



**THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF PARRY SOUND**

Open Agenda	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Council Report &amp; Recommendation</b>
Closed Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	If Closed Agenda, identify applicable reason(s) per Section 239 (2) Municipal Act
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>MEETING DATE:</b> March 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2011

**SUBJECT: Alternate Voting Methods- 2014 Municipal Election**

**Spokesperson(s) / Referred By: Jackie Boggs**  
**Title:** Deputy Clerk/EA

Ec. Dev. Spec. Events	Operations	Emergency/Fire	Comm. Dev. Building/Bylaw	Finance/Admin. & POA Court Services	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**BY-LAW: 2011 –**

or

**RESOLUTION: 2011 –**

**WHEREAS** per the Town of Parry Sound’s Mission Statement; that Parry Sound is the area’s economic hub and the heart of the thirty thousand islands and is committed to serving the community; and

**WHEREAS** Parry Sound Council is considering municipal voting method reform in order to improve accessibility, under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) legislation, increase voter participation, improve accuracy and provide prompt election results; and

**WHEREAS** upon staff review of a number of alternate forms of voting to the traditional paper ballot, it is deemed appropriate to investigate in more detail the cost of internet and telephone voting for the 2014 municipal election;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Council for the Town Parry Sound accepts internet and telephone voting for the next municipal election in 2014; and

**THAT** acceptance by Council, and the subsequent passage of a by-law to that effect, are contingent on staff providing an R&R for the April 19<sup>th</sup> meeting comparing the costs and effectiveness of the traditional paper ballot method with internet and telephone voting.

or

**DIRECTION**

For Direct Staff Follow Up

For Open Council

Resolution

By-Law

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the this R&R is to provide Council with information that provides a number of reasons why Council should consider approving a move from a traditional paper ballot voting method to alternate electronic methods of voting in the next municipal election scheduled for 2014.

## **RELEVANCE TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES or BUSINESS/STRATEGIC PLAN**

Quality of Life, Quality Organization

### **BACKGROUND/REPORT**

Voting is a fundamental right and privilege of democracy. When this privilege is not exercised, one reason may be that being at a voting station during certain hours on a given day may not be feasible or may be inconvenient for many. It seems reasonable that providing more convenient ways to vote may increase voter participation.

#### Voter Participation

In Parry Sound, the 2006 municipal election provided 2 advance polls for voting before election day. The 2010 municipal election provided three advance polls for voting before election day, yet the increase in voters taking advantage of those advance polls for 2010 was only 2.16%. (See attached Voter Statistics for 2006 and updated Voter Statistics for 2010) Overall, voter participation in 2010 was up only .76% over the 2006 municipal election at 54.64% of eligible voters casting a vote.

*Two years ago, in the U.S federal elections in 2008 more than 1/3 of the voters chose internet and telephone voting methods that gave them the convenience to vote irrespective of time and distance. The elderly, individuals with disabilities, and better-educated voters were more likely to use these convenience voting methods. [Report to Town of Markham Council April 23, 2010—{Alvarez, Ansolabehere, Berinsky, Lenz, Steward III, & Hall 2009}]*

#### Issues

On election day October 25, 2010, the Deputy Returning Officers spent most of their time not directing people to their appropriate poll and answering questions, but adding people to the voter's list—**and** directing people to their appropriate poll and answering questions.

Despite the fact that the Revision period (revisions to the voter's list) started almost two months before election day, most people thought that if they were on the voter's list in the previous election and they hadn't moved, then they should already be on it. A logical assumption but unfortunately that was not the case. Election day was an extremely busy day/evening adding people to the voter's list at the BOCC and the municipal office. While no voter's list is perfect, this election highlighted the contentious issue of people/residents who have been at the same address for 20-40 years who were now not on the voter's list.

An informal survey of the West Parry Sound municipalities found similar problems with their voter's lists. The exception to this is The Township of the Archipelago. The Archipelago continually updates property ownership information with the use between elections of Data Fix's Voter View list. This list is utilized usually only during election time by a large percentage of Ontario municipalities Parry Sound included and in conjunction with MPAC's list of course. While realizing that The Archipelago would not have the same mix of property owners and/or as many tenants to identify as Parry Sound has, nevertheless, Parry Sound would be able to assist with MPAC's enumeration process by informing our residents of the importance of returning the enumeration information to MPAC to get on the voter's list through the low cost mediums of advertisements, information on our website, newsletters and the Mayor's Corner in the local paper, tax bill stuffers and through the set up of social networking strategies.

There is also a service provided at an extra expense for internet users to check the voter's list on-line on the Town's website. If the voter's list can be improved by using these methods we then have a more accurate list to mail out PIN numbers should Council decide to use internet and telephone vote by mail.

### Accuracy

Studies have shown a much higher accuracy in votes counted by internet and telephone voting methods than counted by tired election workers at the end of a long work day.

### Cultural

Beyond efficiency, convenience and accuracy, there is an even better argument for internet and telephone voting:

*In a dynamic social and technological environment inaction can have negative consequences. If cultures of shopping, banking, playing games and socialising are increasingly moving online, the failure of the political sphere to move in tandem risks confining it to eccentric marginality. This might be the strongest argument for voting online: the symbolic message is delivered that democracy is consistent with contemporary culture. The risk of such symbolism for the political elite—and a democratic opportunity for citizens—is that online voting will stimulate a public appetite for a more interactive system of representation before and after elections. [Report to Town of Markham April 23, 2010 –{Coleman 2005}]*

In traditional voting, there are few contact points between candidates and their constituents. Certainly the vote itself is one; a conversation while canvassing is another. However, a candidate website mediates, enriches and is a personalizable (as opposed to a generic sign on the neighbour's lawn) dialogue between the candidates and their constituents. Right now businesses are exploring strategies to maintain dialogue with their customers and they are finding the social media—blogs, Wikis, Facebook, LinkedIn and social bookmarking sites—provide them this opportunity.

Internet voting can also allow candidates to see on-line who has voted (not who they have voted for) and thereby allowing them to redirect their resources to those who have not yet voted. We provided this service in paper format during the last two elections but it could be provided electronically if we went to internet and telephone voting.

### Other Issues

Some of the other issues that were apparent in the 2010 and 2006 election were:

- a) difficulty in finding over 50 qualified elections workers and then training them
- b) very late election results
- c) considerable problems with the voters list including the exclusion of many people from the list, who had been at the same address for years.
- d) staff workload and shifting responsibilities for election time
- e) compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* may in the future require the purchase/rental of Voter Assist Terminal(s), which include a touch screen – access port for Sip-N-Puff technology – keypad for Braille and an intuitive access pad – foot pedal, a potentially costly expense that could be mitigated with telephone and internet voting. While the Returning Officer conducted a concerted effort to determine who in the community might need assistance with voting by utilizing newspaper ads, Parry Sound's website and contact with area assistive groups, no one came forward with a particular request. However, in future elections Parry Sound should not expect the same lack of response. Parry Sound has a relatively large population of people with disabilities that could conceivably require assistance to vote. Internet and telephone voting would provide that access under the legislation to allow a disable person to vote in private.

### The Process

The alternate internet and telephone voting process would be, **very generally**, as follows:

- Upon approval of the R&R to be submitted April 19, 2011, staff would

implement the following media plan to inform residents; of the importance of informing MPAC and/or the Town of changes in address; and Council's approval of internet and telephone voting:

- post info on the Town's website
- provide info for inclusion in the Mayor's Corner Letter in newspaper
- advertise periodically & reference our website and the office for info
- election info in each newsletter to all residents
- tax bill stuffers
- development of social networking strategies
- posters at community meeting places and all municipal buildings
- post information youth page on website (under development)
- new paper articles
- move into print and radio closer to election time.

▶ MPAC conducts their enumeration activities during the usual time frame leading up to the election. Staff provides pertinent information on our website and other mediums as outlined above.

▶ Notifications with special PIN's are mailed to all the voters and used to vote at their convenience. Usually voter's are allowed to cast their votes 7-10 days before election day but that doesn't need to be finalized until the year of the election.

▶ Voters can be made aware of community computers that are currently available and additional computers can be made available at the municipal office or "Help Centre" for those who wish to vote and don't have a computer. Most people have telephones, cell phones and there are public pay phones available.

▶ 8:10-8:15 p.m. election results.

#### Security

A pertinent and timely report written for Elections Canada best characterizes this trade –off between risk and opportunity [*Report to Town of Markham April 23, 2010* {Goodman, Pammett, & DeBardeleben 2009}]

*Careful examination of the literature on internet voting as well as the pilot experiences of many jurisdictions suggest that both the extremely optimistic and pessimistic positions about the effects of internet voting are overstated. Internet voting will not act as a panacea for the social causes responsible for electoral disengagement, nor will it remedy negative attitudes toward political entities. It will however, increase voting opportunities for electors and make casting a vote more accessible. On the other side, internet voting will not erode democracy or result in vote buying and election fraud any more than does the existing system.*

If Council provides the approval on April 19, 2011 to conduct electronic voting at the next municipal election, staff would of course call for quotations on a internet/telephone service provider however, Intelivote Systems Inc., the leading service provider in Ontario, provided a sheet which addresses some of the most Frequently Asked Questions about electronic voting, including security. Please find attached for your review.

Also included is a list of election methods used by a number of municipalities in Ontario for the 2006 municipal election. Staff currently tracking down a list for 2010 municipal election.

#### **ADVANTAGES and/or DISADVANTAGES OF RECOMMENDATION**

The advantages to telephone and internet voting are:

Accurate count; anytime, anywhere voting during the voting period; elimination of traditional advance voting; no proxies; results within 10-15 minutes on Election Day after 8:00 p.m.; allows voting over a 6-10 day period; reduces staffing

requirements; no over votes (such as with optical scan voting/vote tabulators unless they are programmed to reject overvotes); no subjectivity relating to count/recount; increase convenience for electors if it is combined with an ability to vote at any location, any time.

Disadvantages to telephone and internet voting are:

Technology may be perceived as vulnerable to hackers, unsupervised voting (but all secret ballots are technically unsupervised); voter card/letter may be stolen and used by another person (mail fraud); perceptions that not everyone will be able to vote over the internet because of speed and security level of the computer, but telephone voting would be available.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Continue with the traditional voting method.

### **COST/FINANCIAL IMPACT**

To be determined with further research.

**INCLUDED IN CURRENT BUDGET?**       Yes       No       N/A

Currently \$6,000/year is set aside for the municipal elections.

2006 Election was budgeted for \$22,500 and the actuals were \$22,650.41, of which \$10,500 was for salaries.

2010 Election was budgeted for \$24,000 and the actuals were \$26,184.97, of which \$16,000 was for salaries.

### **ATTACHMENTS** (please list your attachments here, including draft By-Laws):

Voter Statistics 2006 and 2010  
FAQ Sheet  
Municipal List of Voting Methods Used 2006

### **CAO'S COMMENTS**

Recommends Council approval of Staff recommendation

Recommends Council consider Staff recommendation with the following additional comments:

Moving to internet / telephone voting would be a big change for Parry Sound – one that has to come. Timing is everything. Giving staff the go-ahead now allows for necessary planning by staff and communication with the citizens. There are many advantages as outlined above. The next election is four years away; a long time in terms of advancements in technology and a short time in terms of life. The sooner Council direction is provided the better the result will be for the 2014 election.