

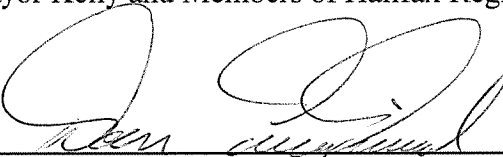


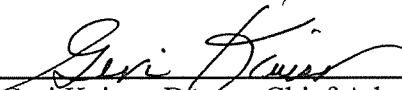
PO Box 1749  
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Committee of the Whole  
January 9, 2007

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

**SUBMITTED BY:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Geri Kaiser, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer - Corporate Services  
and Strategy

**DATE:** December 4, 2006

**SUBJECT:** Voting Options - Municipal Election 2008

### **ORIGIN**

February 10, 2004, Halifax Regional Council approved a motion requesting that staff examine complementary voting alternatives in preparation for the 2008 Municipal and School Board Election.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Regional Council consider the two proposed advanced voting options, mail-in ballot and internet/phone, contained herein and determine the option most appropriate for the 2008 Municipal and School Board Election.

## **BACKGROUND**

On February 10, 2004, Halifax Regional Council approved a motion requesting that staff examine complementary voting alternatives in preparation for the 2008 Municipal and School Board 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. A high level presentation outlining the variety of voting options was presented at Committee of the Whole on August 8, 2006.

Given the complexity of voting options Council referred the Committee of the Whole presentation to a workshop in order to have a full discussion regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with the various options. This workshop took place on November 24<sup>th</sup>.

Following the Workshop, staff committed to provide recommendations to Council and once a decision was rendered, staff would advance HRM's enabling by-law, prepare a detailed RFP which would support the selected voting method, and initiate the election planning process for 2008.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the presentation the following complementary voting options were submitted for Council to consider:

- 1) maintain the status quo election process
- 2) adding ballot scanning technology and supporting software at polling locations to the current voting process
- 3) an advanced mail-in ballot
- 4) an advanced internet/phone ballot
- 5) both advanced mail-in and internet/phone ballots with supporting integrated election systems software

Staff also outlined during the presentation the following alternative voting options which would replace the current voting process:

- 6) internet/phone only process
- 7) mail-in only voting process

The following principles and objectives were used to evaluate the options:

- the transparency, integrity and accountability of the election process is the paramount consideration in evaluating voting options and changes to the current election process
- increased voter access should be equitable across all areas of HRM
- options considered should have a positive impact on voter participation
- consideration be given to improved speed of reporting election results

During the workshop Councillors suggested that staff consider adding an advanced voting option for the 2008 election that would:

- improve and replace the current proxy voting system
- increase voter access equitably across HRM
- allow HRM to evaluate and mitigate any risks associated with implementing gradual change to the election process
- retain the current election day voting process encompassing dedicated polls

Staff have committed to enhancing the voting process through better public awareness and education leading up to the event. Given the input received, the following table outlines the staff evaluation and recommendation on implementing an advanced voting option for the 2008 Municipal and School Board Election.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Option 1 Advanced Mail-In Ballot with Status Quo election day</b>	<b>Option 2 Advanced Internet/Phone Ballot with Status Quo election day</b>
Accessibility for voters across all HRM	Yes	Yes (with both phone & internet options)
Convenience for voters	Yes	Yes
Can replace current proxy system	Yes	Yes
Received well by voting public (based on 2004 Corporate Research Inc response)	Less acceptable	Most acceptable
Cost Effective	Yes	Yes
Validation	Medium- Voter validation issues similar to status quo election process	Medium-Voter validation issues similar to status quo election process
Security	Medium Risk-Reliance on third party for security of ballots offset with significant penalty for improper handling	High Risk-Reliance on third party for adequate equipment, computer security access, data transfer and programming functionality
Ability to Audit	Low Risk-Recounts possible	Medium Risk-Recounts not possible; extensive testing prior, during and after election to verify process worked as described
Implemented in other jurisdictions	Yes	Yes
<b>Overall Rating</b>	<b>Proven &amp; Acceptable</b>	<b>Proven &amp; Acceptable</b>

Staff are confident that either an advanced mail-in ballot or an advanced internet/phone ballot can be implemented along with a traditional election day event for the 2008 Municipal and School Board election.

At this time staff would not recommend adding both mail-in advanced voting and internet/phone advanced voting options due to the additional cost and also the increased risk to the election process.

It should be noted that adding any advanced voting option will not assist in improving the speed of election results. It does address the other desired outcomes of the evaluation criteria.

### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

The budget estimate for the 2008 municipal election, including either an advanced mail-in or an internet/phone advanced voting option is approximately \$1.4 million. At the current rate of annual transfer to the Election Reserve Q313), the balance will be \$1.0 million at March 31, 2008. An additional transfer of \$400,000 will be required to implement either option. It is proposed that the additional transfers be split over the next two fiscal years with an additional \$200,000 in 2007/2008 budget process and \$200,000 in the 2008/2009 budget process. These additional transfers would be subject to approval in the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 business planning/budgeting processes.

Assuming the Halifax Regional School Board and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) provide the same level of funding as received in 2004 there may be recoveries of up to \$200,000 to offset these budget increases. However, this offsetting revenue is not assured at this time.

The estimate is based on the high level pricing provided by vendors through the request for expressions of interest for voting options. The estimate is consistent with the election planning information provided by other Canadian municipalities which have implemented advanced voting options. The estimate represents an election cost of approximately \$5.00 per eligible voter which would position HRM well within election costs reported from similar Canadian municipalities. The final cost for the provision of an advanced voting option will be determined through an RFP and contract with an election systems vendor and from the more detailed election planning process. The proposed budget provides the high-end estimate for planning purposes.

### **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**

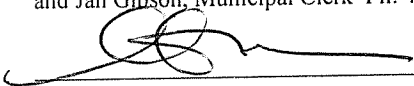
Council may choose to continue with the status quo for the 2008 Municipal and School Board election or recommend other voting options which may have an impact on the budget implications outlined in this report.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Voting Options Summary Sheet

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.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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Financial Approval by:   
Catherine Sanderson, Senior Manager, Financial Services, 490-1562

# Complementary Options (and Status Quo)

# 1

(No Change)

## Status Quo Election

### PROS

- The "known" way of running elections
- A substantial number of citizens (48% from 2004 CCR survey) give "in-person at the polls" as their preferred voting method.

### CONS

- As elections become more complex - i.e. provincial referendum, African Nova Scotia/Acadian and French School Board opt in scenarios, boundary changes etc. - increases time/costs, effort & potential for error in retaining current practises & primarily paper/people efforts.
- As complexity likelihood of counting errors increases
- As complexity increases results reporting time increases
- Status quo will do nothing to increase voter participation (without increased advertising)
- A significant percentage of voters are looking to change to Alternative Voting options (CCR poll)

**RISK** Audit Risk - Moderate

### Financial implications:

Traditional elections are expensive and are becoming more so as complexity increases

# 2

(Relatively Modest Change)

## Move to Vote Scanner Technology at all Polling Locations MAY require reducing the number of Polling Locations

Rest of election day would be traditional - paper ballots (require specific paper/layout etc. to be read by scanners). Voter casts their ballot then returns to the ballot scanner (staffed by elections official) to run their ballot through (like placing it in the traditional ballot box). Scanner picks up over/under voted ballots, errors etc., and gives voter a second opportunity to correct voting error or proceed.

### PROS

- Tabulates results as voters vote so substantially speeds up results time.
- Reduces ballot counting errors
- Represents a gradual change to elector

### CONS

- May require reducing the number of voting locations (to afford the rent & staff scanners)
- Some electors distrust voting machines
- Vendor cost for specific ballot creation and paper required to be read by scanner
- Not likely to result in any increased participation rate, unless combined with some alternate form of advance voting.

### RISK

- Low
- Retains paper ballots for audit
- Relies on electricity
- Transportation & security of equipment an added risk area

### Financial implications:

Affordability of implementing ballot scanners is directly relational to the number of voting locations. Requires training for election officials.

# 3

(Modest Change)

## Advanced Mail in Ballot Election Day - Status Quo (paper based voters lists etc., same # of polling stations, locations, same staff requirements, counting & reporting procedure)

- Requires a process to opt into advanced mail in voting and issue voting mail forms

### PROS

- Added convenience for citizens
- Eliminates proxy vote
- Relatively easy to do
- Modest change
- May increase voter participation

### CONS

- Does nothing to increase speed of vote count/reporting
- Adds an additional location/staff requirement (sending out & counting mail in ballots) - complexity

### RISK

- Moderate - No direct way to audit who mails in the ballot
- No more than current process
- Need to ensure Election day voters lists have all advanced voters removed (additional risk point introduced)
- Can be mitigated by legislation re: mail fraud, etc.

### Financial implications:

Additional costs will be incurred to add the mail in option: approx. \$3.00 per ballot package plus ballot preparation costs plus ballot scanner rental (for mail in ballot counting) plus additional staffing for sending out and counting mail in ballots.

# Complementary Options (con't.)

## 4

### (Relatively Modest Change)

**Advanced Internet/Phone Ballot Election Day - Status Quo** (paper based voters lists etc., same # of polling stations, locations, same staff requirements, counting & reporting procedure)

- Requires a process to opt into advanced internet/phone voting and issuing secure PINs

#### PROS

- Added convenience for citizens
- Eliminates proxy vote
- May increase voter participation among youth/young adult voters (some experience say yes - but modest)
- A significant percentage of voters cite internet (31%) and phone (12%) as their preferred voting method (CRA 2004 survey)

#### CONS

- In a re-count situation only have electronic document for this section of the election
- Does nothing to increase speed of vote count/reporting
- Adds an additional cost to the election for contracting with provider for the advanced internet/phone ballot
- Is a relatively new concept for HRM voters

#### RISK

- Moderate/High - Need to determine the practise for audit from vendor
- Need to ensure Election day voters lists have had all internet/phone advance voters removed (additional risk point introduced)
- Can be mitigated

**Financial implications:** Additional (add on) costs. Final price yet to be determined - ranges from several dollars per voter who elects to cast internet/phone ballot to \$3.00 per eligible voter depending on vendor & approach.

## 5

### (Considerable Change)

**Engage Integrated Election Software Solution Provider as a "Technology Enabler" of Advanced Internet and/or Mail in ballot**

- Electronic "real-time" voters list
- Vote anywhere polling locations
- Ballot Scanner Technology
- Enables advanced internet/phone and/or mail in ballots
- Integrated back-end database used to tabulate results from all sources

#### PROS

- Integrated election software solutions are not new
- Integrated elections done in Peterborough 2006 election
- Better enables a number of alternative voting options
- Speeds up results tabulation and reporting

#### CONS

- HRM hasn't used this type of Integrated election software - new to HRM
- Substantially increases IT election resource requirements and risks
- Increases complexity

#### RISK High

**Financial implications:** Highest relative cost

# Alternative Options

## 6

(Considerable Change)

### Real Time Internet/Phone Voting as the ONLY method of Voting

On election day citizens go to their own computer, phone or internet access points designated to their community (e.g. libraries, CAP sites, etc.) to cast their ballots

- Exclusive "real time" voting.

#### PROS

- Physically accessible to almost all voters (phone or internet access)
- Will be accepted and embraced by some voters (2004 CCR survey 63% mostly/completely favoured of internet/phone voting - 32% mostly/completely opposed - don't know 5%)
- 43% of voters (2004 CCR survey) picked internet and/or phone voting as their preferred method - second only to in-person at local polling station (48%)
- Will speed up election reporting & results
- Local expertise in vendor
- Increase in election tracking & services to candidates

#### CONS

- A fully "real time" phone/web based election has not been held yet in Canada on any large scale (has been done in UK and Australia)
- Won't have the same physical presence (people, poll location etc.) on election day
- A "quantum" change to current election practise.
- May not be accepted by a significant percentage of citizens (2004 CCR survey 63% mostly/completely favoured of internet/phone voting - 32% mostly/completely opposed - don't know 5%)
- Will have most legal hurdles to surmount - complexity of enabling by-law/approval by provincial returning officer/potential challenges to results, etc.

**RISK** Audit Risk - High

Event risk - High (require load/volume etc. testing of vendor's technology solution to provide appropriate comfort level)

**Financial implications:** May be extremely cost effective, substantially reducing election day staffing costs

## 7

(Considerable Change)

### Mail-in Ballots as the ONLY voting method

Ballots are mailed directly to eligible voters; voters either mail back or drop off return ballots, which are held securely until election day.

On election day ballots are opened & scanned & results tabulated

#### PROS

- Physically accessible to almost all voters
- Successful example in St. John's NFLD 2005 election

#### CONS

- Significant change for voters
- Requires substantial education & advertising

#### RISK

Moderate to High

Concerns re: who returns the ballot or ballots going to ineligible voters mitigated by focus on the condition of the voters list and election and mail fraud laws.

#### Financial Implications:

Cost effective form of running an election. At \$3.00 per ballot is comparable to current election costs.