Corporation of the Township of Brock

Staff Report to the Mayor and Members of Council

From: Fernando Lamanna
Position: Deputy CAO & Municipal Clerk
Title / Subject: Alternative Voting Methods for the 2026 Municipal Election
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Report No: 2025-GG-005

1.0 Issue / Origin

The purpose of this report is to recommend and seek Council's approval for the use of alternative voting method(s) for the 2026 Municipal Election.

2.0 Background

The Municipal Clerk is responsible in delivering municipal and school board elections every four years. The planning for this significant event generally is continuous from one election to another, however, planning and preparation generally start to ramp up a year and a half to two years prior.

The Municipal Elections Act (the "MEA") outlines the responsibilities of Council in preparing for an election, one of which is to approve the use of alternative voting methods by by-law.

Section 42(1) of the MEA, provides that the Council of a local municipality may pass by-laws to:

(a) authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scan vote tabulators; and,
(b) authorize 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.

Alternative voting methods are ways that a voter can mark and cast their ballot as an alternative to in-person voting at a physical voting location. For example, vote by mail, vote by phone or internet voting (on-line voting).

The Township of Brock has used Vote by Mail as the alternative voting method since the 2000 municipal election, utilizing optical scan tabulators to count the ballots, in most of those elections. Staff have received comments from electors, candidates, and council members with respect to introducing a new and more modern method of election, namely internet voting.

Every municipal election cycle, staff evaluate alternative voting methods using a number of factors prior to recommending options to Council, as the election and technology landscapes can change rapidly over a four-year term. Staff are committed to ensuring that Brock balances the security of the election process with municipal best practices. In evaluating methods, staff considered the security and integrity of the voting process, convenience and accessibility for voters, ease of use, accuracy, reliability, and cost effectiveness.

The balance of this report will evaluate staff's recommendation to introduce internet voting as the primary method along with a paper ballot option that will be referred to as "Ballot On Demand", as the secondary method.

3.0 Analysis

Alternative Voting Method Evaluation

In past election cycles, the Township of Brock collaborated with the North Durham municipalities (Scugog & Uxbridge) on most matters related to election procurement and procedures and together have hosted Vote by Mail (VbM) elections since 2000.

The Township of Scugog, during the 2022 municipal election, moved away from VbM in favour of internet voting and in-person paper ballot with optical scan tabulators. Unfortunately, with 6 out of 7 offices being acclaimed, the staff at that time were not able to fully gage the success (or failure) of the new voting method.

Prior to writing this report, collectively the Clerks and Deputy Clerks of the North Durham 3 held information sessions with 5 independent internet vote providers, as there is common feeling with introducing a more modern approach to the 2026 municipal elections.

The Brock Clerk's team then met to discuss voting options and went through an election mind map exercise, discussing the various options, the advantages and disadvantages as well as considering the capacity and resources available. Following that, staff held 3 on 3 discussions with Council Members to review the options and gauge the interest of Council as it related to introducing internet voting with a ballot on demand for the 2026 municipal elections.

Internet Voting

Internet voting was first introduced in 2003 by 12 municipalities in Ontario. Each year the number of municipalities incorporating internet voting as the primary voting method or in conjunction with another voting method has increased drastically year after year. According to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), 217 municipalities used internet voting in 2022, which is 42 more than the 2018 election. While the technology is gaining widespread adoption and acceptance by electors, due to its numerous benefits, it is not without potential

risks, similar to all voting methods. Staff are aware of these potential risks and are actively working on strategies to mitigate them and collaborating with other Ontario municipalities to identify best practices.

Studies have shown that voters in municipalities that have adopted internet voting report an overall satisfaction with the voting experience and a desire to continue voting online. This is supported by the 2022 post elections survey conducted by the Association of Municipal Clerks & Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) in which 93% of municipalities who utilized internet voting were 'very satisfied' with internet voting. The same survey noted that satisfaction with internet voting increased between 2018 and 2022 with 15% more municipalities that used internet reporting that they were very satisfied with the method in 2022.

This trend appears to continue with demand for internet voting increasing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canadians of all ages have demonstrated a year over year trend of living an increasingly more online lifestyle. The Canadian Internet Use Survey demonstrated that during the most recent election year of 2022, internet use among Canadians aged 15 years and older reached 95%, up from 92% in 2020. Statistics Canada indicates that Canadians aged 75 years and older saw the largest increase from 62% in 2020 to 72% in 2022.

As the use of digital technologies grows, Canadians are becoming more acquainted with newer technologies and incorporating them into their daily routines with solutions like online banking, which according to Statistics Canada, 78% of Canadians use. Internet voting delivers a convenient solution that integrates well into this lifestyle especially when voters have the choice to access their vote through multiple devices such as smart phones, tablets, and home computers.

Telephone Voting

When internet voting technology was first introduced in 2003, proponents coupled telephone voting as an added remote voting option for those electors without the benefit of technology or the knowledge in using technology to cast a ballot online. Internet access and capabilities have come a long way since 2003 as highlighted in the above noted statistics.

Telephone voting is an alternative voting method which allows voters to complete a ballot using any point-to-point telephone connection to complete an audio ballot. This alternative voting technology is antiquated and has a number of issues. One of the most commonly cited concerns regarding telephone voting has been the significant amount of time to navigate through and complete an audio ballot. A ballot for Brock will consist of a multitude of offices with which to vote including Regional Chair, Mayor, Regional Councillor, Ward Councillor and school board candidates. Depending on the number and sequencing of selections and the review options engaged, a lengthy audio ballot can even serve to disengage and confuse voters.

Staff have received feedback from numerous Clerks that their experiences with telephone voting was unfavorable, lacked the ability to audit in the event of a recount, and insecure.

Telephone voting has been used by municipalities in past elections as an alternative to voting online as a viable option for individuals who may not be comfortable with computers or lack internet connectivity. The Town of Ajax has used internet & telephone as the only methods of voting since 2014 and are potentially looking at continuing that in 2026, even though only 6% of those that voted used the telephone option.

Ballot-On-Demand

Staff have evaluated the various voting methods taking into consideration factors such as the team's ability to carry out an effective and efficient election and, the most viable option for Brock electors given their customary VbM method used the last 25 years.

The concept of Ballot-On-Demand was introduced by our colleagues from Newmarket, during our "lived election experience" discussions. Newmarket had moved away from paper ballots in the 2018 municipal elections in favour of internet & telephone voting. Their election was considered a success with a vast number of Newmarket electors very satisfied with internet voting. However, a small number of Newmarket electors had complained to council that they felt 'disenfranchised' from their right to vote as they did not have a paper ballot option. In response, for the 2022 municipal elections, the Clerks team offered internet voting (no telephone) and a paper ballot-on-demand at the Civic Centre. From the total number of electors who cast a vote, 98.6% cast their vote online and 1.4% cast a paper ballot.

Ballot-On-Demand is literally what it sounds like. Electors will be able to attend the Voting Assistance Centre (VAC), show proof of ID, and the Election Officials will print from a secure and dedicated printer, the appropriate ballot for the elector, which they then complete behind a privacy screen, and deposit into a ballot box.

With the introduction of a new online voting method to Brock residents, staff believe that the option of completing a paper ballot for some electors, may still be the preferred choice in 2026, and represent a good balance as the Township transitions into the possibility of full internet voting for future elections.

Voters' List

Remote voting technologies such as internet, telephone, and mail-in balloting also rely on high quality Voters' List data, which has historically posed a challenge in Ontario. Responsibility for the municipal voters' list has been assumed by Elections Ontario (EO) as of January 1, 2024. Currently, staff are working with EO on the list of eligible municipal electors on an ongoing basis, to facilitate more routine and active updates. The newly administered list will feature a high frequency of data integration from sources including Elections Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), which promises a higher quality of elector data to ensure staff have the most accurate and up-to-date voters' list when it is required to administer an election. Additionally, with the recent provincial election and the pending federal election, staff are anticipating that the EO voter's list is further refined.

Internet Voting Standards

The Digital Governance Standards Institute (D.G.S.I.) in Canada creates standards for managing digital technologies, aiming to reduce risks for Canadians. Collaborating with experts, D.G.S.I. published standards in [December 2024](). The standards cover technical design, security, voter identity, verification, access, secrecy, ballot design, network capacity, election management, accessibility, roles of candidates, and transparency. Previously, municipalities were left to develop their own standards for internet voting, while these provide a benchmark for municipalities to ensure secure and reliable internet voting processes. These standards emphasize the importance of designing online voting systems with the highest levels of trust, security, privacy, and transparency. It advocates for a standardized approach to maintain voter confidence in both the democratic process and the technology itself. Staff will be reviewing these standards and incorporating them in the delivery of the Brock's 2026 municipal elections, in an effort to create a trustworthy election experience.

4.0   Related Policies / Procedures

This report supports the Strategic Plan as it relates to "Service Excellence" by introducing a more modernized voting method during the 2026 municipal election.

5.0   Financial / Budget Assessment

Each budget year between election cycles, there is an annual contribution from reserves to fund the operation of the municipal elections. The total budget for the 2026 municipal elections will be $120,000. Staff are confident that with the introduction of internet voting and ballot-on-demand that the budget will be sufficient.

In respect of any contractual obligations to secure an internet vote provider and an optical scan tabulator provider, staff are intending to conduct a non-competitive procurement in accordance with Section 5.4 (a) of the procurement by-law. Each provider will be a separate supplier with the contract being between the threshold of Over $10,000-$100,000 which requires the approval of the CAO in consultation with the Treasurer.

5.1   Asset Management

There is no impact on asset management.

6.0   Climate Change Impacts

There is no direct impact on climate change, however the introduction of internet voting is more environmentally sustainable as it may result in decreased paper production and an overall lower carbon footprint from electors having to drive to polling stations.

7.0   Communications

The voting method is a crucial component of the Township's communication strategy for each municipal election, ensuring that Brock voters are well-informed about the available options for casting their ballots. Throughout 2025 and 2026, an extensive election communications

strategy will be internally developed in preparation for the 2026 election advertising and promotion.

8.0 Conclusion

The introduction of a more modernized election method (internet voting) will enhance the voter's experience and convenience, while providing paper (ballot-on-demand) on demand for those electors who are not yet comfortable with online voting.

9.0 Recommendation

Be It Resolved That report # 2025-GG-005, entitled "Alternative Voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Elections" be received; and

That Council approve the use of internet voting and optical scan tabulators to count the paper ballots, as alternative voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Elections; and

That By-law #3337-2025 to authorize the use of internet voting method and paper "ballot-on-demand" with the use of optical scan tabulators to count the paper ballots in the 2026 Municipal & School Board Elections be presented to Council for approval.