



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the June 12, 2014, Meeting

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** June 6, 2014
From: Robert Woodland
Director of Legislative and Regulatory Services
Subject: 2014 Local General Election Update

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with information about the 2014 Local General Election, and to request additional funding for voting places.

General voting day for local governments this year is Saturday, November 15, 2014. The positions of mayor and eight councillors will be contested in the City of Victoria; voting will also be conducted for nine members to serve on the Board of Trustees for School District 61. The City will also conduct non-statutory voting for Council members who wish to serve on the Capital Regional District Board, and conduct the plebiscite on the Council-approved amalgamation question.

On general voting day, electors will be able to vote at 12 voting places around Victoria. As well, there will be two advance voting opportunities at City Hall on Wednesday, November 5 and Monday, November 10. The City may offer other special advance voting opportunities to electors, and will use mail ballots to offer voting opportunities to residents of hospitals and other electors who are unable to physically attend voting places. Approval of an additional amount of \$25,000 is sought to enable an additional special advance voting opportunity and an electronic voter check-in process.

In 2014, the City will increase efforts to address specific barriers to voter participation. In Victoria, with traditionally a high number of candidates and within a region of 13 municipalities, election information can be intimidating to navigate.

Recognizing these specific potential barriers, increased efforts will be made to coordinate with neighbouring municipalities, where possible, for greater efficiency and effectiveness in raising awareness of voting day, how to vote and where to vote. Staff are also exploring opportunities to create a centralized location, for information about all Victoria candidates, making it easier for voters to review all candidates and their information in preparation for voting.

Recommendation:


That Committee recommend that Council authorize expenditures of up to \$25,000 from contingencies for:

- a) electronic check-in of electors; and
- b) additional advance voting opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,



Don Schaffer
Manager, Legislative Services



Robert Woodland
Director of Legislative and Regulatory Services

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

Date: _____



June 6, 2014

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with information about the 2014 Local General Election, and to request additional funding for a potential special advance voting place and an electronic voter check-in process.

Background

The *Community Charter* specifies at section 81 that a local general election, to elect members of municipal councils and school district trustees among other local government officials, must be held once every three years. The *Local Government Act*, which governs election proceedings, specifies at section 36 that each local general election must be held on the third Thursday of November in an election year. This year, the local general election is to take place on Saturday, November 15, 2014.

On November 15, City of Victoria electors will be asked to elect a mayor and eight councillors for a four-year term ending in the fall of 2018. Additionally, electors will be asked to vote for nine members of the School District 61 Board of Trustees. In addition to required voting for these offices, Council policy in Victoria is to ask electors to nominate through voting the members of Council who if elected should represent the City on the Board of Directors of the Capital Regional District. Finally, Council resolved to place the following question on the ballot as a non-binding referendum:

“Are you in favour of reducing the number of municipalities in Greater Victoria through amalgamation?”

The *Act* also specifies, at section 41, that a council must appoint a chief election officer and deputy chief election officer for the purpose of conducting the election. At its meeting held February 13, 2014, Council appointed Robert Woodland as chief election officer and Don Schaffer and Sheryl Masters as deputy chief election officers.

Issues & Analysis

1. Legislative change

The provincial government enacted two bills that alter the manner in which local general elections are conducted in BC: the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act* and the *Local Elections Statutes Amendment Act*. Both of these acts have received Royal Assent and are currently in force.

The *Local Elections Statutes Amendment Act* changes the term of office for mayors, councillors, school district trustees and other local government elected officials from the current three years to four years, starting with the 2014 election. This means that the terms of those people elected to office in November 2014 will expire in November 2018. This *Act* makes a number of consequential amendments to other enactments of the Province that govern elected officials.

Among other changes, the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act* changes the manner in which all candidates, successfully elected or not, must report the contributions and expenses associated with their campaigns. It removes the requirement for municipal election officers to oversee financial reporting documents and gives that responsibility to Elections BC, which will now review and store financial documentation and enforce rules

governing campaign financing and reporting. It specifies that individuals and groups engaging in election advertising register with Elections BC, that all campaign-related advertising indicate who is sponsoring the advertising, and provides penalties for violations of the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*.

2. Budget

In 2011, the City budgeted \$233,500.00 for the conduct of the election. The main cost centres were:

- Election personnel: \$ 92,000
 - Advance and election day staff; support staff
- Contracted services: \$ 95,000
 - DataFix (elector information cards); Election Services and Software
- Advertising: \$ 35,000
 - Statutory and other advertising

As per the City's budget guidelines, the budget remains essentially the same. After the 2011 election cycle was complete, some small additions were made to accommodate changes which will be discussed below. The budget allocation for 2014 is \$267,500.

3. Voting places

The City operates 12 voting places on general voting day in venues convenient for residents to access on foot from each neighbourhood in the City. Two advance voting opportunities are scheduled for Wednesday, November 5, and Monday, November 10.

For election-day voting places, the City has traditionally utilized public schools, church halls or community centres. Use of public schools is subject to an agreement with School District 61 that defines costs and recovery of expenses, as well as use of facilities. This year, the City has approached SD61 for the use of the following schools:

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| • George Jay Elementary School | 1118 Princess Street |
| • James Bay Community Elementary School | 140 Oswego Street |
| • Margaret Jenkins Elementary School | 1824 Fairfield Road |
| • Oaklands Elementary School | 2827 Belmont Avenue |
| • Quadra Elementary School | 3031 Quadra Street |
| • Sir James Douglas Elementary School | 401 Moss Street |
| • Victoria West Elementary School | 750 Front Street |

In the past the City has used Sundance Elementary School, but due to the school's impending closure that venue has been moved to St. Barnabas' Church, which is the nearest accessible facility and is located at 1525 Begbie Street.

The City will also use:

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Burnside Campus | 3130 Jutland Road |
| • Central Baptist Church | 834 Pandora Avenue |
| • Cook Street Village Activity Centre | 380 Cook Street |
| • James Bay New Horizons Centre | 234 Menzies Street |

Discussion has taken place about holding a special advance voting opportunity at the University of Victoria, since the City received a formal request in the previous election. City officials have met with representatives of the UVic Student Society and are exploring the opportunity.

The University's reading break is scheduled to run from Monday, November 10 (the date of the second advance voting opportunity) to Wednesday, November 12. This reduces the practicality of an advance voting opportunity at UVic the week of November 10, since many students are absent from campus that week. To be an effective advance voting opportunity for students either November 6 or 7 would be the best choice of dates.

Mail ballots

The City of Victoria has used mail ballots since the 2010 referendum and by-election. Mail ballots provide access to voting for those physically unable to vote on the day of the local general election or at the advance voting opportunities.

Mail balloting was put in place in Victoria largely to assist shut-ins and clients at long-term care facilities to vote. In 2008, the last year the City undertook special advance voting opportunities at hospitals and long-term care facilities, only 45 electors cast ballots. It was felt that this method of advance voting was ineffective, and that the mail ballot process might better enable voting. It was also felt that the mail ballot might be a better approach for electors who are travelling on advance or general voting days.

In 2011, 241 mail ballots were issued, but only 111 valid ballots were returned and counted. Many ballots that were returned were blank and therefore no votes were counted. A small number of ballots were spoiled and could not be counted.

Mail ballots requested by travellers were subject to tight timelines between receipt of the mail ballot package by the elector and the return of the ballot to the City. If travellers were in a distant place, it was problematic to send a package and receive it back within the legislated time frame.

In order to address these issues and make the process more user-friendly for shut-ins and others, election staff will be adjusting procedures and trying to work more closely with the families of those affected and interested in voting. As well, staff will provide clearer information and direction to travellers wishing to vote regarding the practicality of the mail ballot in the hopes of enabling more travellers to vote during the election period.

4. Personnel

The largest single budget allocation for the conduct of an election in Victoria is for the hiring and training of staff for voting places on general voting day. General voting day staff remuneration accounted for approximately \$64,000 in 2011; total staffing allocation was \$92,000. This included the hiring of a temporary full-time auxiliary clerical position as well as a temporary full-time voting supply and logistics employee, 31 staff for advance and special voting and 196 general voting day staff.

If additional voting opportunities are added the requirement for election staff funding will increase. For instance, a six-hour advance voting opportunity at the University of Victoria as noted above might incur as much as \$3,500 in additional costs, including staff and equipment.

5. Equipment

Since 1999, the City of Victoria has used the AccuVote ballot counting system. This technology is reliable and continues to be supported by its provider, Election Systems and Software Canada (ES&S). This system uses a physical ballot, which provides a hard record for recount purposes if such an eventuality arises.

Earlier this year, the City purchased an additional 10 AccuVotes from ES&S for less than it would have cost to lease them for the election. This will reduce the cost of future elections.

6. List of electors

The City of Victoria uses the provincial voters list to compile its list of electors for local general elections and other election functions. Since the by-election and referendum of 2010, the City has contracted with the Ontario company DataFix to provide data verification for the list of electors, a function it performs for a number of other governments in Canada. DataFix provides a number of management tools that allow the election officers to register new electors (provided they meet the criteria set out by the provincial government), remove duplicate entries and produce elector information cards.

The elector information cards are mailed to each registered elector and include information about voting places, residency requirements, elector eligibility criteria and identification that should be brought to the voting place. An election information card feature that has not been used in the past assigns each card a bar code which allows municipalities using the feature to use an electronic voter check-in system. It is felt this system will speed the process of voting by allowing a smoother intake of electors at each voting place. There is no way to connect the election information bar code to a ballot, so the secrecy of the ballot is not at risk.

In order to utilize the functionality of the electronic voter check-in system, two computers will be provided to each voting place, with bar code readers connected to each. Electors will present their card to be scanned, at which time the elector's name will be checked off an electronic voters' list. This will allow voters with cards to move directly to a separate station where they will sign the electors' book and receive their ballots more quickly. Electors without cards would be manually checked in using the digital voters list and the elector's identification.

In addition to the smoother check-in process, electronic check-in will provide staff with an ability to update the voters' list after advance voting is completed and audit the voters' list after the election.

The District of Saanich has used a form of real-time digital check-off of electors attending at voting places in past elections. Election staff there intend to use bar code scanners at some voting places as a trial in this election as well.

Rental of the laptops and bar code scanners will add about \$7,000 to the cost of the election. Staffing the additional equipment will require three additional staff per voting place for a total added staffing cost of about \$12,000.

7. Elector engagement

The City of Victoria traditionally sees about a 27% voter turnout, which is higher participation than in many other communities in BC as some jurisdictions have 20 per cent or less of their eligible electors taking part in the process. However, it indicates that a large majority of the population does not participate in local general elections.

During the last election, the City introduced new engagement tools and approaches to support the election, and will continue to build upon those in 2014. This included a more approachable visual identity for the election to engage youth and first-time voters, on-street information on parking kiosks, increased on-campus presence to assist students, utilizing social media tools (which were newer at the time), and a City election app for smartphones. As well, an "I voted" sticker was introduced for raising awareness on general voting day itself.

In 2014, the City will increase efforts to address specific barriers to voter participation. In Victoria, with traditionally a high number of candidates and within a region of 13 municipalities, election information can be intimidating to navigate.

Recognizing these specific potential barriers, efforts will be made to coordinate with neighbouring municipalities where possible for greater efficiency and effectiveness in raising awareness of general voting day, how to vote and where to vote. Staff are also exploring opportunities to create a centralized location, for information about all Victoria candidates, making it easier for voters to review all candidates and their information in preparation for voting.

An engagement strategy will utilize earned media opportunities and build upon growth in the City of Victoria's social media following to raise awareness and encourage participation, as well as communicate important timelines throughout the election process.

With a high demographic of residents 20-29, outreach on campus and to youth groups will be a focus and staff will engage the Victoria Youth Council to assist in identifying further opportunities for youth engagement.

Staff will refresh the visual identity, to differentiate from statutory notices and provide consistency of publications and advertising across all mediums.

Options & Impacts

Two unfunded options for the election are:

- Option 1 – conducting an additional special advance voting opportunity at UVic.
 - Due to the UVic reading break, a voting opportunity would need to be held either Thursday, November 6, or Friday, November 7.
 - The voting opportunity would last six hours and be scheduled when there is the highest number of people on campus.
 - The cost, for staff and supplies, would be approximately \$3,500.
- Option 2 – An electronic voter check-in system.
 - The City would rent two computers, bar code readers and software for each voting place.
 - Three additional election staff at each voting place would be required to operate the check-in system.

- Costs for this system would be approximately \$16,000.

It is anticipated that some of the costs for these options might be covered by savings from changes to other procedures; however, specific savings have not yet been quantified.

Recommendation

That Committee recommend that Council authorize expenditures of up to \$25,000 from contingencies for:

- a) electronic check-in of electors, and
- b) Additional advance voting opportunities.