



Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Request for Decision

REPORT TO: Mayor Bolivar-Getson & Municipal Councillors
SUBMITTED BY: Leah Zinck, Returning Officer & Sherry Conrad, Municipal Clerk
DATE: July 21, 2020
RE: **COVID-19 Safety Issues re Use of Paper Ballots for Election Day**

RECOMMENDATION

“that due to the extraordinary public health threat of COVID – 19, Municipal Council rescind its motion of May 26, 2020 to authorize the use of alternative voting for the Alternative Polling days from October 8 to October 14 and that paper ballot be used for ordinary polling day.

And further

that Municipal Council authorize the use of telephone and personal computing device (internet), only for the 2020 Municipal and CSAP Election with voting commencing on Thursday, October 8, 2020 at 8:00 a.m. through to Saturday, October 17, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. with a voting kiosk set up at the Municipal Office during election office hours for that period”.

BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the global outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic. On March 22, 2020, the Nova Scotia government declared a state of emergency to contain the spread of COVID-19 and non-essential businesses, schools, government offices, and airlines, to name a few, began an unprecedented shutdown unlike anything any of us have known in our lifetimes. The state of emergency remains in effect until noon on July 26, 2020 and is reviewed every two weeks. Health experts have predicted a second wave of COVID-19 is inevitable and are currently predicting a strong possibility of reappearance in September/October.

On May 26, 2020, Council authorized the use of telephone and internet voting during the Advance Polling Days and paper ballots on Ordinary Polling Day. Staff is concerned of the

potential for the second wave of COVID-19 that is predicted for the September/October timeframe and the health risk that it poses to electors, election workers and Municipal staff with the opening of polling stations for paper ballot voting.

If there is an outbreak close to election time, it may have a negative impact on the number of voters who come out to vote and we will have poll station workers cancelling at the last minute.

- At least 65% of the election workers are older than 60. If there is an outbreak close to election time, we will have election workers cancel at the last minute, leaving election staff with positions to fill. There will be approximately 185 positions to be filled and staff found it difficult to get 120 people to work in the last election without any health threats.
- Based on 2016 data, 8,128 eligible voters in MODL were 60+ or just over 40% of eligible voters. This group is at the highest risk for COVID.

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in consultation with various groups including the Dept of Health and Elections Nova Scotia, will be providing guidelines on how to conduct a safe election. It is anticipated this final document will not be available until mid-August which will put us late into the planning timeframe.

DISCUSSION

Staff has concern regarding the safety and protection of electors, election workers and Municipal staff in relation to conducting paper ballot voting. By implementing voting by telephone and computer, and other electronic devices, we are eliminating the threat to electors, election workers and staff.

As of July 6, 2020, 40 municipalities are in active negotiation with Intelivote for telephone and internet voting. Of the 40,

- 19 - telephone and internet voting only
- 13 - intending to do only telephone and internet voting (waiting for approval of their by-law)
- 4 - telephone and internet for advance and paper on ordinary polling day
- 3 - telephone and internet for advance and are undecided on ordinary polling day
- 1 - telephone and internet for advance and 2 days of paper and undecided for Ordinary Polling Day

Items to be considered if alternative voting only is implemented.

Improved Safety for Election Workers & Electors

- Paper ballots get touched a minimum of 9 times before deposit into a ballot box and then 3 more times by the DRO when sorting, counting and then sealing ballots in an envelope on Election Night. Not using paper ballots eliminates the risk to election workers and electors as there would be no handing of ballots back and forth. With electronic voting, the electors will cast their vote using their own equipment.
- Eliminates the training required for 185 election workers.
- The election worker would not be required to come to the Municipal Office on the Friday before Ordinary Polling Day to pick up their poll books, ballot boxes, etc.
- The election worker will not have to have close interaction with the elector as would be required through the paper ballot voting process.
- Candidates would not need to visit the polling stations to see who has voted as candidates would have access to the candidate module right up to the close of voting.
- At the close of the poll, approximately 60 election workers will come to the Municipal Office to return their supplies, ballot boxes and other necessary documents. There will be an issue with how we will accommodate these workers while they wait for their work to be checked as we do not have the room to social distance. This can be a 3-hour process without COVID restrictions. This would be eliminated with alternative voting.

Reduce Cost of Election

- Elimination of hiring and training election workers. [Due to the restrictions of COVID if paper ballot voting continued, we would have to hire an individual (Election Support Worker) to open doors, monitor and control elector traffic in and out of each voting location, and assist traffic flow inside the building]. Total reduction in costs would be approximately \$46,300.
- There would be no hall rentals. Due to restrictions of COVID if paper ballot voting continued, MODL would have to rent the halls for 2 days at an additional expense of \$9,200. Some halls are not open yet for rental. If there is a second wave of COVID, bookings for halls may be cancelled at the last minute.
- Poll books, ballots and other election supplies would not be required to be purchased.
- No overtime for Municipal staff to work election night.
- No purchase of cleaning supplies, hand sanitizers and special signage for public health requirements.

Mobile Polling Stations

- MODL has mobile polls that are set up in Homes for Special Care. One is a Long-Term Care facility and one is a Residential Care facility. Both facilities have indicated that it is highly unlikely that Election staff will be allowed to go into the facility and they would prefer not to do paper ballot. It has been arranged with those facilities already that two of their employees (the two that typically would assist our election team) would be sworn in as DRO and Poll Clerk and the residents would vote by iPad during the Alternative Polling Days. Clients are familiar with iPads as they have been using them during COVID to stay in touch with family members.

Avoids issues with Electors re Public Health Requirements

- Election workers would not have to deal with electors who do not want to comply with Public Health Requirements.
- Due to the close proximity of the elector to election staff when they come to the table to register with the poll clerk and receive their ballot from the DRO, it would be recommended that masks be worn. If masks are not worn, the elector would have to stay 6 feet away from the election staff.

Increased Amount of Days for Electors to Vote

- By implementing alternative voting only, the elector has 10 full days to vote. If voting by paper ballot, the alternative voting must close at 7:00 p.m. on October 14th, which allows 7 days of alternative voting and one day on election day.

PROCEDURE FOR TELEPHONE AND INTERNET VOTING

- Set up a kiosk at MODL building during regular office hours on October 8 – 9 and October 13 – 16, and from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Ordinary Polling Day to assist electors who are not comfortable using the technology whether by phone or internet to log in with their unique PIN identifier. Safety procedures and cleaning protocols will already be established at the Municipal Office.
- Election office will be open for electors who did not receive a voting letter to contact staff to obtain a PIN number.
- Additional advertising will be done to ensure their information is correct on their letter and to get them to call for a letter if they did not receive one.

Data has shown that it takes on the average of 1.5 minutes to vote by telephone, 51 seconds to vote by internet and, this year with COVID measures in place, we are estimating a voting time of 5 – 7 minutes (this does not include the wait time).

ALTERNATIVES

1. Alternative Voting only but in addition to setting up one centrally located kiosk for voting at the Municipal Office during Alternative Polling Days, that four polling stations be set up throughout the Municipality on Ordinary Polling Day only.
 - These polling stations will be in areas where there is good internet.
 - Required rules and signage will need to be erected and public health protocols/ requirements followed.
 - The cleaning protocol and safety restrictions will still be required but there will be no one on one interaction between the elector and staff. Staff will be required to wipe off the desk, chair, telephone or computer, or any other surfaces touched by the elector.
 - Hire a DRO and Election Support Worker for each location.
 - Polling Station will contain a table for the DRO and table for the elector to vote. The voting table will be located away from the entrance and DRO's table and will contain a computer and telephone.
 - A hand sanitizer station will be set up at the entrance.
 - The elector will take their voting letter to the table and proceed with voting either by telephone or computer.
 - The DRO will be available to provide assistance. PPE will be worn by election staff and offered to an elector if assistance is required.
 - Once the elector has voted, they will leave the building and staff will follow the cleaning protocol.

2. Do not make any changes and continue with paper ballots on Ordinary Polling Day. With paper ballot voting, there are two procedures that will need to be implemented. Procedure for the Polling Station and one for the return of the material to the Municipal Office on Ordinary Polling Day.

Procedure for Paper Ballot Voting at the Polling Station

- Have the hall set up so there is social distancing between the DRO and Poll Clerks and another table set up for Candidate Agents.
- Candidate's agents will have to sanitize hands and wear a mask to look at the Poll Book.
- Sanitizer station will be set up as electors come into polling station. People entering the hall will need to sanitize their hands upon entering the building.
- Electors will be asked to wear a mask. (We need to decide if one will be provided for those that do not have one).

- Elector will walk to table where poll workers are and provide their name and address to the poll clerk for recording in the poll book and to have their name crossed of the list of electors.
- If electors do not want to wear a mask, they will be required to stay 6 feet away to provide the poll clerk with their information. This not only puts our election workers at risk but also does not allow for confidentiality.
- If the elector is not on the list of electors, an oath will have to be administered.
- The DRO will place the ballot and a pencil on the table and the elector can take them and proceed to the voting station.
- The elector will be told to throw the pencil in the garbage can after voting.
- The elector will be required to hand the ballot to the DRO so the DRO can remove the counterfoil.
- The DRO will give the ballot back to the elector to place in the ballot box.
- The elector will leave and the DRO and Poll Clerk will have to sanitize the surfaces that were touched (voting compartment & table where the elector picked up the ballot).
- Election workers will be required to sanitize their hands between each elector or between each transfer of paper if they feel the need to do so.
- The polling station will be closed at 7:00 p.m. The Election Support Person will remove all signage and social distancing marks from the floor while the DRO is counting the ballots.
- The DRO opens the ballot box and takes out all the ballots. They are divided into one pile for each office. The DRO reads the ballot and the Poll Clerk records it in the Poll Book. The ballots are then put in their respective envelopes.
- The election material is packed up and they head to the Municipal Office to return their material and have their poll book checked to ensure the count matches the figure they called into the office.

Procedure for Returning Material to Municipal Office at Close of Poll

- There will be at least 60 individuals coming to the Municipal Office to return material and get their material checked.
- There is not enough room to keep the social distance once workers arrive with their material. Depending on weather, some individuals will have to wait in their vehicles. It will be hard to monitor which workers are next if they are in their cars. A numbering procedure may need to be implemented and a staff person will be assigned to let the workers know when they can enter the building.
- Hand sanitizing stations will be set up when the poll workers arrive.

- Municipal staff will be assigned to take the election material, except the poll book, ballot box, time sheets, and expense reports. Staff will be required to sanitize their hands between each return.
- A staff person will have to be assigned to ensure social distancing is maintained.
- A reception desk will be set up where poll workers will come in and will be given a number. As well, the worker's name and number will be taken in case there needs to be a follow up in case a worker is tested positive for COVID.
- The poll worker will proceed into the Council Chambers where they will wait to have their number called.
- A staff person will be required to ensure social distancing is maintained in the Council Chambers.
- Once the worker's number is called, they will proceed to the location where their material will be checked. The number of staff checking will depend on the spaces that are available where 6 feet can be maintained. If social distancing cannot be maintained, a mask will be required to be worn. Each office will have to be set up with sanitizing material and each space (desk and chair) will need to be cleaned each time.
- Staff must find a location to store the ballot box and poll books until the next week when the official count is done.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Budget before COVID	Voting Method	Total Budget
\$189,000	Alternative Voting Only – estimating decrease of \$50,000	\$139,000
\$189,000	Alternative Voting Only – 4 additional polling stations	\$143,000
\$189,000	Alternative Voting & Paper Ballot with COVID Restrictions – estimating additional \$28,000 (does not include pricing for protective screens for each polling station table if required)	\$217,000

WORK PLAN

Alternative Voting Only – reduces workload of staff as follows:

- Eliminates the hiring and training of election workers
- Eliminates the preparation of polling station kits
- Eliminates the purchase of ballots and other election supplies
- Municipal staff will not be required to come into the office on election night to receive the election numbers, receive the election material at the close of the poll and to check that all the important documents such as ballot boxes, poll books, and lists of electors are there as well as confirming that the votes per candidate match the number that was called in and that the totals of the poll statement are correct.

CONCLUSION

If Council does not feel voting by paper ballot can be done in a low risk manner to the electors, election workers and Municipal staff, Council does have the option to rescind its decision to have alternative voting for Advance Polling Days and paper on Ordinary Polling Day and to make a new motion to do only telephone and internet voting for the election. Staff feels voting by telephone and internet in 2020 is the only way Council can ensure that electors, election workers and Municipal staff are protected against the spread of COVID.

The Agreement with Intelivote allows for the Municipality to change its voting days and to encompass telephone and internet voting from the start of the advance polling days right up until 7:00 p.m. on Ordinary Polling Day. There would be no additional cost for the extra days as the Agreement is based on number of electors on the Electors List and the number of voter letters sent out, and that work has to be done for the Advance Polling Days.

If the Province postpones the election at the last minute because of COVID, Intelivote has in their Agreement that they will continue to provide the obligated services described in their Agreement at no additional cost.

Prepared by: Leah Zinck & Sherry Conrad

Date: July 17, 2020

Reviewed by: Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO

Date: July 17, 2020

Approved by: Tom MacEwan, CAO

Date: July 21, 2020

