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**Date:** Wednesday, December 07, 2022

**From:** Brittany Drury, Director of Corporate Service / Clerk

**Subject** 2022 Municipal and School Board Election

**Report** LEG2022-015

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## Recommendation

That report LEG2022-015, be received for the information of Council, to fulfill the requirements of Section 12 (3) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996; and

That annual elections reserve fund allocations be increased by \$3000.00 per year to accommodate purchase of new IT equipment, to be assigned to Council, at the commencement of each term.

## Background

The conduct of municipal elections is governed by the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996 (The Act), supplemented by such policies and procedures as required by the *MEA*, or as deemed necessary by the Clerk of the municipality, who is legislatively responsible for the conduct of the election.

The Act further requires that the Clerk of each municipality provide a report to Council, detailing the election and any identified accessibility barriers.

## Analysis

Amendments to the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, via Bill 168: *Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act*, 2020, introduced new timelines associated with elections procedures, including:

Procedure	Prior to Bill 218	After Bill 218
<p>Ranked Ballot Voting</p> <p>Ranked ballots allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference --first choice, second choice, third choice, etc. -- instead of just voting for one candidate.</p>	Permitted through O.Reg 310/16.	<p>Not permitted.</p> <p>Bill 218 removed the option for ranked ballot elections by revoking O.Reg 310/16 and repealing Sections 41.1 and 41.2 of the Act.</p>
Nomination Day	Fourth Friday in July.	Third Friday in August.
<p>Alternative Voting Methods:</p> <p>Changes the timeline for passing a by-law authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment or alternative voting method.</p>	By-laws authorizing the use of vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods to be passed on or before May 1 in the year before a regular election.	By-laws authorizing the use of vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods to be passed on or before May 1 in the year of the election.
<p>Creation of procedures and forms for alternative voting methods.</p> <p>Changes to the timeline for Clerks to establish procedures and forms for voting and vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods.</p>	December 31 in the year before the year of the election.	Before June 1 in the year of the election.

The amendments reverted elections timelines to those observed prior to the 2018 cycle and overall, extended the nominations period, shortened the campaigning period and decreased administrative preparation timelines.

With the amended timelines in mind, the following key dates were applied to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election:

May 2, 2022                      Nominations opened – Candidates and Third Party Advertisers were able to file their nomination/registration papers.

Aug 19, 2022	Nominations closed – last day for Candidates to file nomination papers
Aug 22, 2022	Received Preliminary List of Electors from MPAC / Commencement of data cleansing by the Clerks Department
Sept 5, 2022	Beginning of Voters' List revision period (to close of voting)
Oct 6, 2022	Internet and Telephone Voting opened
Oct 19, 2022	Paper Ballot Voting opened (Advanced Polls)
Oct 24, 2022	Election Day – voting closed at 8:00 p.m.
Oct 25, 2022	Official Declaration of Election Results
Nov 16, 2022	Council Inauguration
Jan 3, 2023	End of Campaign Period
March 31, 2023	Deadline for Candidates to file Financial Statements

Upon closing of nominations, the offices of Deputy Mayor and English Public School Board Trustee were acclaimed by the Clerks Office, 8 candidates were certified for the role of Councillor and 3 candidates for the role of Mayor.

### **Hybrid Voting**

The 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections, "VotetheBluffs2022", marked the first instance in the Township's history that invited residents to vote using multiple voting methods. Further, with voting opening on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, it also provided residents with the most time to cast their ballots.

In 2018, the Township hosted a strictly telephone and internet election, with ample feedback received through the Clerks Department to re-introduce paper opportunities in 2022. Similar feedback was received via the survey circulated to the public in 2020. While the majority of voters prefer internet voting, a minority remained partial to telephone and paper ballot voting.

Voting in VotetheBluffs2022 opened on October 6, 2022 and ran continuously through to 8:00 p.m. on October 24, 2022:

<b>Voting Method</b>	<b>Commencement</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Termination</b>
Online	October 6, 2022	18 days (24/7)	Election Day, October 24, 2022
Telephone	October 6, 2022	18 days (24/7)	Election Day, October 24, 2022
In-person	October 19, 2022	5 days (per polling location schedules)	Election Day, October 24, 2022

To assist voters casting their ballot using the online method, staff hosted Help Centres on a daily basis, during regular business hours, at the Township Administration Office from opening of voting on October 6<sup>th</sup> through to the close of voting on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Said Help Centres were outfitted with a dedicated staff resource to assist voters and two voting stations, each with an accessibility enabled iPad. All paper ballot polling stations also had accessibility enabled iPads available, to assist voters who wished to vote online.

To facilitate in-person, or paper ballot voting, staff hosted polling stations throughout the Township, per the following schedule:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
Township Administration Offices (Council Chambers)	October 19, 2022 – 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.  October 22, 2022 – 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  October 24, 2022 – 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Shallow Lake Community Centre	October 20, 2022 – 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.  October 24, 2022 – 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Kemble Sarawak United Church	October 21, 2022 – 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Kilsyth Arena	October 23, 2022 – 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

## Voter Turnout / Statistics

A total of 3,743 votes were cast in VotetheBluffs2022, resulting in a total voter turnout rate of 35.1%, slightly lower than the 36.7% of 2018. While the turnout was less than that of the previous election cycle, such was the trend throughout the province and Grey County.

Number of Voters on Preliminary List of Electors	10,343
Number of changes to PLE (by Clerk, before Voters' List published – most changes were to mailing addresses)	> 5,000
Number of Voters List revisions by Voters	Adds 137 Deletes 37 Deceased 5
Total Number of Voters on the Voters List (as of 8:00 pm October 24)	10,638

To simplify amendments to the 2022 Voters List, the Township offered an online form to eligible voters to amend, correct, add, or remove their information from the List. Any amendment, correction, addition, or removal of information required the applicant to sign a virtual declaration of truth and provide a copy of valid government ID to justify the requested change. All requests were then processed by appointed Election Officials and responded to via the provided email address. This procedure was new to the 2022 cycle and was received with overwhelmingly positive response. The Township was the first and only municipality in Grey County to provide this service and will continue to do so in future cycles.

The received 3,743 votes were cast in the following methods:

Internet	2,438
Telephone	621
In-Person / Paper	684

In-Person / Paper totals by polling station:

Township Administration Offices (Council Chambers)	October 19, 2022	106
	October 22, 2022	54
	October 24, 2022	124
Shallow Lake Community Centre	October 20, 2022	77
	October 24, 2022	174
Kemble Sarawak United Church	October 21, 2022	103
Kilsyth Arena	October 23, 2022	46
<b>Total</b>		<b>684</b>

As demonstrated above, 65% of ballots cast were cast by internet voting. In considering the voting patterns observed throughout the 2022 cycle, it will likely be staff's future recommendation to continue with online and in-person voting in 2026, while discontinuing the telephone voting method.

Overall, feedback received by staff regarding the 2022 Municipal and School Board election was positive, with the majority of voters commenting on the simplicity of the online voting system. The Township's election provider, Scytl Voting Systems, was responsive, assistive and developed a simple, easy to use platform for Township constituents. Scytl has administered hundreds of elections throughout North America and is the dominant election services provider within Ontario.

The Township purchased a live elections night reporting tool through Scytl, which demonstrated results, in real time, on the Township's website. Unofficial internet and telephone results were posted to the website via said tool by 8:30 p.m. on Election Night, with paper ballot results posted by 10:30 p.m. All paper ballots were tallied manually, by appointed Election Officials.

There were no discrepancies identified between the unofficial and official results declared on October 25, 2022. There were no requests received for a re-count.

### **Technology and Elections Budget Contributions**

The previous term of Council, being the 2018-2022 term, was the first term of Council to be provided iPads to facilitate completion of Council business. While the equipment is purchased for members of Council, they remain a Township-owned, corporate resource.

To provide voters with multiple methods of voting and to remain budget conscious, all approved monies within the 2022 Elections Budget were allocated to election administration, online and telephone voting software fees and communications, with little resources left to allocate to dedicated IT equipment. To cover IT needs throughout the election, staff drew from internal resources, including laptops, phones and iPads. All Township equipment was requested to be returned by Council members by October 3, 2022, to support the election and to allow for updating of the devices for the new 2022-2026 Council term.

This return of equipment was met with some negative feedback, as the new term would not commence until November 16, 2022. To mitigate an early return of equipment for the 2026 election cycle, it is recommended that Council increase annual elections budget reserve allocations by \$3000.00 per year, totalling an annual reserve contribution of \$23,000.00. The additional funds will be used to purchase new IT equipment for use during the election, which will then be subsequently provided to the newly elected members of Council. Currently, all Township equipment assigned to Council is simply updated, cleaned and returned for use by newly elected members.

### Financial Impact

Total election reserves balances at the commencement of 2022 provided \$80,000.00 for allocation to the 2022 Municipal and School Board election cycle. All elections related costs are to be funded by the \$80,000.00, including all software fees, communications, training opportunities and election related equipment.

Per best accounting practices, a total withdraw or use of an established reserve fund, is not recommended nor best practice. To date, total costs associated with the 2022 Municipal and School Board election sum approximately \$65,000.00. The proposed annual increase in reserve contributions will provide flexibility to purchase new IT equipment for Council, while not draining the elections reserve account.

### Strategic Priorities

Approval of the recommendation as included in this report achieves the 5<sup>th</sup> Strategic Goal, Deliver Effective and Cost-Efficient Services, as defined in the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan.

### Conclusion

The 2022 Municipal and School Board elections welcomed voters to cast their ballots in the method of their choosing, over an 18-day voting period. A total of 3,743 votes were cast in *VotetheBluffs2022*, resulting in a total voter turnout rate of 35.1%. The 2022 election went very smoothly. Staff are recommending an annual increase to the election reserve for the purchase of electronic device to support the 2026 election and for allocation to the new Council members.

Respectfully Submitted: Brittany Drury, Director of Corporate Services / Clerk



## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	LEG2022-015 - 2022 Municipal and School Board Election .docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Nov 15, 2022

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

Cynthia Fletcher, Chief Administrative Officer