



# The Corporation of the Township of Huron-Kinloss

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## Staff Report

**Report Title: Method of Voting 2026 Municipal Election**

**Date: Sep. 4, 2024**

**Report Number: CLK-2024-09-32**

**Department: Legislative Services**

**File Number: C11 CLK 24**

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

**Attachments: None**

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### **Recommendation:**

THAT Huron-Kinloss Committee of the Whole hereby receives for information Report CLK-2024-09-32 prepared by Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/ Clerk;

AND FURTHER that an appropriate by-law be brought forward to authorize alternative voting methods (telephone and internet voting) and to include advance voting via this method.

### **Background:**

Every four (4) years Municipal and School Board elections are held. The Clerk in every local municipality has the responsibility for preparing and conducting all municipal and school board elections as prescribed in the Municipal Election Act, 1996 (MEA).

The next regular Municipal and School Board Election will be held on Monday October 26, 2026. The MEA Section 42(1)(b) permits a Council of a local municipality to pass a by-law, by May 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of an election, to authorize electors to use alternative methods that do not require an elector to attend a voting place, such as internet and telephone voting.

Legislative Services staff, along with Clerks from across Bruce County have already started planning for the 2026 election. Staff are recommending that Council choose a method of voting for the 2026 election now, to secure the appropriate election vendor. To provide effective customer service during an election cycle, municipal election vendors do limit the number of municipalities that they will contract with.

It is anticipated that an early decision will permit municipalities to take advantage of more competitive and incentive pricing opportunities, and the ability to secure a preferred vendor before capacities are reached.

### **Discussion/Analysis/Overview:**

The Township has not used traditional paper polling methods in the last two decades, having used vote by mail beginning with the election in 2000, and each election thereafter until Electronic (telephone and internet) voting was implemented in 2010, and used for each election since (previous 4 election cycles).

Council received Report [CLK-2023-02-9 Election Method Price Comparison](#) following the completion of the 2022 municipal election. This report contrasted the costs of traditional paper poll-based election, vote by mail and electronic voting methods. The report concluded that electronic voting remains the most cost-effective method at this time of administering an election.

While the purpose of the report was to identify cost comparisons, as a matter of course, benefits and disadvantages of each voting method are also included.

A summary is included below:

### Vote by Mail

#### Advantages

- Flexibility for residents and non-residents ie. Property owners who reside elsewhere/seasonal populations
- Accessibility – persons with disabilities, illness, on vacation, or other groups who may find it difficult to visit a polling station on voting day can cast their ballot up to a week before the election.

#### Disadvantages

- Significant printing and mailing costs
- Increased staff costs processing ballots leading up to election day
- Increased staff time and costs to tabulate ballots on election day
- Results delayed during counting of ballots
- Generally, requires voters to select their candidate a week in advance of the election date to allow delivery time of cast ballot
- Heavy reliance on Canada Post

### Paper Based Polls

This method has not been used by the Township of Huron-Kinloss in the years since amalgamation formed the Township. No municipalities in Bruce County have used this method of voting within the last two election cycles. This voting method provides barriers to residents and non-residents who may find it difficult to attend at voting stations on voting day. This method is labour intensive as it requires temporary staff at each polling station and extensive training for those staff in advance of the election. There is additionally the cost of tabulators for each polling station and a delay in obtaining the results on election day.

### Telephone and Internet Voting

#### Advantages

- Voting commences 7-10 days before the election, and is open until 8:00 p.m. on election day, providing flexibility to electors on when to cast their ballot.
- Flexibility for residents and non-residents ie. Property owners who reside elsewhere/seasonal populations
- Accessibility – persons with disabilities, illness, on vacation, or other groups who may find it difficult to visit a polling station on voting day can cast their ballot from anywhere with internet or telephone access

- Allows electors to use their own devices or assistive technology to cast their ballot, as needed.
- Eliminates spoiled ballots, as the device prompts the elector if there is an overvote.
- Cost effective as it reduces printing, postage, staff time, facilities, and equipment compared to other voting methods.

Staff recommend that Council pass an appropriate by-law to authorize electors to use alternative voting methods (telephone and internet voting) and would include advanced voting through this voting method. The by-law would exclude proxy voting as each elector will have the opportunity to vote by internet or telephone.

Staff will continue to collaborate with Bruce County Clerks in obtaining an appropriate vendor. All the other Bruce County municipalities have already approved proceeding with internet/telephone voting.

**Financial Impacts:**

Funds are allocated to the Election Reserve Fund annually. These funds ensure there are appropriate funds available for the regular elections every four years, and any by-elections that may be required within those four years.

The 2022 election did not require the full transfer to reserve so there was a balance left over of \$1,811.80. In 2023 and 2024, \$10,000 was contributed to the reserve, with a current balance of \$21,811.80.

It is anticipated that the 2025 and 2026 budgets would include contributions of \$10,000 each. Any changes to voting method are likely to result in more substantial contributions being required as outlined in Report CLK-2023-02-9. There is incentive pricing for the municipalities in the same County to use the same vendor and method.

**Performance Measurement:**

The 2022 election had a 40.9% voter turnout using the internet and telephone voting method. The 2022 election had no acclamations, and a race occurred in each office and across all school boards.

**Strategic Area:**

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embrace a thriving rural lifestyle | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhance Municipal Service Delivery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for Inclusive Growth       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure Financial Stability                    |

**Strategic Goal: Strive for continuous improvement and increased efficiency**

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk

**Report Approved By:**

Jodi MacArthur, Chief Administrative Officer