



Report n° CLERK2025-07

Date: May 20, 2025

Submitted by: Monique Ouellet, Clerk

Subject: 2026 Municipal Elections Voting Method

Nature/Goal

The purpose of this report is to provide members of Council with information with regards to the voting method options for the 2026 Municipal Elections and outline the proposed approach for a successful election process.

Department's recommendation

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council hereby approves the use of an alternative voting method, being internet voting and possibly telephone voting, in the 2026 Municipal Elections; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED THAT the Clerk be authorized to participate in a Request for Proposal Process jointly with other municipalities within the United Counties of Prescott and Russell in order to provide the proposed alternative voting methods; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a By-law confirming the specific alternative voting method to be used in the 2026 Municipal Elections be presented Council once the Request for Proposal Process is completed.

QU'IL SOIT RÉSOLU QUE le conseil approuve par la présente l'utilisation de modes de vote alternatif, soit le vote par Internet et possiblement le vote par téléphone, pour les élections municipales de 2026; et

QU'IL SOIT AUSSI RÉSOLU QUE la greffière soit autorisée à participer à un processus d'appel d'offres conjointement avec d'autres municipalités des Comtés unis de Prescott et Russell afin d'offrir les modes de vote alternatif proposés; et

QU'IL SOIT AUSSI RÉSOLU QU'un règlement confirmant le mode de vote alternatif spécifique à utiliser lors des élections municipales de 2026 soit présenté au conseil une fois que la procédure d'appel d'offres sera terminée.

Background

The Clarence-Rockland Municipal Elections have been successfully conducted with the use of internet and telephone voting since 2003.

Discussion

While the **Internet Voting method is being recommended** for the 2026 Municipal Elections, it may be worth considering **Telephone Voting** in order to complement this voting method, depending on the outcome of the Request for Proposal process.

- **Telephone Voting**

In Clarence-Rockland, Telephone Voting has been offered along with Internet Voting, since 2003. The number of voters that cast their votes by telephone has been decreasing considerably. In the 2018 Election, 19.2% of voters used the telephone voting option, while in the 2022 Election, the use of telephone voting decreased to 17.7%.

We have experienced some level of difficulties with the Telephone Voting option in the previous elections, where the phone lines became unavailable for short periods of time, possibly due to an overwhelming number of calls incoming at the same time, creating serious problems as we approached the end of the voting period on voting day.

While Telephone Voting is convenient for some electors, because of the complexity of the service delivery, not all Internet Voting Service providers offer this alternative method as an added option to internet voting.

As Telephone Voting may not be a feasible option for the 2026 Election, it is important to point out that Voter Help Centres will be opened and available in different locations during the election period, to allow electors to attend in order to cast their votes by Internet.

Why is Internet Voting being recommended?

Internet voting in municipal elections offers several advantages:

- **Increased Accessibility:** Internet voting allows voters to cast their ballots from anywhere with an internet connection, making it easier for people with mobility issues, those living abroad, or those with busy schedules to participate
- **Higher Voter Turnout:** By providing a convenient and flexible voting option, internet voting can increase voter turnout. Studies have shown that the availability of online voting can lead to a significant increase in voter participation
- **Reduced Costs:** Internet voting can reduce the costs associated with traditional voting methods, such as printing ballots, staffing polling stations, and transportation. This can make elections more cost-effective for governments
- **Time Efficiency:** Voters can cast their votes quickly without the need to travel to polling stations or wait in long lines. This efficiency can encourage more people to vote
- **Enhanced Privacy and Security:** Properly implemented internet voting systems can offer enhanced privacy for voters, especially those with disabilities. Additionally, these systems can reduce human error and improve the accuracy of vote counting
- **Flexibility for Voters:** Internet voting allows voters to cast their ballots at their convenience, which can be particularly beneficial for those with unpredictable schedules or those who may face difficulties voting in person

What are the concerns associated with Internet Voting and how do we plan to address those concerns?

- Internet-based voting systems may be susceptible to attacks by viruses and hackers.
 - Although there has been no documented evidence of an occurrence, there may be a concern with the potential for internet-based voting systems to be susceptible to attacks by viruses and hackers. To strengthen voter and candidate confidence and to ensure that the voting system is secure, third party companies (for example, I.T. security firms) may be hired to conduct vulnerability assessments to test the security strength of the website, and an analysis on the voting website's security features
- Voter Identification
 - The Municipal Elections Act requires that electors show identification at the polls. In the case of Internet Voting, an online oath of qualifications stage is incorporated in the online voting processes. This online oath requires a voter to attest that they are a qualified voter and also to declare that they have not already voted in the current election. The voter can either choose to accept or reject the oath by clicking the buttons respectively labeled 'I have read and I accept' or 'No, I do not accept'. This is similar to the oath of qualifications that can be administered to a voter, present at a poll who has no identification.
- Voter Fraud
 - Another potential risk associated with Internet Voting is the possibility of fraud. Errors in the voters list may lead to voter notification letters being misdirected and, mail can be stolen. To safeguard against this possible breach, the clerk will be considering the implementation of specific procedures, that may include, but not be limited to: online voter registration; two-step mail out process to the elector in order to provide them with their elector identifier and personal identification number; requirement for the elector to sign-in to the internet voter's module with their date of birth.

Other voting methods could be considered should Council wish to direct the Clerk to evaluate the pros and cons as well as the global cost of such methods:

- **Vote-by-Mail on demand**

Alternatively, Council could direct the Clerk to evaluate the cost of offering Vote-by-Mail on demand as a complementary option to Internet Voting, where the elector would have to register in order to receive a Vote-by-Mail Ballot Kit, before a specific deadline.

- **Vote-by-Mail**

Alternatively, Council could direct the Clerk to evaluate the cost of providing Vote-by-Mail with a manual count, or tabulator count.

- **Traditional Paper Ballots**

Alternatively, Council could direct the Clerk to evaluate the cost of providing a traditional voting method, being paper ballots, with a manual count, or tabulator count.

In conclusion, unless Council directs otherwise, the Clerk's intent is to work in conjunction with the Clerks of the other municipalities within the Prescott and Russell geographic area to prepare a Request for Proposal document which will provide for separate pricing for Internet Voting and Telephone Voting. In working together, we anticipate being able to get better pricing, however, each participating municipality will be executing its own contract with the selected service provider and select the voting method options as approved by their respective Council. Following the evaluation of the proposals received, a recommendation will be brought to Council for consideration.

Consultation

n/a

Recommendations or comments from committee/ other departments

n/a

Financial impact (expenses/material/etc.)

In an effort to reduce the financial impact in an election year, \$30,000 is transferred in the election reserve every year. Accordingly, a total of \$120,000 will be available in this reserve for the 2026 Municipal Elections.

Legal implications

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended, governs the process for a municipal election. Councils are required to pass a by-law authorizing the use of alternative methods of voting on or before May 1st in the year of an election.

Risk management

Details have been included in the Discussion portion of this report.

Strategic implications

Internet Voting enhances accessibility for all electors, including those with disabilities (i.e. mobility challenges, visual impairment, hearing impairment, etc.)

Supporting documents

n/a