



Committee of the Whole Report
For the Meeting of March 21, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Chris Coates, City Clerk
Subject: 2018 General Local Election – Lessons Learned

Date: February 25, 2019

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to:

1. Arrange for two voting machines at each voting location for the 2022 election.
2. Secure additional voting locations in the City for general voting day 2022.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Part of the City's ongoing continuous improvement process is to provide Council with Lessons Learned Reports after major projects are completed. The purpose of this report is to outline lessons learned in conducting the 2018 Municipal Election; identify changes anticipated for the next election in 2022; and offer Council an opportunity to provide suggestions for improvements based on their own participation and feedback from voters.

Voting places were busier than past elections, which is a commentary offered after the 2014 election. Voter turnout was estimated at 43.5%, an increase from 39% in 2014. Five thousand and forty-two more voters cast ballots in 2018. In total, 29,707 voters cast ballots. Since the 2011 Election the number of ballots cast has increased over 12,000.

In 2018, prior changes to the *Local Government Act* moved general voting day to the third Saturday in October from the decades long third Saturday in November requirement. Continued use of social media and other non-statutory promotion, greater access to voting, as well as the candidates and issues, all impact voter turnout.

A series of regional sessions were held with elections staff from many of the local governments within the capital region. These sessions led to greater consistency of approaches on managing voting places; discussing best practices; the pooled rental of new election voting machines and support infrastructure as well as the continued joint election (non-statutory) advertising to increase voter awareness.

The City's election process is complex and multifaceted involving several City departments. In 2018 the election was managed through the City's Project Management Framework. That played a key role in managing the significant logistical issues from the formative stages of the election through to the post election wrap up.

The City's election provided the following voting opportunities:

- 12 voting places on general voting day
- 6 advanced voting opportunities, at locations such as City Hall, UVic, Camosun College Interurban Campus and Our Place

- mail ballot voting
- special voting opportunities provided to care homes in the City with more than 50 residents for the first time.

Most voting locations were very busy at both the advanced voting opportunities and on general voting day and the main public feedback during the election process was about the length of time for line ups at voting places. This was a common occurrence in the City and in other jurisdictions including Saanich and municipalities in Metro Vancouver. In addition, a few comments were received about:

- the use of voting machines as opposed to hand counting ballots
- the time for challenging nominations between the deadline for filing and the formal declaration of candidates.

Election administration is complex given the logistics of multiple voting locations, the staffing and electronic requirements, and the complexity of ballots with numerous candidates for numerous offices covered by the process. Continuous assessment and improvements result from thoughtful analysis of lessons learned each time. Opportunities for further improvement in the next election have been examined and a summary of issues and recommendations related to each area is included in the report. These will be further reviewed, along with any suggestions Council may have in preparation for the next election.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to review the 2018 general local election and present the lessons learned from it, and to provide Council with the opportunity to bring forward any issues for consideration.

BACKGROUND

The City's election process is a multi-faceted and multi-departmental undertaking with numerous components, contributors and participants needed to effectively administer and manage all aspects of the election.

Legislative change from the 2014 election prescribed that the general local elections be held on the third Saturday in October, a month earlier than in past elections. General voting was held on October 20, 2018. Voter turnout was 43.5%, the largest recorded turnout in a City election. There was an increase of 5,042 voters from the 2014 election where there was a 39% turnout. A total of 29,707 of 68,297 eligible voters cast ballots in 2018. In 2014 the increase in the number of voters over the 2011 election was more than 7000. Since the 2011 election the number of voters has increased by over 12,000, while the infrastructure and staffing to support the election process has remained static.

Twelve voting places throughout the City, as shown on Appendix A, were in operation on General Voting Day. Five advance voting opportunities were held- two at City Hall, one at the University of Victoria in partnership with Oak Bay and Saanich, one at the Camosun College Interurban Campus in conjunction with Saanich, and one at Our Place Society. The total number of ballots cast during advance voting was 4,791 increased from 3,144 in the 2014 municipal election.

Voters were also offered the opportunity to cast a mail ballot if they were unable to vote at an advance voting location or on General Voting Day, either due to mobility issues or absence from the municipality. A total of 197 mail ballots were cast.

New for 2018 was the special voting opportunities at care homes in the City with 50 or more residents where 403 ballots were cast.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

In 2018, the election was considered a Project and was managed under the City's Project Management Framework (PMF). The PMF was extremely effective to outline tasks, responsibilities, requirements and timelines as well as provide progress tracking for all of the components.

There are two distinct tracks to the election that are reviewed below:

Formal Election Process

There are prescribed and rigid requirements governing the conduct of local elections under the authority of the *Local Government Act* with certain discretion to local procedures that may be established by bylaw. The City's *Election Procedures Bylaw* is attached as Appendix B. Milestone dates in the election process are legislated in the *Local Government Act* along with the accompanying mandatory advertising.

Election Officials participated in a series of regional sessions with other capital region local governments to discuss common approaches to issues and cost sharing or cost saving ideas that could be pursued. This resulted in the pooled rental of voting machines by several municipalities in the region and produced a better rate on the rentals for all the participants, shared, election day support for the voting machines and a broad local support network for troubleshooting.

Voting Opportunities

Ballots cast at each of the voting locations is identified in the table below:

Voting Place	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	% Turnout
Advance City Hall (2)		3751	5.49%
Additional Advanced Voting (Camosun, UVIC and Our Place)		1040	1.52%
Special Voting (Care Facilities)		403	0.59%
Mail Ballots		197	0.29%
Burnside Gorge Community Centre		1431	2.10%
Central Baptist Church		2131	3.12%
Cook Street Village Activity Centre		2236	3.27%
James Bay Community Elementary School		2032	2.98%
James Bay New Horizons Centre		1922	2.81%
Margaret Jenkins Elementary School		1977	2.89%
Oaklands Elementary School		2369	3.47%
Quadra Elementary School		1766	2.59%
Sir James Douglas Elementary School		2391	3.50%
St. Barnabas Church		1674	2.45%
Victoria High School		2292	3.36%
Victoria West Elementary School		2095	3.07%
Total	68,297	29,707	43.50%

The City has administered various types of voting opportunities in the past and expanded this in 2018. Additional voting opportunities accounted for 8% of total voter turnout which was a decrease from 11% in 2014.

a) Special Voting Opportunities – 0.6% of total votes, 403 people

Special voting opportunities were expanded in 2018 to include all Care facilities with resident populations of 50 or more. 14 Care Homes received mobile voting opportunities. Overall the

uptake was reasonable and the costs associated for specialized teams to attend these sites was higher than other voting methods.

b) Advance Voting Opportunities – 7% of total votes, 4791 people

Two advance voting opportunities are mandated by the *Local Government Act*. The Chief Election Officer has discretion to establish additional advance voting polls. Additional advance voting was held at UVic and Our Place as in 2014 and for 2018 and additional opportunity in conjunction with tSaanich, was held at Camosun College's Interurban Campus. There was a very small uptake at Camosun. Given the success of the advance polls offered in 2018, staff will be seeking to expand advance voting in the next election. Costs to administer additional advance voting places will be included in the 2022 budget request.

c) Mail Ballot Voting – 0.3% of total votes, 197 people

Mail balloting was originally introduced in Victoria to ensure that residents who could not leave their homes or lived in long-term care facilities were still given the opportunity to vote. The City has administered a mail ballot process for three elections. Eligible voters are provided with the option to vote by mail if they are unable to attend in person at a voting place due to a physical disability, illness or injury, or are absent from the municipality on General Voting Day and at the times of all advance voting opportunities. A few issues were experienced with respect to the mail ballot program, notably that the deadline for the nomination period was too close to the beginning of the voting period, making it difficult to provide ballots early enough to voters who would be away during voting. In 2014 Council passed a motion to request the Province amend legislation to establish an earlier nomination period that would enable mail ballots to be made available earlier. No changes to the legislation occurred for 2018.

As part of the post-election evaluation, staff met with the Presiding Election Officials from each of the voting places to receive feedback on their experience and gather ideas for future improvements. Many of the comments related to methods for further improving traffic flow and faster processing of voters in the voting places generally, while others were unique to specific locations or related to the impacts of the increasing voter turnout. These operational level improvements have been noted and will be incorporated into planning for 2022.

The main issues of concern from the public was the length of time spent in line at voting locations. 45 minutes was not uncommon and unsubstantiated comments have indicated longer waits in certain locations. Waits are not uncommon and were experienced in other municipalities in the region and elsewhere. Based on feedback from elections staff, and from the recognition of the significant number of voters attending the voting places the solutions to assist in reducing wait times and better managing the higher numbers of voters in the election will be proposed.

In addition, a member of the public expressed concern about the challenge period for review of nomination documents filed by candidates. The Nomination period closes on a Friday at 4pm and the challenge period begins at that time and ceases at the end of business on the following Tuesday. This amounts to two business days for any review and possible challenge. This is a *Local Government Act* provision and the assertion made is that two business days does not leave sufficient time for a thorough review and potential challenge of a candidate based on the nomination requirements. Additionally the City's election Procedures Bylaw requires 25 nominators for a candidate to be eligible for nomination. With 39 candidates standing for election there were 925 nominators required in total. Legislative change at the Provincial level would be needed to address this issue to extend the challenge period for nominations.

Recommended Changes

1. Additional Voting Machines

Staff recommend adding one (at minimum) additional voting machine and additional staffing at each voting location. The relative cost is small \$25,000 for the machines and staffing in a \$320,000.00 overall budget. The implications on line ups would be significant. Each voting location had one voting machine in both 2014 and 2018. With an additional 12,000 voters over the 2011 election the infrastructure needs to increase to stay in step with the additional voters.

2. Additional Voting Locations

It is expected that the number of eligible electors will continue to increase which will place additional strain on the voting locations that have historically been provided. Additional advance voting opportunity locations should be pursued for 2022 to respond to the population increase in the City and the pressure of higher voter turnout to create further opportunities for voting in advance and on general voting day in neighbourhoods. The cost associated with securing and staffing additional voting locations are not known clearly at this time.

Community Engagement

In addition to the prescribed advertising requirements in the *Local Government Act* the cover, registration for electors, notice of nomination period and requirements for candidates, declaration of candidates and notices of election by voting, the City has been a leader in the region in terms of outreach to voters in a variety of ways. In 2018, building on experiences from 2014, engagement activities included:

- Advertising (non statutory) in both traditional and online media
- Times Colonist front page wrap, in coordination with other core municipalities
- Coordination with other municipalities regarding social media messaging, I Voted stickers, and sharing messaging and resources where appropriate
- Voter card mail-out to each household in the City
- 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 to receive quick access to all relevant election information
- Utilize City-owned communication channels including parking pay station signage and digital signage
- Election specific edition of Connect Victoria Newsletter distributed with the Victoria News to all homes in the City
- E-Newsletter
- Other communication tools, including posters and rack cards
- Media coverage

Opportunities noted for further development in 2022 are outlined below.

1. Continue with communication tools used in 2018, with focus on online communications.
2. Continue to find additional ways to work with other municipalities to build on and leverage our combined reach.
3. Improved reliability of webcasting of election night results – work with webcast provider to ensure service disruptions due to high traffic or maintenance schedules don't interfere with the broadcast.

4. Improved functionality in Victoria Votes app – investigate the opportunity to provide elections results via the Victoria Votes app, either in real-time or as a post-election notification.
5. Continue to work with Youth Council to build momentum among youth in the months and years leading up to the next municipal election. Find ways to engage younger voters well in advance of their first voting opportunity.
6. Additional considerations could include adding resources to support engagement among traditionally under-represented individuals.

Live webcasting of the polling results was offered for the second time. There was an issue with the webcast that has since been resolved that resulted in a crash of the website earlier in the evening.

Accessibility Impact Statement

Provisions in legislation permit assistance to be offered to voters who may have difficulty voting without assistance or entering the voting place where curb-side voting is an option. In addition, mail ballot voting is an opportunity available to anyone to ensure that voting can occur from home.

Impacts on Financial Plan

The net budget allocation for the 2018 election was \$289,000. The overall budget was 366,000. The actual net costs after compensation from School District 61 was \$246,300. Additional staffing specific to the election (an additional deputy chief election officer) was funded in 2018 given the staff reduction in Legislative Services from 2014. Future elections will likely require this additional staffing as well to mitigate the impact the department's ability to continue to deliver on other initiatives.

The recommended changes to increase voting opportunities do not have an impact on the current financial plan and would be costed, if approved and presented for the 2022 budget. The financial implications are not considered significant at this point.

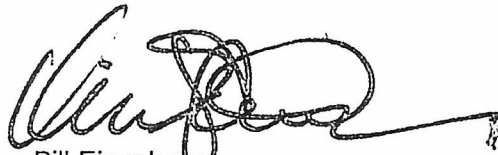
CONCLUSIONS

The City's election process is complex and has a number of milestones and numerous statutory requirements. The City has been a leader in the region to supplement the required advertising with electronic and social media based initiatives with the goal of continuing to increase voter turnout. The growth in voter turnout over the last two elections has been significant and highlights that infrastructure to support the process should be reviewed to ensure that service levels are where Council would like them to be, and that voter experience is positive which leads to greater turnout with each election.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Coates
City Clerk

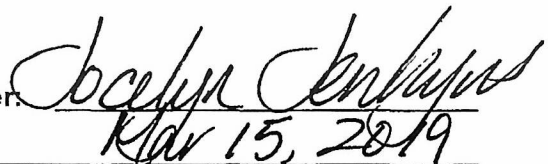


Bill Eisenhauer
Head of Engagement



Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:


Mar 15, 2019

Date: _____

List of Attachments:

Attachment A – Map of Voting Locations
Attachment B – Election Procedures Bylaw

