Voting methods review

CITY OF Guelph
Making a Difference

How each voting method works

Vote by mail

1. To vote by mail, a voter would need to complete a form requesting a mail in ballot and submit it online or by mail to the City Clerk's Office. This form would have to be received by a set cut-off date, to ensure the vote-by-mail kit could be received and mailed back in time before Election Day.

2. The City Clerk's Office would process requests to vote by mail and track who requests a vote-by-mail kit on the voter's list for security purposes.

3. Once a request for a vote-by-mail kit was processed, election officials would prepare and mail the vote-by-mail kit with the ballot, secrecy folder, voter declaration card and a return envelope with postage pre-paid up to the cut-off date.

4. Once received, a voter would mark their ballot and seal it inside the secrecy envelope provided in the vote-by-mail kit. They would also sign their voter declaration card and mail it along with the secrecy envelope back to the election office using the provided return envelope. The voter declaration card acts as an affidavit or solemn oath and must be signed in order for the ballot to be counted.

5. When election officials receive the returned envelope, they will open the vote by mail package and separate the voter declaration card from the ballot, which is kept secret and sealed in the secrecy envelope. Election officials review and scan the voter declaration card to automatically strike that voter off the voters list. This is an important part of the ensuring a secure voting process by verifying the details on the voter declaration card and confirming that the voter is struck off the voters list at the time the mailed ballot is received. They will take the secrecy envelope containing the ballot and place it in a ballot box for safe keeping until Election Day.

6. If the voter declaration card is not signed, the ballot cannot be accepted or counted. These vote by mail packages will be separated out and securely stored should candidates or scrutineers wish to review this decision at the time of vote counting.

7. On Election Day, tabulators will be deployed at the election office. At the start of the scanning process, a report will be run to demonstrate to all officials and scrutineers that the results database is empty, and all candidate totals are zero. Secrecy envelopes containing ballots, which are anonymous and separated from anything identifying the voter, would then be opened. Ballots would be flattened and stacked in batches by election staff, and the batches would then be placed in the feeding trays of the tabulators.

8. After the close of voting locations on Election Day, the vote by mail results would be counted and announced at the same time as unofficial results on election night.

Vote by phone

1. To vote by phone, a voter will use a touchtone phone to call the toll-free number provided on their voter notification card. They are prompted to input the voter identification (ID) listed on their voter notification card and are asked to answer a security question to verify their identity. This question is usually for the voters' birthdate which can be verified with the voters' list. Once the voter credentials are validated, the voter is presented with an audio version of the ballot.

2. The telephone voting system uses pre-recorded interactive voice commands to guide the voter through the voting process. Voters are prompted to make their ballot selections from the list of candidates for each ballot race. Voting will take more or less time depending on how many candidates there are in each race.

3. In the case of a single-member race, like for Mayor, the voting system will read back the candidate selection and prompts the voter to confirm if the selection is correct. If the voter indicates this was their choice, the system moves on the next available ballot race. In a multi-member race, like for ward Councillor, the voter is prompted to make their next selection from the list of available candidates (those which they have not already selected) until all their selections are complete for that race.

4. Upon completion of all the races the voter is provided the opportunity to review the full ballot prior to providing final confirmation and casting the ballot. They can return to the ballot and update their choices before final confirmation if anything is not correct.

5. If the voter is disconnected before final confirmation, their voter credentials are still valid. They simply have to re-access the telephone voting system and would begin marking a blank ballot again. The ballot is only cast when the voter provides final confirmation to cast it at the very end of the call.

6. Once final confirmation is provided, the ballot is received electronically through the same system as internet voting. It is sent through an encrypted channel to secure servers. Ballot information is encrypted to protect the information on the ballot and hash coded to ensure the ballot is not altered by malicious intent before reaching the election servers.

7. Once at the application servers, the integrity of the information is then verified one last time against business rules. If there are any issues, the voter is prompted to review and make any further changes. If there are no errors, then the ballot is received and stored on secure servers. It is stored with an electronic audit trail that can be used to audit, investigate or conduct a recount if needed.

8. Once a ballot is cast, the voter is then struck off the voters' list and cannot receive another ballot over the phone or at an in-person voting location.

Internet voting

1. To vote online, a voter enters the website address provided on their voter notification card into a web browser on a computer, mobile phone or tablet to go to the secure internet voting website.

2. They will first register to vote online, which requires that they enter the unique voter ID provided on their voter notification card and verify other personal information to confirm their identity. This usually asks for the voters' birthdate. This automatically checks that they are eligible to vote if all information matches the voters' list. Once the registration step is complete, the voter will receive an encrypted email with a unique PIN for that voter. This two-step process increases security by ensuring that a single voter credential cannot be used alone to access, mark and cast a ballot.

3. The voter can now to log in using their voter ID and PIN. They will be asked to accept a voter declaration statement indicating that they are aware of offences and penalties under the Municipal Elections Act and that they are not committing fraudulent or corrupt acts by voting.

4. The voter then receives their ballot. Instructions are provided on how to mark and navigate from one race to the next. Once the voter has completed all races on the ballot, they are presented with a confirmation screen which provides an overview of how each race is marked and shows any warning messages if the voter has left any races blank, under-voted or over-voted. This is an opportunity to update the selections. Once everything is marked as intended, the voter clicks the 'cast ballot' button.

5. If the voter is disconnected before selecting 'cast ballot', their voter credentials are still valid. They simply have to re-log in to the internet voting system and would begin marking a blank ballot again. The ballot is only cast when the voter provides final confirmation to cast it at the very end.

6. When a voter casts their ballot online, the ballot is sent through an encrypted channel to secure servers. Ballot information is encrypted to protect the information on the ballot and hash coded to ensure the ballot is not altered by malicious intent before reaching the election servers.

7. Once at the application servers, the integrity of the information is then verified one last time against business rules. If there are any issues, the voter is prompted to review and make any further changes. If there are no errors, then the ballot is received and stored on secure servers. It is stored with an electronic audit trail that can be used to audit, investigate or conduct a recount if needed.

8. Once a ballot is cast the voter is struck off the voters' list and cannot receive another ballot online or at an in-person voting location.