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Item No. 3
Halifax Regional Council
January 15, 2013

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed by 
Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 20, 2012

SUBJECT: Review of the 2012 Municipal and School Board Elections

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Summary report for the 2012 Municipal and School Board Elections.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Municipal Elections Act of Nova Scotia specifies that; 4 (1) The council shall appoint a returning officer, who may be the clerk, another municipal employee or another person who is not a municipal employee, to conduct all regular and special elections required under this Act.

By motion of March 6, 2012 Halifax Regional Council appointed the Municipal Clerk as the Returning Officer for the 2012 Municipal and School Board Elections.

BACKGROUND

HRM's Municipal and School Board Elections were held on October 20, 2012. The Municipal and School Board elections are required to be conducted in accordance with the legislative requirements of the Municipal Elections Act of Nova Scotia.

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DISCUSSION

Following each election debriefs are held to look at issues and opportunities in order to begin the process of planning for the next Municipal and School Board elections to be held in October 2016.

- HRM Debrief – October 30, 2012
- Debrief with Elections Nova Scotia (ENS) – November 6, 2012
- Debrief of Returning Officers with Service Nova Scotia & Municipal Relations (SNMR)- November 23, 2012

Participation

Of the 298,209 eligible voters 110,114 voters cast ballots for an overall participation rate of 36.93%. Of the total number of voters 66,272 (60.18%) of those who voted cast their ballots electronically during the advanced electronic poll. Since amalgamation voter participation in HRM has remained fairly stable with no significant shift in voter demographics. Voter participation has declined generally federally, provincially and municipally during the same period.¹

Voter Participation Rates – HRM Municipal and School Board Elections				
1995 – 43.65% 2 days of in person advanced polls	2000-47.64% 2 days of in person advance polls	2004- 48.39% 2 days of in person advanced polls Plebiscite on Sunday shopping	2004- 36.2% 2 days of in person advanced polls 4 days of electronic voting – 28.4% of voters cast their ballots electronically	2012-36.9% 2 weeks of electronic voting – no in person advance polls – 60% of voters cast their ballots electronically

Elector/Voters List

One of the challenges for the election office and candidates was the state of the provincial voters' list. Municipalities in Nova Scotia are required under the Municipal Elections Act (MEA) to conduct enumeration or use the provincial voters list. Enumeration is an expensive undertaking which is estimated, in the case of HRM, to cost the equivalent of running the entire election (\$1.6million). The Provincial voters list is provided to HRM in return for a reciprocal agreement to provide voter revisions to ENS following the election.

¹ Provincial Election Participation Results (from Elections Nova Scotia web site) – 1993/75.4%; 1998/69.5%; 2003/65.6%;2006/59.8%; 2009/57.95%

Federal Election Participation Results (from Elections Canada web site) – Oct 1993/69.9%; June 1997/67%; Nov 2000/61.2%; June 2004/60.9%; Jan 2006 64.7%; Oct 2008/58.8%; May 2011/61.1%

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At the provincial debrief returning officers from across the province indicated the state of the provincial list was a concern. Elections Nova Scotia have committed to improvements in this area. In addition Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations (SNMR) will be requested to undertake a review of the Municipal Elections Act including enabling municipalities to extend the time for revisions and to consider the use of voter registration for future Municipal and School Board elections.

Electronic Voting

As noted previously almost 61% of all voters in the 2012 Municipal and School Board elections cast their ballots electronically during the advanced voting period from October 6, 2012 to October 18, 2012. Approximately ten percent (10%) voted by phone and ninety percent (90%) over the internet. Electronic voting has become a preferred approach for many electors.

During the advanced voting period HRM hosted Elections BC, Elections Alberta and Elections Nova Scotia and ten (10) municipalities from across Canada who have an interest in electronic voting. The experience proved beneficial to all involved, including HRM. Subsequently the province of Alberta has agreed to conduct a pilot project with electronic voting in the City of Edmonton and three rural municipalities in the 2014 municipal elections. In addition fifteen (15) municipalities in Nova Scotia conducted their elections using electronic voting either in whole or in part. Overall satisfaction rating with electronic voting in urban and rural municipalities across Nova Scotia was rated as high.

The on-line self-serve look up functions – “Are you on the voters list” and “Where do I vote?” Implemented for the 2012 election were well received by voters and well used by candidates and electors. The voter management system² used to manage voter information for the electronic voting portion of the election was an excellent tool that can be utilized more broadly to manage voter records regardless of the approach taken to conducting the 2016 elections.

Recommendations will be forthcoming in 2015 to allow sufficient time for Council to debate and determine the direction provided to the election office for conducting the 2016 Municipal and School Board elections.

Election Workers

In 2012 there were sixteen (16) registration locations and one hundred and four (104) polling locations staffed by over 1,200 election workers. HRM was successful in recruiting returning and new election workers and in having sufficient contingency plans in place for election-day polls. Many of the new workers were recruited through the use of social media, which was a new approach in 2012. With new demands and changing legislation the training and use of election-day supervisors and workers will be a significant focus in the planning for the 2016 elections.

² Provided by Datafix Canada of Toronto, Ontario

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Candidate Support

Providing direction and support to candidates was priority of the HRM Returning Officer for the 2012 elections. Candidate workshops were conducted in April and May 2012 with over 100 interested residents attending. A total of eight-seven (87) candidates who were officially nominated for Mayor, Regional Council, Halifax Regional School Board and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. Regular updates information and reports were provided to candidates electronically during the election period. In 2016 the Election Office will be considering launching a candidate portal that will enable candidates to access forms, information, reports and voters lists electronically at their convenience, with cost savings anticipated in production of election materials.

Results Reporting

Electronic voting provides the opportunity to provide real time information on voter participation and demographics (age, gender, location) that is not available using traditional voting methods. The results of electronic voting are available immediately and can be readily accessed by candidates, the public and the media. The speed and detail of electronic voting results has set a new standard and expectation for real-time reporting of election results. Participation rates and voter demographics for the advanced electronic poll are provided as Attachment 1 of this report. Complete election results can be found on line at www.halifax.ca/election/ElectionArchives.

In the 2012 Municipal and School Board elections results reporting from in-person polls were slow due to inadequate resourcing of phone lines and in the volume of results to be entering into the results data base. Improvements to the speed and method of reporting election results from the traditional polls is expected and required for the 2016 municipal elections. Those improvements are expected to be achieved by placing the entry of the results at the polls using hand-held devices. HRM's ICT Section has received the formal request from the elections office to initiate this work for the 2016 Municipal and School Board Elections along with a review of the results reporting system.

Budget

The projected budget for conducting the 2012 Municipal and School Board elections was \$1.6 million dollars or approximately \$5 per eligible elector. Federal and Provincial elections costs run at approximately \$10 per eligible voter.

The 2012 Municipal and School Board elections will be within budget. In addition there will be a cost recovery of \$400,000 from the provincial Department of Education for conducting the Halifax Regional School Board and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial elections.

HRM currently allocates \$400,000 annually to support the Election Reserve. In the 2013/2014 budget process the Election Office will be recommending that annual contributions to the Election Reserve be increased to \$450,000 to meet increased costs and expectations anticipated in conducting the 2016 Municipal and School Board elections.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Municipal and School Board Elections are a significant public event which underpins the democratic process and endeavors to engage citizens in the process of electing representatives to Regional Council and School Boards.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Participation and Demographics, 2012 Advanced Electronic Poll

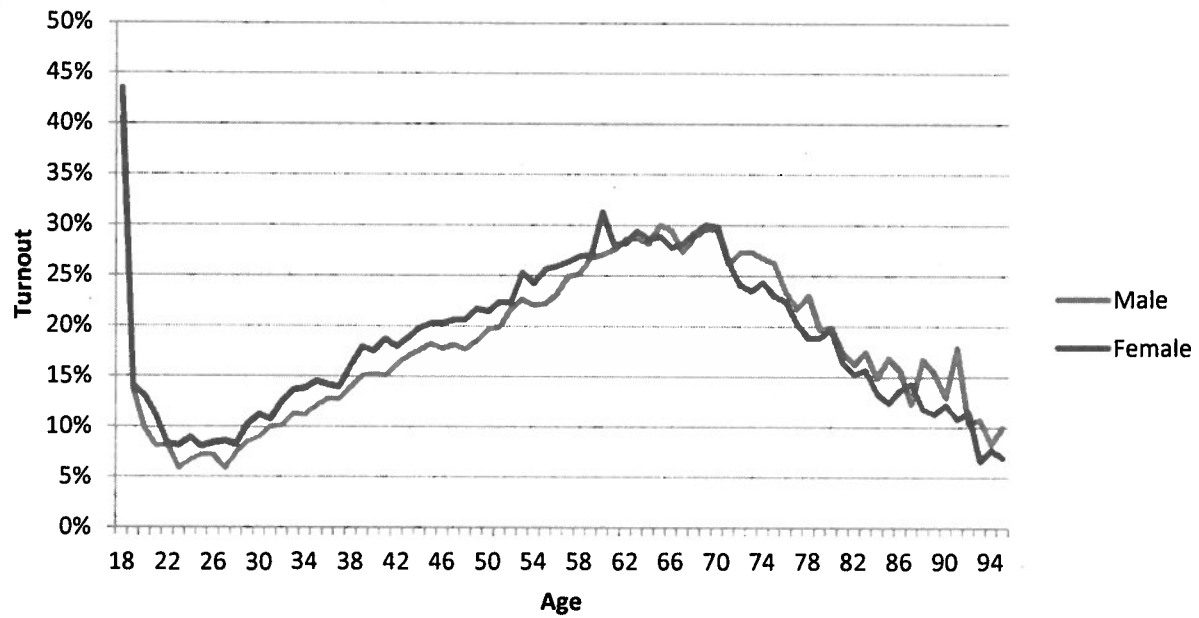
A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared & Approved by: Cathy J. Mellett, Municipal Clerk/Returning Officer, 490-6456

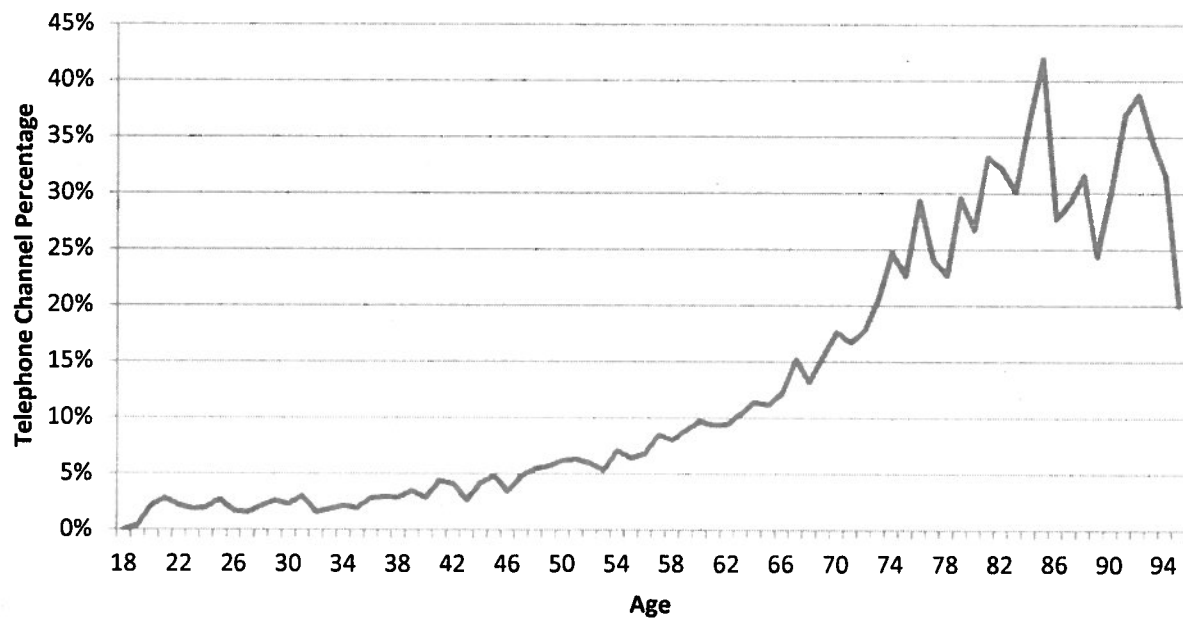
Attachment 1 –2012 Electronic Advanced Poll Voter Participation and Demographics

District	Eligible Voters (as of Oct 19, 2012)	Total overall % of voter turnout	Total # voted in the Electronic Advanced Poll	% eligible voters who voted in the Electronic Advanced Poll
1	15,669	41.48%	3,981	25.41%
2	20,027	37.79%	4,059	20.27%
3	20,884	39.82%	4,881	23.37%
4	19,897	37.96%	5,071	25.49%
5	21,138	42.85%	5,114	24.19%
6	19,238	34.82%	4,394	22.84%
7	17,912	33.51%	3,529	19.70%
8	19,789	44.46%	4,975	25.14%
9	20,841	36.42%	3,757	18.03%
10	18,855	31.77%	3,431	18.20%
11	18,347	33.65%	3,615	19.70%
12	18,794	34.87%	4,157	22.12%
13	17,880	39.93%	4,747	26.55%
14	15,373	28.16%	2,725	17.73%
15	16,638	36.17%	3,435	20.65%
16	16,927	38.65%	4,401	26.00%
All Districts	298,209	36.93% (110,114 voters)	66,272 (60.18% of voters)	22.22%

Turnout by Age and Gender



Telephone Voting by Age



Turnout by Age

