



Subject: 2024 Municipal Election - Report #1
To: Corporate & Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: November 7, 2023
Related Motions:
Prepared by: Sheralee MacEwan, Assistant Municipal Clerk
Approved by: Kim Ramsay, Chief Administrative Officer

Summary

Preparation for the 2024 Municipal Election has started and staff require direction from Council in the following areas:

- Appoint the Returning Officer and associated fee
- Authority to set the Tariff of Fees and Expenses
- Authority to appoint Assistant Returning Officer(s)
- Authority to expend funds this year for preparation work
- Use of electronic voting (internet and phone) from Intelivote Systems Inc.
- Dates for advance polling period and Nomination Day
- Direction on how to advise the public of preliminary list of electors for revisions
- Permission to update the electors' list database up to end of Poll Day
- Use of the "Nova Scotia permanent registry of voters" from Elections Nova Scotia as the preliminary list

Financial Impact Statement

There is currently \$147,862 in the Election Reserves for the 2024 Municipal Election. \$35,000 will be included in the draft 2024/2025 Operating Budget per motion C20(335).

Election Costs Prior Years:

2012 = \$60,159.77

2016 = \$87,641.05

2018 (Special Election) = \$7,157.48

2020 = \$138,343.70 (hybrid)

2021 (Special Election) = \$13,108.16

2022 (Special Election) = \$12,288.75

The cost per vote in 2020 was \$13/electronic vote versus \$50/paper vote (excluding COVID measures).

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Corporate & Residential Services Committee recommends that Council authorize staff to conduct the 2024 Municipal Election as outlined in the recommended motion below.

Recommended Motion

That the Corporate & Residential Services Committee, recommend to Council;

1. *That Council authorize expenditures for the October 2024 Municipal Election up to the amount held in reserve for that purpose, including \$10,000 for preliminary expenses which may be expenses prior to March 31, 2024.*

2. *That Council appoint Kim Ramsay as the Returning Officer for the 2024 Municipal Election, setting the fee for the Returning Officer to a maximum of \$25,000 (based on hours worked and within Municipal HR Policies) with invoices to be approved by the Warden.*
3. *That Council gives authority to the CAO to determine the Tariff of Fees and Expenses for the 2024 Municipal Election.*
4. *That Council gives authority to the CAO to appoint Assistant Returning Officer(s).*
5. *That Council agree to a full electronic method (internet and phone) from Intelivote Systems Inc. for the 2024 Municipal Election.*
6. *That Council set the dates for the advance polling period from Thursday, October 10, 2024 to the close of voting on Regular Election Poll Day of October 19, 2024. Nomination Day to be held on Tuesday, September 10, 2024.*
7. *That Council agrees that in addition to the methods mandated by the Municipal Elections Act to notify the public of the preliminary list of electors and revision methods, that it be left to the discretion of the Returning Officer to determine additional notification mechanisms that will improve the accuracy of the electors lists.*
8. *That Council authorizes election staff to continue to amend the electors' list database in conjunction with the electronic voting system up to and including Regular Election Poll Day.*
9. *That Council authorizes the use of the Nova Scotia permanent registry of voters provided by Elections Nova Scotia as the preliminary list of electors for the 2024 Municipal Election for East Hants.*
10. *That the RO do public education on the upcoming election and offer information session(s) for potential candidates.*

Background

The 2020 Municipal Election was hybrid using both electronic and in-person methods in 9 of 11 districts resulting in 5 new members of the 11-member Council. Two (2) members of Council were acclaimed (Districts 3 and 9) and the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) representative was also acclaimed.

Special Elections were held in 2021 (District 7) and 2022 (District 4) that were 100% electronic. It has been proven that use of electronic voting has been successful not only in East Hants, but across the province. Provincially, other units started going paperless in the 2016 election and even more in 2020. Other municipal units have also started their 2024 planning and most are recommending electronic options to their respective Council's as well. Final decisions are not known yet.

It is recommended that the 2024 Municipal Election be conducted 100% electronically (internet and phone).

Returning Officer (RO)

The amount of work to oversee a municipal election cannot be understated. There is a significant amount of work to ensure a successful election in compliance with the Nova Scotia Municipal Elections Act. It is recommended that Kim Ramsay serve as the Returning Officer and be compensated for time and expenses outside of her regular work as Chief Administrative Officer. There will also be a need for an Assistant Returning Officer and support from other municipal staff; these employees all qualify for overtime under the current human resource policies. Municipal HR policies pay overtime at time and one half of the hourly wage. All such expenses will be billed to the election project.

RO Compensation has varied by election, depending on status of employment of the RO and time/overtime expended. A history of payments:

2008 Election - Ian Glasgow (\$10,000)

2012 Election - Gabryel Joseph was full-time Clerk, RO, Consultant was Rick Ramsay (\$3,668)

2016 Election - Connie Nolan as RO and Mark Jamieson (\$13,981) as ARO
2018 Special Election - Connie Nolan as RO and Sheralee Mitchell-MacEwan as ARO
2020 Election - Connie Nolan (\$25,000) as RO and Sheralee Mitchell-MacEwan as ARO
2021 and 2022 Special Elections - Kim Ramsay as RO Sheralee Mitchell-MacEwan as ARO

Electronic Voting (Internet and Phone)

Electronic voting offers voters the ability to vote by phone or online which removes physical access barriers such as transportation and provides an opportunity for residents to vote from their own homes.

In 2020, 41 Nova Scotia municipalities contracted Intelivote's eVoting services. 68% of those municipal units ONLY offered electronic voting.

2020 Regular Election - Hybrid

Council was satisfied with the success of using an electronic voting system (internet and phone) for the first time, in addition to paper polls in the 2020 Regular Election. Voter turnout numbers were strong at 41.6%. 89% of those who voted used an electronic method.

Election participation = 41.6%
Voters who used the internet to vote = 72.4%
Voters who used the phone to vote = 16.4%
Voters who used the paper ballot to vote = 11.2%

Six (6) Poll locations were used and a mobile poll was held at the Magnolia Continuing Care facility in Enfield (District 1-Division 4). As the election was during the COVID-19 pandemic, many supplemental supports were needed at polling stations to ensure the safety of voters.

In addition to the Returning Officer, there were two municipal staff who provided direct election planning support; as well as, support from:

CAO Office: CAO, Communications, Technology, Human Resources and administrative
Planning & Development Department: mapping and administrative
Finance Department: Financial transactions and budgeting

There were 78 staff hired (DRO's, poll clerks, checkers, and custodial). The hiring and training of poll clerks and related staff was a lot of work for the ARO and RO.

The total cost for this election was \$138,000.

2021 Special Election - District 7 - Lantz-Milford

The 2021 Special Election for District 7, was successfully conducted 100% electronically. The election participation increased 0.50% over the 2020 Regular Election which was a hybrid of electronic and in-person voting.

Election participation = 42.1%
Voters who used the internet to vote = 75.9%
Voters who used the phone to vote = 24.1%
Paper Ballots were not provided

2022 Special Election - District 4 - Shubenacadie

The 2022 Special Election for District 4, was successfully fully conducted 100% electronically.

Election participation = 15.3%
Voters who used the internet to vote = 70%

Voters who used the phone to vote = 29%
Paper Ballots were not provided

Advanced Polls

Section 114(4) of the Nova Scotia Municipal Elections Act (“the Act”) provides for an advance poll on Tuesday, the fourth day before regular poll (October 15th). Council may select one other day or delegate its authority to select the first advanced poll to the Returning Officer. The choices are either Thursday, October 10th or Saturday, October 12th. With use of electronic voting, a polling period can begin on the first date of October 10th and continue for the entire period up to the close of the Poll Day on October 19, 2024 giving voters 24-hour voting for 10 days.

Notice of Preliminary List

Section 34(1) of the Act requires the availability of the preliminary list of voters to be advertised in newspapers circulating in the Municipality.

Section 34(4) outlines other mechanisms to notify voters, but is only necessary if directed by Council. The other mechanisms include:

- a. Distributing flyers to households
- b. Mailing cards to voters
- c. Providing for other advertisements as directed by Council

Staff recommend that this authority to choose other mechanisms be delegated to the Returning Officer.

Date of Final List

Section 38 of the Act refers to a date selected by Council on which the amended list of voters is finalized. Decisions on the final list must be done in time to allow the lists to be printed. With use of electronic voting, the lists are available electronically and printed lists would not be necessary.

Working with lessons learned from the past elections, the RO will ensure sufficient telephone support on election day is available to man the phones and election voter list enquiries.

Candidates Deposit

Section 51(1) of the Act states that every nomination paper shall be accompanied by a deposit of \$200. Council may by by-law specify that a lesser deposit, or no deposit, shall be required. Staff recommends that Council comply with the Act and Bylaw #149 (Respecting Deposits by Candidates at an Election) with no changes as there needs to be some commitment to potential candidates to the election process to make the process a serious one.

Preliminary List

Since 2016, the federal government and all provinces keep a permanent registry of voters which is updated monthly. The permanent registry for Nova Scotia is the most up-to-date list of electors and should be used as the preliminary list of electors.

Public Education

Prior to the 2020 election the RO and the then Warden hosted a session for potential candidates to help them understand the role of a Municipal Councillor, that of municipal staff and the relationship between Council and other levels of government. This type of session is a recommended again for the 2024 election.

Discussion

There is a significant concern provincially with the anticipated lack of potential election staff for 2024. It is expected that finding workers will be extremely difficult and certainly the pay rates would need to be significantly higher than in previous years to meet current market demands.

With three successful electronic elections in the last four years, the accessibility of electronic voting and the concerns with staffing shortages, it is recommended that the 2024 election be conducted 100% electronically (internet and phone).

Proposed Schedule:

September 10, 2024 - Nomination Day

October 10, 2024 to October 18, 2024 - Advance Polling Period

October 19, 2024 - Regular Municipal Election Poll Day

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Organizational Values:

- Responsive, transparent and accountable
- Informed and sustainable decision-making

Key Strategies:

- Corporate Excellence

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia Municipal Elections Act

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Costs

There is currently \$147,862 in the Election Reserves for the 2024 Municipal Election. \$35,000 will be included in the draft 2024/2025 Operating Budget per motion C20(335).

2020

Overhead costs (Returning Officer, Legal, Phone, Postage and Advertising) equated to \$6.19/vote

Poll Station costs (without Covid measures) was \$43.89/vote plus the \$6.19 overhead = \$50/vote

Poll Station costs (with Covid measures) was \$68.23/vote plus the \$6.19 overhead = \$74/vote

Electronic/Telephone vote costs were \$7.07/vote plus the \$6.19 overhead = \$13/vote

2021 and 2022

Electronic/Telephone vote costs were \$14/vote

It is estimated that costs may be approximately 20% higher than 2020 in general for paper elections. Intelivote Systems Inc. is offering 2020 rates again in 2024 which would help keep costs significantly lower than a paper election.

Where the costs of an election are subject to several variables, the CAO should be authorized to spend up to the amount held in reserve for the purpose of electing municipal council in October 2024.

Alternatives

At the discretion of Council within legislative authority, Council may choose to do a hybrid election, with one or more polling stations. Adding paper polling stations will drive the cost of the election up significantly.

Council may choose to go to an RFP for electronic voting services in lieu of sole sourcing to Intelivote. This would add complexity to the project timeline but is within Council's discretion.

Attachments

Intelivote Brochure - 2024 Municipal Election
Intelivote Nova Scotia 2020 Election Infographic