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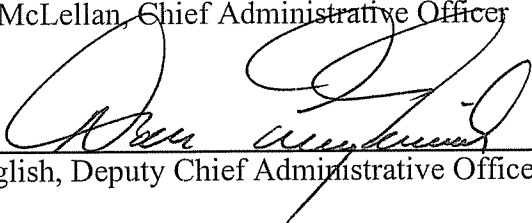
Halifax Regional Council
February 10, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer



Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 5, 2004

SUBJECT: Complementary Voting Alternatives for Municipal Elections

ORIGIN

At the January 13, 2004 meeting of Regional Council it was requested that staff examine complementary voting alternatives, including costs/savings and time lines for the next election and bring a report and/or an appropriate by-law for Council's consideration by February 10, 2004.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- 1) HRM not pursue complementary voting alternatives for the October 2004 municipal election.
- 2) Regional Council approve further exploration and study of complementary voting alternatives for use in future municipal elections prior to adopting and implementing any of the currently available electronic or mail-in options.

BACKGROUND

Section 146A (1) of the Municipal Elections Act permits municipal councils to authorize voters to vote by mail or another voting method through the development of a by-law which would govern the process and method. At the meeting of Regional Council on January 13, 2004, discussion suggested that alternative methods of voting may be put in place for the October 16, 2004 election.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the traditional paper ballot utilized by voting in person at a polling location, there are a number of methods currently in limited use in other jurisdictions which provide the citizen with various options of casting their vote. These include:

- **Mail-in voting**
Mail-in voting utilizes current postal delivery methods. This system requires registration of voters, PIN numbers and letters of instruction to voters to maintain security.
- **Televoting**
Televoting is a fully automated process whereby citizens vote by phone. This system also requires registration of voters, PIN numbers and letters of instruction to voters to maintain security.
- **Internet voting**
Internet voting systems which may be comprised of:
 - a) poll site voting where traditional election locations are augmented with Internet technology;
 - b) kiosk voting which involves terminals similar to using banking machines (ATM) which may be placed at malls and other non traditional locations;
 - c) remote voting which permits the citizen to vote from any Internet terminal, including home or work.

Internet voting systems also require the registration of voters and PIN numbers to maintain security.

The overall interest in using internet voting or mail-in voting methods focuses on the desire to make voting more convenient for the citizen and more efficient in the tallying process. It is desirable to explore alternatives and complementary methods which would increase citizen participation in the democratic process.

Much of the information currently available within Canada regarding electronic and mail-in voting is being gained from the Ontario experience. However, the benefits and constraints to these methods cannot be easily translated to Nova Scotia and the HRM as Ontario's Election Act permits 'non resident' voting which Nova Scotia does not permit.

Issues

There are a number of issues which need to be carefully researched prior to recommending any one optimal alternative or complementary system which would serve the citizens of HRM.

Security

Ensuring the confidence, security and integrity of the municipal election process is paramount when considering any change. There are conflicting views as to the current state of ensuring the security of online and televoting systems for broad based government elections. The first trials in the United States are being conducted during the primaries and in Canada several Ontario municipalities have begun to move to online voting.

Complying with regulatory and election requirements

Consultation with the Provincial Government's Municipal Election Officer would 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.

Costs

Without fully scoping the approach or extent of complementary voting alternatives, only high level pricing estimates are available. Based on the costs of implementing televoting and online voting options, HRM should expect incremental additional costs in the range of \$4-\$6 per eligible voter. This would mean between \$1 and \$1.5 million of additional costs to provide these options, although competitive bidding through an RFP process may substantially reduce those costs. At this time complementary voting alternatives are utilized to provide new channels to encourage voter participation. The cost of implementing alternatives would be over and above the costs associated with running the 2004 municipal election according to past practices until such time as solely electronic voting is deemed acceptable.

Steps required to implement complementary voting alternatives for the October election.

The Municipal Clerk's Office and Information Technology staff have begun to discuss and identify some of the physical infrastructure as well as the technological, financial, logistical and human resource implications which would need to be considered as part of the process. Time lines are very short as this is an election year. Consideration of the issues outlined above, the process of by-law creation, and procurement/tendering time lines make changes to the current voting system unadvisable for the 2004 municipal elections.

The steps necessary to implement complementary voting alternatives are:

- 1) Identify the requirements for complementary voting alternatives
- 2) Develop an RFP
- 3) Invite submissions
- 4) Evaluate submissions
 These steps are a 3 to 6 months initiative.
- 5) Test and Implement the new voting methods
 This step could take between 4 to 8 months.
- 6) Amend appropriate bylaws to accommodate complementary voting alternatives
- 7) Educate the public on the process
- 8) Enumeration to establish eligible voters

Based on the timeline outlined above, the minimum time to implement new alternatives is 7 to 8 months. However, this is a new technology and the process for conducting elections has not been fully implemented anywhere in Canada. A quick implementation of new technology carries the maximum risk and there is no contingency should anything go wrong to prevent challenges to the election process.

Next Steps

The Municipal Clerk's Office has initiated a corporate questionnaire designed to better understand the public support for and or issues regarding electronic voting. Electronic voting requires a great level of security and resources in order to ensure that the voter maintain confidence in the electoral process.

Should Council approve the recommendations as contained in this report, the Municipal Clerk's Office will conduct the October 16, 2004 municipal election according to past practices. The public will be provided with ongoing information regarding the voting process, eligibility, and polling locations. This information will be available in the print media and on the HRM web site, as we continue to advise the voters and candidates at all stages of the elections process.

Staff will further explore opportunities for complementary voting alternatives for use in future municipal elections prior to adopting and implementing any of the currently available electronic or mail in options.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications for the proposed recommendations.

There are significant cost implications, estimated at \$ 1,000,000 to \$1,500,000, to the implementation of any complementary voting alternatives for the October 2004 election.

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.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no viable alternatives for the October 2004 municipal election without incurring significant risk.

Council may choose to have staff investigate the viability of implementing alternative voting options for by-elections which may occur subsequent to the 2004 general municipal election.

ATTACHMENTS

None

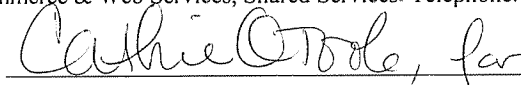
Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

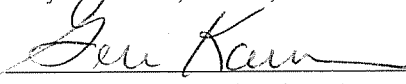
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