

## Staff Report

**To:** Mayor Bazinet and Members of Council  
**Report From:** Andrea Fisher, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk  
**Meeting Date:** April 28, 2025  
**Subject:** Alternative Voting Methods – 2026 Municipal and School Board Election  
**Attachment(s):** 1) AMCTO Modernizing the Municipal Elections Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**Recommendation:**

That Goderich Town Council receives this report for information;

And That Council authorizes the use of internet and telephone-based voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election;

And That a By-Law be brought forward at a future meeting for consideration;

And That Council authorizes staff to proceed in a Joint Municipal Request for Proposal (RFP) process with lower-tier Huron County municipalities for election service providers to submit a joint proposal to provide a telephone and internet-based voting system for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.

**Background and Analysis:**

The next Municipal and School Board Election will take place on October 26, 2026. The *Municipal Elections Act* (“MEA”) provides Municipal Clerks the authority to establish policies and procedures that apply to how the municipal election is conducted in their jurisdiction.

All lower tier municipalities in the County of Huron chose to implement telephone and internet voting for the 2018 and 2022 Municipal Elections. All lower tier municipalities in the past have utilized the same telephone and internet voting solution (Simply Voting) and election management system (Datafix). The services were procured through a joint RFP, developed and issued by the Huron County Election Working Group, and approved by each of the respective Councils. This approach has served to eliminate voter confusion and provides the benefit of group procurement.

The Town of Goderich used internet and telephone voting for the 2018 and 2022 election and allowed for increased consistency in vote counting over a manual counting process and supported the reporting of unofficial election results on Election Night. Internet voting modernizes the election experience for voters and offers a convenient, accessible and secure way to cast a vote without the need to attend a physical voting location and inherently offers flexible voting times – you can vote anywhere, anytime. Electors receive a Voters Information

Letter in the mail providing the date of the voting period, voting website and their personal, unique voting PIN to cast their ballot, along with a telephone number to call, in order to choose their method to cast their vote. Opportunities are available to confirm selections at each race, and the review and confirmation of all selections before casting votes. Once the vote has been cast, individuals receive confirmation and are no longer able to use their PIN to re-enter the system. The same principles are applied with telephone voting.

Internet voting offers benefits such as the integration of accessible technology and enables the voter to identify errors in the ballot selections prior to casting a ballot. This voting method also allows for automated election processes like online ballot processing, striking names off the voters list, and an effective and rapid count of the votes at the close of voting. For those that still like to “vote in person” during the voting period the Town of Goderich in the past has provided, during the voting period, the use of telephones and laptops for voters to electronically cast their vote, this was also provided on Election Day. It is a similar set-up to in person paper ballots, where the voter goes behind the voting screen and instead of using paper, they use a laptop. Election results are instantaneous and accurate and eliminates the potential for spoiled ballots, as voters are unable to submit a vote that has not been completed correctly. All platforms are designed to take accessibility requirements into consideration, such as specific colours to accommodate those who are colour blind, and clear voice selection for audio prompts. As with the last election, a laptop or similar device, and a telephone will be made available at the municipal office during the voting period, during regular hours for those who are unable to get access to a computer or a telephone to cast their vote, and on Election Day.

In the past there have been challenges using the MPAC provided voters’ list. An updated voters’ list has historically been a challenge; the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) solicits information from property owners prior to municipal elections, however the failure of property owners to update their personal information with MPAC resulted in their name not being on the voters’ list. The number of corrections to the voters’ list made administering internet and telephone voting more difficult and the Clerk’s Department worked with many voters to correct data errors, such as incorrect birthdate, to allow them to vote. As of January 1, 2024, Elections Ontario has taken over responsibility for the Voters’ List, which is anticipated to significantly improve the accuracy of the information on the list.

### **Statistics between 2014 and 2022**

2014 - Vote by Mail - total of 3540 votes cast, 53.14% voter turnout.

2018 – Telephone/Internet Voting – Total of 3,905 votes cast, 61.6% voter turnout

2022 – Telephone/Internet Voting – Total of 3,421 votes cast, 52.2% voter turnout

There are several factors that impact voter turnout including age, weather, political interest, candidate acclamations, etc.

## **AMCTO Advocacy for Updates to the Municipal Elections Act (MEA)**

In April 2024, AMCTO made a submission to the Province with the goal to improve and modernize the MEA and its regulations. A copy of this submission is attached to this report for reference. AMCTO's submission package included recommendations focusing on three themes 1) Strengthening Public Trust and Electoral Integrity 2) Enhancing Accountability and Transparency while Making Compliance and Enforcement Easier and 3) Permissive Legislation that Reduces Administrative Complexity. The Province has not made any amendments to the MEA since 2021.

## **Huron County Elections Working Group**

The Huron County Elections Working Group consists of staff from each lower tier municipality as well as the County who share ideas, experiences, challenges, interpretations and documents to help guide each municipality in meeting the requirements of the MEA. The 2026 Huron County Elections Working Group held its first meeting on January 16, 2025. The group was supportive of continuing with the use of telephone and internet voting for the 2026 Election and issuing a joint RFP for a telephone and internet voting system. If Council approves, the group will collaborate on a joint RFP for an election service provider to provide internet and telephone voting to ensure the best quotes possible for the benefit of all members of the Working Group. The Municipality of Central Huron has agreed to take lead on the joint RFP and receive and open in accordance with their Procurement By-Law. The Working Group will meet to review submissions and presentations. This collaboration across Huron County has been a tremendous resource and will continue to promote the sharing of services when possible while increasing consistency among Huron County municipalities. Voters and candidates will receive similar election information, regardless of which lower tier municipality they live in.

### **Linkage:**

- Corporate Strategic Plan Priority #2: Welcoming and Caring Community

### **Financial Impacts and/or Source of Funding:**

Council contributes \$10,000.00 annually towards the Elections Reserve. The estimated budget for the 2026 election is \$38,000 which will be confirmed as part of the 2026 budget process.

### **Consulted With:**

Huron County Elections Working Group

**Approved By:**

Janice Hallahan, Chief Administrative Officer

Andrea Fisher, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk