



## MUNICIPALITY OF **West Elgin**

### Staff Report

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**Report To:** Council Meeting  
**From:** Terri Towstiuc, Manager of Community Services/Clerk  
**Date:** 2025-08-14  
**Subject:** 2026 Municipal Election – Method of Voting

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#### **Recommendation:**

That West Elgin Council hereby receives the report from Terri Towstiuc, Manager of Community Services/Clerk Re: 2026 Municipal Election Method of Voting; And

That Council hereby approve recommended Alternate Voting Methods, being Telephone and Internet voting, with in-person Help Centers for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election; And

That staff are authorized to execute any agreements necessary to implement Telephone and Internet Voting, and direct staff to prepare the necessary by-law for consideration at a future meeting.

#### **Purpose:**

As the 2026 Municipal Election approaches, it is important that the voting system utilized provides ease of access to voting, and at a time and place convenient to the elector. The purpose of this report is to propose a voting method for the upcoming 2026 Municipal Election that is reliable and secure, both cost effective and affordable for the Municipality, and is easy to use and to understand for all individuals, regardless of language skills or understanding of the electoral process. In 2021, Council approved the use of telephone/internet voting for the 2022 election, and staff are seeking approval for the same method for 2026.

#### **Background:**

According to [AMCTO's 2022 Post-Election Survey](#), internet voting continues to gain traction across Ontario, increasingly being seen by municipalities as a reliable, accessible, and modern voting method. While it cannot address all the broader factors contributing to declining voter turnout, it presents a valuable opportunity to engage underrepresented voters. In doing so, it complements existing municipal modernization efforts, establishing a foundation to encourage innovation, enhance transparency and accountability, and leverage technology to better support community participation. Municipal and School Board elections are held every four (4) years, and the Clerk in each local municipality is responsible for preparing and conducting all municipal and school board elections, as prescribed by the [Municipal Elections Act](#), 1996 (MEA).

In accordance with the MEA, municipal elections are to be held every four years and voting day is to be held on the fourth Monday in October, with the next municipal election scheduled to be held on October 26, 2026. Prior to each municipal election, Section 42(1) of the MEA requires that:

*“42 (1) The council of a local municipality may pass by-laws,*

- a) Authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators;*
- b) Authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method, such as voting by mail or by telephone, that does not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote. 1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 42 (1)”*

The MEA was amended through [Bill 218](#), requiring a decision on alternative voting methods be made by May 1st in the year of the election rather than in the year before the election. Staff believe it is advantageous to select a voting method early to allow ample time to procure necessary contracts and equipment as all municipalities across Ontario will be securing their own during the same time period. Municipal election vendors often limit the number of municipalities they will contract with, so an early decision ensures that the Municipality secures a preferred vendor and avoids potential capacity issues. An early decision will allow Elgin’s lower-tier municipalities to collaborate again with Middlesex County, as was done in 2022, benefiting from competitive pricing, incentive opportunities, and the ability to secure a preferred vendor before capacity limits are reached, and potential for discounted bulk pricing. Preparation for the 2026 Municipal Election has already begun, collaborating with Elgin County, lower tier municipalities and Middlesex County.

### **Analysis:**

This report provides information regarding the alternative voting methods previously presented in the Township of Malahide and the Municipality of Dutton-Dunwich Council, which were approved for the use of telephone/internet voting.

### **Vote by Mail, with Tabulators – Process Summary**

Electors are required to confirm they are on the Voters List before Voter Kits are mailed. The kit includes instructions, a ballot, a secrecy envelope, a voter declaration form, and a return envelope. Voters complete the declaration, mark their ballot, and return it by mail or drop it off at the municipal office. After a set mail return deadline, ballots must be dropped off in person by election day. On election day, return envelopes are opened, declarations are scanned to update the Voters List, and ballots are tabulated. Once all ballots are processed, the results are finalized.

Voters not on the list during the initial mailout must visit the municipal office with an ID to be added and receive a Voter Kit. This method is highly dependent on the postal system for two mail-outs and offers a limited timeframe for mail-in ballot returns.

### **Advantages**

- Flexibility for residents and non-residents i.e. Property owners who reside elsewhere/seasonal populations

- Accessibility – persons with disabilities, illness, on vacation, or other groups who may find it difficult to visit a polling station on voting day can cast their ballot up to a week before the election.

### Disadvantages

- Significant printing and mailing costs
- Substantially increased staff costs throughout the election process
- Increased staff time and costs to tabulate ballots on election day
- Results delayed during counting of ballots
- Generally, it requires voters to select their candidate a week in advance of the election date to allow delivery time of cast ballot
- Heavy reliance on Canada Post

### **Internet and Telephone Voting (recommended) – Process Summary**

Electors on the Voters list receive a personal voter identification letter by regular mail containing information on how to access the voting system, including a unique identification number and PIN, the URL and telephone number for the voting system, a list of the candidates running for office, legal requirements to vote and the contact information and location of the Help Centre. Electors access the voting system by telephone or internet, confirm they are entitled to vote, enter their access credentials, follow the prompts to vote, and confirm their selections. The voter is allowed to review and reconsider their vote before confirming and moving on to the next race. A voter can log in and choose to vote for one race and do the rest later. The PIN is valid to sign in until all the eligible races are selected. Controls are in place to warn the voter of any over-votes or blank offices. Voting data is encrypted and stored in a secure database and tabulated at the end of the voting period. Voter information is severed from an internet/phone ballot after it has been cast. This option is a highly secure and reliable solution that ensures voter anonymity and secrecy of the vote.

The seven to ten-day advance voting period allows electors to vote 24 hours a day, from anywhere in the world. The Help Centre is available, which allows electors to vote using the internet or telephone, and to receive assistance, on request. This provides a third choice with the feeling of a polling station. Electors are also able to be added to the voters list and to vote up until the close of voting, on election day.

### Advantages

- Voting commences 7-10 days before the election, and is open until 8:00 p.m. on election day, providing flexibility to electors on when to cast their ballot.
- Flexibility for residents and non-residents i.e. Property owners who reside elsewhere.
- Accessibility – persons with disabilities, illness, on vacation, or other groups who may find it difficult to visit a polling station on voting day can cast their ballot from anywhere with internet or telephone access.
- Allows electors to use their own devices or assistive technology to cast their ballot, as needed.

- Auditor module – system is regularly audited to ensure functionality and to validate critical components during the entire election process
- Cost effective as it reduces printing, postage, staff time, facilities, and equipment compared to other voting methods.
- Reduction in “human error” as there is no counting of ballots, as they are processed online.

#### Disadvantages

- Each voting method presents potential risks. For internet/telephone voting, concerns include power outages or internet loss, but these risks are manageable. Voting is accessible via personal devices with internet or phone service throughout the 7–10-day period. In case of disruptions, alternatives include mobile data, public Wi-Fi, or kiosk locations equipped with backup generators.

#### Summary:

Internet/telephone voting is being recommended again, given the additional convenience and accessibility that it offers voters. Effectively this method of alternative voting is a service enhancement. Having the bundled option creates a digital (and secure) opportunity for majority of voters. Additional benefits include being significantly less costly, environmentally friendly, provides ease of access to the electors and potential to increase voter turnout. Further, staff are confident that while concerns around the security and auditability of internet voting are understandable, many have been effectively addressed through proven safeguards and, in some cases, may be overstated or no longer reflect current realities.

Internet voting cannot resolve some underlying problems which have been linked to the decline in voter turnout. Internet/telephone voting can offer a new way with which to potentially engage or re-engage underrepresented electors. In the same way, it complements existing municipal modernization efforts which establishes the foundations with which to encourage and embrace innovation, bolster transparency and accountability and leverage technology to better support civic participation.

With the use of internet/telephone voting again, an integrated communications strategy for the 2026 Election will be a key component. It will be important to thoroughly engage stakeholders (candidates, public and media) early in the process to educate them about the process and encourage their questions. Our communications strategy would identify and address communication needs and issues of all stakeholders (from youth to seniors) and employ various tactics suited to specific and diverse audiences to facilitate voting. The goal will be to ensure that all stakeholders are well informed of the voting process. The addition of the Communications & Recreation Coordinator position will be a great assistance for engaging stakeholders to increase the voter turnout for 2026.

Based on the above, it is staff's recommendation that internet/telephone voting alternative method be implemented for the 2026 Municipal Election as a cost-effective method that provide convenience,

accessibility and integrity in the voting process and is consisted with Municipality 's goals of being a progressive, sustainable, and fiscally responsible organization.

**Financial Implications:**

Current eligible voters on list x \$2.75/elector = \$13,810.50 (voting system only) plus advertising, staff time costs and miscellaneous.

**Policies/Legislation:**

[Municipal Election Act](#)

**Alignment with Strategic Priorities:**

Infrastructure Improvement	Recreation	Economic Development	Community Engagement
<input type="checkbox"/> To improve West Elgin's infrastructure to support long-term growth.	<input type="checkbox"/> To provide recreation and leisure activities to attract and retain residents.	<input type="checkbox"/> To ensure a strong economy that supports growth and maintains a lower cost of living.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To enhance communication with residents.

Respectfully submitted by,

Terri Towstiuc, Dipl. M.A.

Manager of Community Services/Clerk

**Report Approval Details**

Document Title:	2026 Municipal Election, Method of Voting - 2025-17-Community ServicesClerks.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Aug 11, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Robin Greenall