



**Report**  
**Staff Report**  
 The Corporation of the City of Brampton  
 2/19/2025

**Date:** 2025-01-29

**Subject:** **2026 Municipal Election – Voting Methods**

**Contact:** Shawnica Hans, Deputy Clerk, Elections, Accessibility and Lottery Licensing, City Clerk’s Office

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**Report number:** Legislative Services-2024-839

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That the report from Shawnica Hans, Deputy Clerk, Elections, Accessibility and Lottery Licensing, City Clerk’s Office to the Committee of Council Meeting of February 19, 2025, re: **2026 Municipal Election – Voting Methods**, be received; and,
2. That the by-law attached as Appendix 2, be passed to provide for the use of an alternative voting method – a home voting service for electors who are unable to leave their home due to illness, injury or disability – for the 2026 Municipal Election, be passed.

**OVERVIEW:**

- **The next municipal and school board election for the City of Brampton will take place on Monday, October 26, 2026.**
- **Section 42 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (MEA)* permits municipalities to pass a by-law to authorize the use of vote tabulation equipment. Vote tabulation equipment facilitates accurate, efficient and transparent vote tabulation and results reporting.**
- **The City of Brampton uses vote tabulators and accessible voting units at voting locations. At its meeting of November 24, 2021, Council passed By-law 265-2021 to permit voting and vote counting equipment for the 2022 and future municipal and school board elections.**

- **Section 42 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA) also permits municipal Councils to pass by-laws to authorize alternative voting methods that do not require electors to attend a voting place.**
- **In the 2022 Municipal Election, an alternative voting method by-law was passed to provide for a home voting service, enabling electors who were home-bound to vote independently from home. The home voting service served 51 electors who were able to vote independently from home.**
- **Staff has reviewed possible alternative voting methods and recommend passing a by-law for the 2026 Municipal Election in order to continue the home voting service for Brampton electors, to be administered at the discretion of the City Clerk.**
- **Operating costs associated with the 2026 Municipal Election will be funded by the Election Reserve. The Election Operating Budget can accommodate the minimal costs attributed to the home voting service. Should Council choose to implement additional alternative voting methods, such as internet or mail-in voting, a corresponding budget amendment may be required to account for technology infrastructure, security measures, administration, staffing, and voter education initiatives.**

## **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Brampton conducts municipal and school board elections in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA). The next regular municipal and school board election is scheduled to take place on Monday, October 26, 2026.

### **Voting Technology**

Section 42(1) of the MEA permits municipal councils to pass a by-law authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators.

For more than 17 years, the City of Brampton has used optical scan units (vote tabulators) and touch screen units for accurate and efficient vote tabulation and results reporting. In November 2021, Council passed By-law 265-2021 (attached as Appendix 1) to approve the use of vote tabulators and accessible voting units at voting locations for Brampton municipal elections.

## **Alternative Voting Methods**

Section 42(1) of the MEA also permits municipalities to pass a by-law authorizing the use of alternative voting methods for a municipal election. An alternative voting method is one that does not require an elector to attend a voting location in order to vote.

### *Home Voting Service*

In the 2022 Municipal Election, a by-law was passed to provide for a home voting service for electors who could not leave their homes due to illness, injury or disability. The 2014 election was the first time a home voting service had been implemented in Brampton, and the City was one of the first in Ontario to implement this program at the municipal level.

The 2022 program enabled 51 home-bound Brampton electors to participate in the Municipal Election by voting independently in their homes. Electors who would not have had an opportunity to vote otherwise in the election, were appreciative of the service and opportunity to vote. The program provided enhanced customer service to Brampton electors and reinforced the City Clerk's commitment and responsibility towards accessible elections for all.

## **CURRENT SITUATION:**

### **Voting Method for the 2026 Municipal Election**

Section 42(1) of the MEA requires municipalities to pass by-laws regarding voting methods by May 1 of the election year (May 1, 2026) and requires that the Clerk establish procedures and forms related to voting and vote counting equipment and alternative voting methods no later than June 1 of the election year. The Clerk is also required to make the procedures available to candidates when they file their nomination papers beginning May 1, 2026.

At its meeting of November 24, 2021, Council passed By-law 265-2021 to authorize the use of voting and vote counting equipment for City of Brampton Municipal Elections. This by-law applied to the 2022 Municipal Election and to future municipal elections.

Unless otherwise directed by Council, the 2026 Municipal Election voting model will be in-person voting with paper ballots, with the use of vote tabulation equipment and accessible voting units, as authorized by By-law 265-2021.

### Voting Equipment

The current voting location model includes one or two tabulators per voting location, one accessible voting unit per advance voting location, and one accessible voting unit per ward on voting day. Plans for the 2026 Election include increasing the number of accessible voting units at advance voting and voting day locations.

The City of Brampton's voting and vote counting equipment contract has expired. An RFP is being developed and anticipated to be issued in Q1 of this year. A capital request was approved in the 2025 Budget for paper ballot tabulation, which includes expenses for vote tabulators, accessible voting units, software, ballots, and peripherals.

A new standard, developed by the Digital Governance Standards Institute (DGSi), a division of the Standards Council of Canada, specifies minimum technical requirements for vote tabulator technology and equipment used in Ontario's provincial and municipal elections. The standard specifies the minimum requirements for the design, installation, operations and maintenance of vote tabulators and vote tabulator systems. The standard ensures protection of the core democratic principles of an election: accessibility, integrity, equality of the vote, secrecy, and transparency and accountability. The vendor chosen to support the 2026 Municipal Election will be required to adhere to this standard.

### **Home Voting Service as an Alternative Voting Method for the 2026 Municipal Election**

Due to the positive feedback received for the home voting service in 2022, staff recommend continuing the program in 2026. The home voting service will be held during the advance voting period, with dates and times to be established by the City Clerk.

In 2022, 51 electors were served through the program; administratively, the program can serve up to 100 electors, providing them with the opportunity to vote at home during the advance voting period. Based on municipal best practices and feedback from the last election, staff are considering improvements in 2026, which may include extending the program to eligible caregivers, as required.

The service is based on the following guidelines:

- An elector who is home-bound due to illness, injury or disability may contact the Election Office to request a home voting appointment.
- An elector is not required to provide the reason they are home-bound, but they will be required to sign an acknowledgement form stating that they are home-bound due to illness, injury or disability and are choosing to vote using the home voting service.
- Election staff will review the elector's information and confirm their eligibility to vote.
- Election staff will schedule an appointment time during the advance voting period to visit the elector.
- A team of two staff members will attend the elector's home and provide them with the appropriate ballot in order to vote.
- Staff will review the elector's identification and administer any oaths during the visit, and the elector can vote independently in their home. The elector will place

their completed ballot in a sealed ballot box, which will be returned to the Election Office for secure keeping until election night, when votes are tabulated.

The cost to administer this program is minor. Voting supplies will be used from existing inventory and Election Office staff will be available to administer the program. Additional costs for mileage of election workers will be budgeted through the Election Operating Budget.

It is recommended that home voting be made available again for the next election. A draft by-law to authorize a home voting service at the discretion of the City Clerk is included as Appendix 2 to this report.

### **Additional Alternative Voting Methods**

Other alternative voting methods that have been successful in various municipalities include voting online (internet), by telephone, and by mail.

#### Internet and Telephone Voting

Prior to the 2022 Municipal Election, election staff conducted research on internet voting as a form of alternative voting. Staff presented a report to Committee of Council, which provided a high-level overview and the benefits of the internet voting process. Based on concerns around security and the identity of who is marking a ballot, Council decided not to proceed with internet voting as a form of alternative voting for the 2022 Municipal Election.

Municipalities across Ontario are increasingly using internet voting in their elections, either exclusively, or in combination with another form of voting. More than half of Ontario's municipalities – 57% – used internet voting in 2022. This is a 16% increase from the 2018 municipal elections, in which 41% of municipalities used internet voting (AMCTO, 2022 Post Election Survey Report).

Satisfaction with internet voting increased between 2018 and 2022 with 15% more municipalities that used internet voting reporting that they were very satisfied with the method in 2022 (AMCTO, 2022 Post Election Survey Report).

Voting by telephone is similar to internet voting in that an elector can use technology to cast their ballot remotely via telephone. Telephone voting has been used in partnership with internet voting and other alternative voting methods in various municipalities in previous elections. Telephone voting is typically used by smaller and more rural municipalities.

General estimates to offer internet and telephone voting during the advance vote period range from \$2.00 - \$3.00 per elector, plus a per-letter amount for postal mailing.

It is recognized that standards need to be in place for internet voting, as such, in 2024, a Canadian standard for internet voting was developed by the Digital Governance Standards Institute. The standards specify technical design requirements for online voting and best practices for election administrators. The standard is subject to yearly reviews.

### Vote by Mail

Some municipalities have adopted mail-in voting as an alternative voting method. Mail-in voting can be used as either a primary voting method, or an alternative voting method that complements traditional in-person voting or another method of voting.

Staff has reviewed mail-in voting processes in various elections and by-elections that have taken place over the past few years.

- Mail-in voting was used as an alternative voting method alongside in-person voting during the City of Toronto 2022 Municipal Election and 2023 mayoral by-election.
- The Cities of Hamilton and Guelph also implemented mail-in voting as an alternative voting method in the 2022 Municipal Election.
- Elections Canada offered mail-in voting during the last federal election, and Elections Ontario offered mail-in voting as an option for the 2022 Provincial Election, and will be an option for the 2025 Provincial Election.
- Mail-in voting was also used extensively in the 2024 US elections.
- Overall, 18% of municipalities offered mail-in voting in the 2022 Municipal Election.

The following table highlights the mail-in voting participation in the 2022 Hamilton and Toronto municipal elections, and the 2022 provincial election:

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Number of Mail-in Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Total Number of Ballots Cast (incl. declined, rejected)</b>	<b>% Electors Voting by Mail</b>
City of Hamilton Municipal Election	Oct. 2022	2,397	143,375	2%
City of Toronto Municipal Election	Oct. 2022	19,926	563,124	4%
Provincial Election – Brampton Electoral Districts	Jun. 2022	6,747	143,776	5%

The general process for mail-in voting as an alternative method is as follows:

- In order to vote by mail, electors would be required to apply during a specific application period. An online application would be created and hosted on the City's website, alongside other application methods (e.g. in person application).

The City's existing Voters' List Management Services (VLMS) provider offers vote by-mail services, including the application process.

- Electors must already be on the Voters' List or apply to be added to the list within the application period, and must submit proof of identification with their application.
- Upon review of the application, staff would determine elector eligibility.
- At the end of the application period, staff would create a listing of electors who are voting by mail and work with the VLMS provider to mail special voting kits to those electors.
- Some municipalities implement policies whereby an elector who applies to vote by mail can only vote in that way – they cannot change their mind and vote at a voting location instead.
- Electors would receive their voting kit, complete their ballot, sign the appropriate declaration and return their voting kit to the Election Office via mail. Some municipalities established vote-by-mail drop boxes in different areas for convenience.
- Upon receipt of the completed voting kit, staff would review to ensure the kit was signed correctly, and mark the ballot as having been received.
- Procedures would be required to establish the deadline by which a voting kit must be received for the ballot to be counted, so as not to delay the unofficial election results on Election night. Procedures for adjudication of ballots would also be required.
- On Election night, the ballots would be placed through the vote tabulator and counted, and adjudicated, if applicable.

### *Benefits*

Some of the benefits of mail-in voting are that it provides an opportunity for electors to cast their ballot without attending a physical voting location – electors who cannot visit a voting location can vote independently, rather than appointing a proxy voter to vote on their behalf. It also provides convenience for those electors who know they will be unable to vote at any of the advance voting dates or on voting day.

### *Risks*

Some of the risks include having to rely on the mail system – there is potential for ballots to be lost or damaged in the mail, and completed ballots may be received after voting day, and so would be rejected. Mail-in voting would not be an accessible method of voting for electors who are moving address or who are experiencing homelessness or may not have a consistent address. Additionally, like internet and telephone voting, staff cannot guarantee that electors are voting privately, in secrecy and without the influence of others.

## Costs

While mail-in voting provides a convenient method for electors to cast a ballot remotely, significant administrative effort will be required to create policies and procedures for the alternative voting method, which has not been previously implemented at the municipal level in Brampton.

Additional staff would be required to administer a mail-in voting program. Other costs, based on an estimate of 10,000 electors (roughly 10% of the 2022 voter turnout) are estimated at \$140,000 (not including additional staffing requirements).

If Council recommends that mail-in voting be offered in the 2026 Municipal Election, the Clerk may consider not implementing the home voting service, as mail-in voting has the potential to accommodate the special needs of electors who cannot attend a voting location.

Council may also adopt additional alternative voting methods such as internet voting or mail-in voting. While some municipalities use these methods as primary methods of voting, these can be used as alternate methods to complement Brampton's current in-person method of voting. Should Council decide to implement an additional method of alternative voting, such as internet or vote by mail, a by-law will have to be passed no later than May 1, 2026.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:**

### **Financial Implications:**

Operating costs associated with the 2026 Brampton Municipal Election will be funded by the Election Reserve. The Election Operating Budget can accommodate the minimal costs attributed to the home voting service. Should Council choose to implement additional alternative voting methods, such as internet or mail-in voting, a corresponding budget amendment may be required to account for technology infrastructure, security measures, administrative staffing, and voter education initiatives.

### **Other Implications**

### **Legal Implications:**

In accordance with the MEA, a by-law regarding alternative voting methods must be passed by May 1 in an election year. By-law 265-2021 authorizes the use of voting and vote counting equipment in municipal elections, and a draft by-law establishing the home voting service for the 2026 Municipal Election is attached to this report as Appendix 2. Should Council adopt internet or mail-in voting, a by-law would need to be passed no later than May 1, 2026.



**Purchasing Implications:**

Should Council adopt internet voting as an alternative voting method, an RFP for the service will be required. An RFP would not be required for mail-in voting as the service is available through the City's current VLMS vendor.

**Communications Implications:**

A communications plan will be developed for the 2026 Municipal Election. The plan will include extensive voter education and public engagement. If the ward boundary review project results in ward boundary changes, further communications will be required to inform and educate residents about the new ward boundaries.

**STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA:**

This report achieves the Strategic Focus Area of Government & Leadership by planning for the administration of a fair and transparent municipal election process.

**CONCLUSION:**

Voting in municipal elections is one of the most important ways for citizens to engage in municipal governance. This report provides an overview of the voting methods considered for the 2026 Municipal Election to allow electors to cast their ballot in an efficient and accessible manner. Staff is proceeding with the voting method of in person voting with paper ballots, vote tabulators and accessible voting units. Staff is also recommending passing a by-law to allow for home voting as an alternative voting method.

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**Attachments:**

- Appendix 1 – By-law 265-2021 – Voting and Vote-counting Equipment for City of Brampton Municipal Elections
- Appendix 2 – Draft by-law to provide for a home voting service during the advance voting period for the 2026 City of Brampton Municipal Election