elections Bylaw. The changes directed by Council are incorporated in to the Bylaw attached as Appendix A.

Starting in 2008, the City began to increase its non-statutory advertising and engagement efforts to encourage higher voter awareness and participation. In both 2011 and 2014 municipal election, the City of Victoria introduced new communications tools and strategies that met with positive results and feedback. Several tools have now been replicated by other municipalities across the country and City staff monitor the voter engagement efforts of other Canadian municipalities to measure what is working in other communities.

## **ISSUES & ANALYSIS**

In 2018, focus will continue on ensuring the election process meets the legislated requirements within the *Local Government Act*, while making the election more accessible, through enhanced opportunities and voting methods, and engaging to support a positive voting experience.

## **Proposed Changes to Election Procedures Bylaw**

A number of changes have been proposed to the Election Procedures Bylaw, based on the 2014 lessons learned. The changes are highlighted below:

- Expanding additional voting opportunities at the discretion of the Chief Elections Officer
- Repealing municipal voting divisions, due to the use of electronic voting machines that enable the “vote anywhere” model.
- Establishing special voting opportunities for care Homes with more than 50 residents
- Changes to the application and voting procedure for mail ballots
- Campaign signage regulations

The proposed bylaw Amendment is attached as Appendix B with the amendments proposed highlighted in bold type.

## **Voting Locations**

Voting places will be located at 12 sites spread across the City of Victoria on General Voting Day, Saturday, October 20, 2018. Polls are open from 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. Two advanced voting opportunities are required under the Local Government Act. The City will offer a minimum of four, with additional opportunities being explored. Two advanced voting opportunities will be held at Victoria City Hall, as well as one at the University of Victoria, Camosun College’s Interurban Campus, jointly with Saanich, and one at Our Place Society. Saanich and Victoria are jointly pursuing a co-located voting opportunity at a shopping mall.

In 2014 advanced voting opportunities were held at City Hall, UVic and Our Place, with Our Place and UVic voting occurring for the first time that year. The total number of ballots cast during advance voting in 2014 was 3,144, an 80% increase over the advanced polls held in the 2011 election.

Voters are also offered the opportunity to vote by mail-in ballot if they are unable to vote in person during advanced voting or on General Voting Day, either due to absence from the municipality or mobility issues. For reference, in 2014, 266 mail-in ballots were received, doubling the number of mail-in ballots cast the previous election.

All voting locations are accessible and elections staff will accommodate curbside voting for those with difficulty accessing the voting station. Based on the voter turnout experienced in 2014, signage and room set up at voting places will be enhanced in 2018 to improve quality, wayfinding and traffic flow.

With a shared desire to see increased voter turnout in all municipalities, Victoria, Esquimalt, Saanich and Oak Bay did a small amount of joint communications outside the statutory requirements. This involved a “wrap” on the front of the Times Colonist. For the 2018 election, discussions are well underway to enhance the cooperation and resource sharing between the core municipalities and Capital Regional District and staff have begun meeting with these partners to discuss 2018 opportunities to further combine resources and share communications strategies and efforts.

## **Voting Technology**

New voting and reporting machines will be introduced for the 2018 election, streamlining the voting process for both voters and elections staff.

Electronic voter check-in introduced in 2014 will also continue this election, providing a number of benefits including automatically updating the voter list, increased confidentiality, audit functions, and access to demographic information of voters. This also facilitates a “vote anywhere” model, as opposed to designated voting locations that can be an inconvenient barrier for voters.

Although there has been discussion over the years of exploring electronic voting options, the systems and technology are not in place for 2018.

### **Voter Engagement**

A concerted effort to make the election more accessible and engaging has been underway over the past two elections. By identifying and understanding the barriers to participating in the election process, the City is better positioned to support all current and future voters. A number of new strategies have been cautiously introduced, with a view to assessing increased discretionary engagement efforts. Based on lessons learned in previous elections and from other communities, increased engagement efforts will continue.

Council’s request, during the 2018 budget discussions to investigate a voter mail-out and social media promotion have already been accounted for in the 2018 strategy. These tools were used in 2014 as well, and have been considered within the existing election budget, with no additional resource allocation required.

Planned voter engagement strategies for 2018 include:

- Advertising (non statutory) in both traditional and online media
- Voter card mail-out
- Social media engagement
- Accurate and easy-to -access information on Victoria.ca, including Candidate Profile Guide
- Voting day encouragements, including the “I Voted” sticker
- Future Voter program, including “Future Voter” sticker and colouring contest
- Election app
- Utilize City-owned communication channels including parking pay station signage and digital signage
- Newsletter (e-news and print)
- Other communication tools including posters and rack cards
- Earned media

In the lead-up to the 2014 Election Day traffic was high on all of the election webpages, with the City's highest one day visitor count at the time occurring on Election Day. This was specifically directed at the Candidate Profile Guide, suggesting that many voters accessed this information shortly before voting.

Live webcasting of the polling results will be offered again at the close of polls on General Voting Day. In 2014, this resulted in the highest website and webcasting visitation the City had ever experienced. We will investigate improvements to the quality of the live webcast with the contractor providing ballot counting services.

## OPTIONS & IMPACTS

### *Accessibility Impact Statement*

The variety of voting options available to eligible electors in the City including mobile voting and mail ballot voting along with legislated procedures to accommodate visual impairments enable a wide range of enhanced accessibility options for voters in the City.

### *2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan*

While the election process is a statutory one, options within the legislation that are exercised, including locations of voting places, and the proactive engagement of voters in the City are consistent with the Objectives of Demonstrating Regional Leadership and Engaging and Empowering the Community.

### *Impacts to Financial Plan*

Strategies requested by Council, including a voter mail-out and social media promotion, were part of the 2014 strategy, and will be part of the 2018 strategy as well. These tools have already been considered within the existing election budget, and will require no additional resource allocation. The overall budget for election proceedings in the Financial Plan is \$281,000.

## CONCLUSIONS

The municipal election in 2018, as in previous elections, requires a significant and interdepartmental resource requirement particularly from Legislative Services, Engagement and IT. Planning for the election began at the beginning of the year and will continue to ramp up in the coming weeks. Changes to the Election Procedures Bylaw, to have effect for this year's election must be adopted by July 9, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Coates  
City Clerk



Bill Eisenhauer  
Head of Engagement

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date: May 17, 2018

## List of Attachments

- Appendix A: 2015 Lesson's Learned Report
- Appendix B: Election Proceedings Amendment Bylaw No. 18-070
- Appendix C: Election Procedures Bylaw No. 02-013