

2020 By-Election Lesson Learned

Committee of the Whole

February 11, 2021



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Background

- Vacancy on Council November 4, 2019
- April 4 by-election cancelled by Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing due to pandemic
- Staff work with Ministry to discuss and develop best practices for appropriately conducting a by-election over the summer months.
- Ministry advises municipalities to resume by-elections
- On October 1, Council appoints Chief Election Officer and sets December 12, 2020 by-election date



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Ministerial Order

- October 9 - Chief Election Officer sends formal request for a Minister's Order
- October 29 – Minister of Municipal Affairs issues Ministerial Order 405/2020
- November 5 – Council approves the Order
- November 9 – City begins implementing new temporary changes to local election rules



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Temporary Changes to Local Election Rules

- The Order changed some local election rules to appropriately conduct by-election during pandemic
- Key changes:
 - All eligible voters can vote by mail
 - Changes to vote by mail administration - earlier processing of ballots
 - Changes to vote in person administration at voting locations – safety plans and procedures



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Consideration/Challenges

- Evolving province-wide restrictions on public events and gathering and previously cancelled by-election
- More work to ensure ability to vote safely and securely during a pandemic
- Less time to plan despite changing rules and new health and safety standards
- Availability of voting locations and staff
- Trade-offs due to higher volume of vote by mail requests within existing tight timelines
- October 24 provincial election created some confusion due to the different process requirements



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Vote by Mail

- All eligible voters could vote by mail
- High volume of vote by mail - 18.5% of total votes
- Developed online administration portal
- Provided telephone support
- Sent 3759 vote by mail packages
- Provided postage to remove barrier
- Counted all mailed ballots by 9:30 pm on December 12
- Due to provincial local election rules, 1030 ballots that arrived late could not be counted in election results



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Voter Turnout

- Voter turnout at by-elections is typically lower
- 2020 by-election voter turn out (17.4%), not including late mailed ballots
- 2010 by-election voter turnout (25.95%) higher than usual due to borrowing referendum
- In 2017 by-elections, Vancouver (10.99%) and Saanich (11.4%)
- City had highest voter turnout at 2018 election (43.5%) of municipalities with <15,000 eligible voters



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Lessons Learned

- Set by-election date no less than 120 days before general voting day
- At least 8 locations on general voting day and 2 locations for advanced voting
- At least 5 advanced voting days
- 2 voting machines at each voting location and 1 accessible voting machine at a central voting location
- At least 1 additional senior and 1 additional administrative staff dedicated to by-election
- Distribute voters cards



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Recommendation

That Council endorse these minimum requirements for conducting a by-election:

1. 1 month of planning before appointing Chief Election Officer
2. Hire an additional senior staff and administrative staff
3. Establish at least 8 general voting day locations that are geographically distributed throughout the city
4. At least 2 advance voting locations
5. At least 5 advance voting days
6. Each voting location to have 2 voting machines
7. 1 accessible voting machine available during advance and general voting in a central location
8. Postage-paid return envelopes for vote by mail packages
9. Distribute election information materials to households using a voter card system and other standard engagement activities.



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