

Advisory Committee of Council Staff Report



To	Accessibility Advisory Committee
Date	Tuesday, April 16, 2024
Subject	2026 Municipal Election: Staff recommendation and next steps

Recommendation

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) receive information on the staff recommendation for the 2026 regular election.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To share the staff recommendation on alternative voting methods and accessible voting enhancements ahead of the May 7 Committee of the Whole meeting and next steps for participation in that public process.

Key Findings

Accessible voting service enhancements are a decision of the Clerk and staff are planning to provide all options identified in 2026.

Alternative voting methods are a decision of Council and staff will be recommending vote by mail and a vote from home service be offered in 2026.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This report aligns with the Future Guelph Strategic Plan Foundations theme and the objective of providing excellent service. It outlines and seeks approval for voting options and service enhancements that will improve customer service and remove barriers to voting.

Financial Implications

Financial information will be available as part of the staff report when it is publicly posted on the agenda on April 25, 2024.

Report

During the February 20, 2024 AAC meeting, staff heard the Committee's request for more information on the reasons for the staff recommendation. Following the Committee's February deferral, staff are updating materials for the April 16, 2024 agenda as requested by the AAC.

Staff received the following [resolution](#) from the AAC during the December 19, 2023 meeting:

In order to accommodate independent voting for all residents of Guelph, the AAC recommends that the city offer Online/Internet Voting, Remote

Accessible Vote by Mail, Vote by Phone, Vote by Mail, and door-to-door vote from home options for upcoming municipal elections. The AAC feels that leaving any of these options out will leave some disabled voters without access to a confidential and independent way to mark their ballot. Providing all options will help the city meet their duty to accommodate those individuals under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Furthermore, the AAC would like to highlight the importance of specifically RAVBM and Internet voting as the most universally accessible options, which would solve significant service gaps that have been present in the past two elections for many disabled individuals who have not had access to independent voting.

Staff recommendation

In developing the staff recommendation, we considered the principles of the Municipal Elections Act, budgetary constraints, resourcing requirements, staff capacity, potential risks if offered, past elections, and the recommendation of the AAC.

The staff recommendation will propose offering in-person voting with accessible voting enhancements on Election Day. Vote by mail and a vote from home service will be recommended during the advanced voting period based on:

- Ability to uphold the principles of the MEA
- In line with existing financial and staffing resources
- Offers dependability and reliability
- Ensures verifiability and ability to recount in other ways if needed
- Supports remote voting options for voters who cannot make it to in-person voting

The two greatest factors that influenced the recommendation were the reliability/dependability of the platform, and the verifiability of the results. These factors are important to us, the democratic system and are required by the principles of the MEA to ensure the integrity of the election is maintained. Over the past two elections, there have been issues with bandwidth and servers slowing or crashing, be that on the part of internet voting vendors or vendors that support the use of live voter strike off on the voters' list. Being able to ensure that each vote that comes in is accurate and is what was intended is paramount. In the case of voting, the public tolerance for downtime of these interrelated systems and platforms is limited, if not non-existent. A critical aspect of the City Clerk's Office team is to maintain the integrity of the election, the results, and the public's trust.

The staff recommendation must also align with current budget resources and staffing capacity. Through the staff report to Council, staff will transparently share budget estimates for all options so that additional resources can be allocated by Council if they wish to pursue additional alternative voting methods.

Next steps

It is our shared job to present the best advice from our perspective and lived experiences to Council and to allow them to make the decision.

We hope that Chair Root will join us and present to Council alongside staff on May 7, 2024. Requests to speak or send comments on this item can be received up until 10:00am on Friday, May 3, 2024. Information on how to register to delegate or submit comments can be found on the [City's website](#).

Consultations

This item will be publicly discussed and any decisions will be communicated through the Committee of the Whole and Council meeting processes in May 2024.

Attachments

None.

Departmental Approval

None.

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