

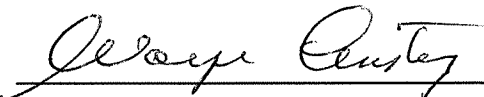


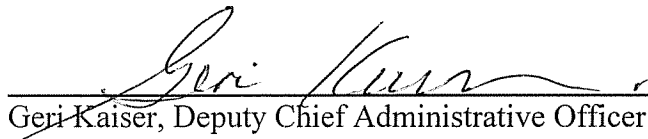
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**Committee of the Whole**  
**August 8, 2006**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
Wayne Anstey, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

  
Geri Kaiser, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** June 8, 2006

**SUBJECT:** **Complementary/Alternative Voting Methods for 2008 Municipal Elections**

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**ORIGIN**

On February 10, 2004, Halifax Regional Council approved a motion requesting that staff examine complementary voting alternatives in preparation for the 2008 Municipal Election. Further to this request the Municipal Clerk provided Council with a verbal update regarding this matter on October 18, 2005, indicating that a report would be submitted to Council in December 2005. An information report on the approach and status of the initiative was presented to Council December 13, 2005.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council approve a workshop to outline and discuss, in more detail, the options, risks and opportunities surrounding the adopting of complementary/alternative voting methods for the municipal elections of 2008 with a view to bringing forward a final recommendation.

## **BACKGROUND**

In order to determine voting options available to HRM an expression of interest was advertised and five (5) proponents made submissions. The purpose of the expression of interest was to obtain more specific information from suppliers of complimentary/alternative voting methods as to:

- (1) the interest, ability and qualifications of the vendor to provide alternative voting methods;
- (2) examine options and opportunities for implementation of alternative voting methods for future municipal elections presented by interested vendors;
- (3) evaluate the feasibility of proposals to partner with HRM for the provision of alternative voting methods for future municipal elections and/or special election;
- (4) investigate how the proponent of alternative voting solutions meet HRM objectives in considering such alternatives which include, but are not exclusive to:
  - (a) increasing access to voters within HRM
  - (b) increasing voter participation rates
  - (c) the cost effectiveness of alternative voting methods.

In addition staff considered how the proposed alternatives might serve to improve the speed in results tabulation and reporting in increasingly complex elections processes.

A staff evaluation committee was struck to review the submissions and evaluate the risks and opportunities presented to HRM through the responses to the EOI. The evaluation committee, included representatives of the Municipal Clerk's office, Information Services, Legal Services, Business Systems & Controls and Financial Services. Bernie White, Municipal Clerk, Cape Breton Regional Municipality agreed to sit on the review committee in an advisory capacity.

The Municipal Clerk will engage the Municipal Elections Officer - Chief Electoral Officer for the Province of Nova Scotia- in discussions regarding the opportunities presented in consideration of advancing alternative voting methods for HRM's municipal elections in 2008.

## **DISCUSSION**

The EOI determined that there are a number of alternative and complementary methods currently in use or trial in other jurisdictions.

### **Complementary Voting Options**

A number of advanced voting options are being used solely or in combination as an addition to traditional "in person" election day voting at a local polling stations.

- **Mail-in advanced voting**  
Mail-in voting advanced ballot utilizes current postal delivery methods.
- **Telephone advanced voting**  
Tele-voting is a automated process whereby citizens vote by phone through an IVR phone system (push 1 for, etc.). This system will require advanced registration of voters, PIN numbers and letters of instruction to voters to maintain security.
- **Internet advanced voting**  
Internet voting systems is a process whereby citizens cast their advance ballots over the internet. Internet voting systems require advanced registration of voters and PIN numbers to maintain security.

### **Alternative Voting Options**

Alternative voting options propose the replacement of the polling station voting locations with an alternative election process.

At least one vendor provided the option of replacing the current election process with a completely “real time” internet and phone voting alternative. Voters are issued a pin number and, go to their own computer or phone or to internet access points designated in their community (e.g., libraries, CAP sites, etc.) and cast their ballots electronically.

Several Canadian municipalities, such as St. John’s Newfoundland, have moved to a total mail-in ballot with positive citizen response and election cost savings.

### **Enabling Technology**

Several vendors supply an integrated election system that improves or enables a number of improvements to the elections process.

- **Integrated Election “Systems”**  
An integrated vendor supplied “elections software and consulting service” that includes technology to support an integrated voter list management, production of the increasingly complex ballots required for elections, and also serves to support the implementation of a number of voting methods such as telephone voting, mail-in, internet voting, ballot scanners and/or polling station touch screens consolidated through a vendor provided vote counting and reporting system.
- **Ballot Scanners**  
Ballot scanners, which can serve to substantially improve the speed of tabulating and reporting election results, are a tried and tested technology utilized in many jurisdictions

across Canada. Implementation of ballot scanners requires a reduction in the number of election day polling locations and is generally used along with a complementary voting option such as mail in or internet advanced voting.

### **Risks & Opportunities**

The evaluation committee reviewed the proposals and have determined that there are a number of factors which need careful consideration prior to recommending any one or combination of alternative or complementary system which would best serve the citizens of HRM.

#### *Security/Audit Ability*

Ensuring the confidence, security and integrity of the municipal election process, and the ability to effectively audit election results, is paramount when considering any change to the election process.

Detailed assurances regarding specific audit, security and compliance requirements in place to ensure electoral integrity would form part of the evaluation and contract with a vendor.

#### *Accessibility*

Selected options must be available to electors of HRM regardless of where they reside. HRM must be able to ensure the technology and infrastructure is in place to support the proposed solutions throughout the region.

#### *Public Acceptance*

In 2004 HRM conducted a phone survey to examine general public acceptance to the introduction of alternative voting options. The results were generally positive and very informative with 63% of the sample completely or mostly in favour of some form of electronic voting method (phone or internet) and 43% of the sample expressing their preferred voting method as internet or phone and 48% with in-person at the local polling station as their preferred voting method. Staff would look to Council to provide direction on options and public acceptance.

#### *Regulatory Requirements*

Under the Municipal Elections Act HRM will be required to enact a by-law enabling the preferred complementary/alternative voting option.

Consultation with the Provincial Government's Municipal Elections Officer will be necessary when addressing complementary methods as the method must accommodate those voters who must meet certain qualifications prior to voting on a particular matter. An example would be the African Nova Scotian member of the Halifax Regional School Board, and the HRM representatives to the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) which are within jurisdiction of the Education Act.

*Financial Implications*

There are financial implications for the implementation of complementary or alternative voting methods for the 2008 municipal elections.

Costing for a specific voting system would be dependent on a variety of factors such as; the number and type of voting options selected; the degree of integration; the number of traditional polling stations retained; and the final costing of the contract services provided by a vendor.

**Next Steps**

Because of the complexity of complementary or alternative voting options staff are seeking an opportunity to “workshop” options with Council and have a full discussion regarding the opportunities and challenges prior to forming a recommendation on a preferred approach for Council’s consideration. Following the workshop staff would:

- Bring a report with recommendation for Council’s consideration and direction
- Engage in a detailed RFP to support the requirements of the selected election process
- Contract with a vendor and initiate the election planning process for 2008
- Advance HRM’s enabling by-law

These actions should be completed by end of year 2007, allowing the necessary time to plan for the revised electoral methods and to implement an electoral training program and public education campaign well in advance of the 2008 municipal election.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget implications for the proposed recommendation of workshop and opportunities for adopting alternative or complementary voting methods for the municipal elections of 2008.

There are budget implications with the adoption of alternative or complementary voting options.

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality’s Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

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**ALTERNATIVES**

Council could enter into a full discussion of options and alternatives regarding alternative and/or complimentary voting methods.



Council could direct staff to bring forward a specific recommendation regarding alternative and/or complimentary voting methods for Council consideration without a workshop.

**ATTACHMENTS**


None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/agenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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