



## Staff Report

**Report Title: Election Method Price Comparison**

**Prepared By: Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk**

**Department: CLK**

**Date: Feb. 6, 2023**

**Report Number: CLK-2023-02-9**

**File Number: C11 CLK23**

### **Attachments:**

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### **Recommendation:**

That Huron-Kinloss Committee of the Whole hereby receives for information Report Number CLK-2023-02-09 prepared by Jennifer White, Clerk.

### **Background:**

Council requested information on the price comparison between a traditional paper poll-based election and using electronic voting methods. Staff are unable to provide a precise number at this time, as the variables involved can change dramatically between election periods.

Staff provide the following information for Council to consider with respect to the costs associated with different voting methods. *This is provided for information only*, as the method of voting for the next municipal and school board election is not required to be determined at this time.

### **Discussion:**

The Township of Huron-Kinloss has not held a traditional, polls based, paper-ballot election within the last 7 election cycles, having used the Vote by Mail Method in the 2000, 2003, and 2006 elections, and the Electronic Voting (phone and internet) in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022.

While some variables such as postage of voter information/ballots, elector maintenance software and advertising will be consistent across voting methods, there will be some differences in how costs are allocated and how soon results could be available. Many election costs do not vary regardless of the number of candidates or positions being contested.

Members of Council specifically requested that the price difference between e-vote counting and vote tallying by Township staff be investigated. This can not be examined independently, as the nature of electronic voting precludes Staff from physically counting each vote cast. To count a paper based ballot, the Township would require the vote by mail or traditional paper-based polls to be used as the election method. A brief synopsis of each type and how the election budget could be influenced is included below.

It should be noted that the method of voting is not an accurate predictor for voter turnout. This is more often influenced by the positions being contested, and the issues being discussed.

### **Vote by Mail**

This method of voting requires additional postage budget for returned mail. As well, additional Staff are required to manage the intake of ballots from the time they are mailed out until election day. Several forms of technology exist (scanners, tabulators) to minimize the time required, and improve the accountability and accuracy of tracking votes, such as scanners and tabulators. The Township appears to have used both physical counting and tabulator counting in the past for vote by mail.

According to records, when tabulators were not used, more than 60 temporary employees were used to assist with various aspects of vote counting. While vote counting can begin before the close of polls, the checks and balances to ensure the integrity of the vote will typically result in a delay in the results being announced.

Major costs include postage and wages which may be off-set by the cost of counting equipment.

### **Traditional Paper Based Polls**

The main costs associated with this type of voting are the human resources costs. Significantly more time must be dedicated by Staff to the management of this election method. Beyond the vote counting aspect, there is a significant increase to the time commitment to prepare for, setup and administer polling stations across the Township.

Temporary staff are required to administer regular and advanced polling at multiple locations across the Township. Each of these temporary staff must undergo extensive training. The same type of technology assists (scanner/tabulator) could be used to assist with voting counting, but multiple staff would need to be available across multiple locations for the entire time that voting is open. It could be expected that 60+ individuals would be required to work at polling stations and would need to be trained extensively to ensure the integrity of the vote.

Vote counting can't begin with this method, until after the polls have closed, and polls can't be closed until all eligible electors at the polling stations have voted, delaying the time when results can be announced.

Major costs include – setup, training and wages of election poll staff, wages for staff involved in the counting of ballots, which may be offset by technology costs and increased staff commitment to preparing for the election.

## **E-voting (Telephone/Internet Voting)**

The costs for the Service Provider are the most impactful in this type of method. Due to the nature of the voting method the election can be managed with fewer full time Staff and depending on other Township projects and workload, may require no temporary staff or additional technology.

## **Historic Election Costs**

Election costs\* for each year are outlined below:

2003 Vote by Mail \$23,776.22

2006 Vote by Mail \$30, 221.91

2010 E-vote \$40, 603.27

2014 E-vote \$28, 944.53

2018 E-vote \$28, 372.57

2022 E-vote \$29,815.63

\*These costs do not reflect regular or Overtime Staff wages.

## **Constraints**

It is difficult to accurately compare pricing across the years, due to fluctuations/increases in:

- Wage costs (since 2004 minimum wage pricing has more than doubled),
- Cost of goods (paper, printing, etc.),
- Cost of postage, and
- Advertising costs.

Despite many of the operational costs associated with administering an election increasing substantially in the last two decades, the budget impact from the election as noted above has remained relatively stable since 2003. Staff attribute this to the shift to electronic voting methods, the benefit of group pricing discounts with other County municipalities, and the reduction in the number of staff, staff time, and staff training committed to administering the election.

It is expected that Council could expect a dramatically decreased level of service across many operational areas, due to constraints imposed on staff to facilitate a traditional poll, paper-based election. This could be mitigated with the addition of a staff member dedicated to the election administration. Such an addition however would increase wage costs and it may be difficult to recruit an employee with the necessary skills for the limited time of the contract. This cost would be over and above the costs required to staff polling stations or count ballots.

## **Conclusion**

Electronic voting remains the most cost-effective method at this time, of administering an election. Staff will bring forward a report to outline any changes to expected costs closer to the next election cycle.

No decision is required from Council at this time. This report is provided for information at Council's request.

**Financial Impacts:**

No impact currently.

**Strategic Alignment / Link:**

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk

**Report Approved By:**

Mary Rose Walden, Chief Administrative Officer