

То:	City Council
From:	Mary Medeiros, Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk, Office of the C.A.O.
Report Number:	CNCL-25-39
Date of Report:	June 18, 2025
Date of Meeting:	June 23, 2025
Subject:	Method of Election for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections
Ward:	All Wards
File:	03-05

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Report is to respond to the following direction of Council from its meeting of December 16, 2024:

"That based on Report CF-24-68 dated November 27, 2024 concerning the method of election for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections:

- 1. That City Council direct staff to investigate internet voting for Advance Polls and internet voting and paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day as the methods of voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections; and,
- 2. That staff be directed to issue a Request for Proposal for an internet voting system vendor capable of conducting internet voting in conjunction with paper ballots and vote tabulators, with the execution of any agreement being contingent upon a successful penetration test and security analysis to the satisfaction of the Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk and Chief Information Officer; and,
- 3. That staff report back to City Council regarding the penetration test and security analysis in order to pass the appropriate by-law concerning the method(s) of voting and any use of vote counting equipment as set out in Section 42(1) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32, Sched."

This Report will confirm the penetration testing and security analysis requirement for the implementation of internet voting have been met to the satisfaction of the Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk and Chief Information Officer and recommends that Council

proceed to authorize the use of internet voting for the Advance Voting Period and internet voting and paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day as the methods of voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections.

Attachment 1 is a draft by-law to authorize the use of alternative methods of voting and the use of vote counting equipment as set out in Section 42(1) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32, Sched.

2.0 Recommendation

It is recommended to City Council:

That based on Report CNCL-25-39 dated June 18, 2025 concerning the method of election for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections:

- 1. That internet voting for Advance Voting and internet voting and paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day be used as the methods of voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections; and,
- 2. That the necessary by-law be passed to authorize the use of an alternative method of voting as well as the use of vote counting equipment in a form and content satisfactory to the Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk and City Solicitor generally as set out in Attachment 1.

3.0 Input From Other Sources

- Digital Boundary Group Third party cyber security assessment and penetration testing.
- Information Technology Services Cyber Security and Technology Requirements.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Background

In accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32, Sched. ("the Act") the Clerk is responsible for conducting elections, including providing for any matter or procedure that is not provided for in an Act or regulation, and that in the Clerk's opinion, is necessary or desirable for conducting the election. The Act also 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 ("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 a voting place in order to vote.

Regardless of the method of election or voting or vote counting equipment utilized, it is necessary to conduct the election in a manner that reflects the overarching principles of the Act. These principles are recognized as:

- the secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount;
- the election shall be fair and non-biased;
- the election shall be accessible to voters;
- the integrity of the voting process shall be maintained throughout the election;
- there is to be certainty that the results of the election accurately reflect the votes cast;
- voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently; and,
- the proper majority vote governs by ensuring that valid votes are counted and invalid votes are rejected, so far as reasonably possible.

For every election since 1997, Council has passed a By-law authorizing the use of vote tabulators as a method of counting paper ballots. No other vote counting equipment or alternative voting method was used until the most recent election cycle. In 2022, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Vote-by-Mail on Request was added as an option for voters who did not wish to attend in person at a voting place to cast their vote. Of the 22,456 voters who cast a ballot in the 2022 Election, 161 voters submitted a Vote-by-Mail ballot. All ballots, including those received from the Vote-by-Mail stream were tabulated using optical scan tabulators.

At its meeting of October 20, 2020, the Corporate Services Committee directed the following concerning Report CORP-20-20 Internet and Telephone Voting for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections:

"Therefore be it resolved:

That Option 2 concerning Internet and Telephone voting as outlined in Report CORP-20-20 be referred back to staff:

- a) To further investigate risk mitigation strategies associated with Internet and Telephone voting with consideration being given to a comprehensive security analysis including end-to-end verifiability, security audits and appropriate authentication measures; and,
- b) To develop a public consultation strategy on internet voting; and,
- c) To report back to the Corporate Services Committee on the above matters in the fourth quarter 2024."

Staff reported back through Report <u>CF-24-68</u> which provided an overview of internet voting use and methodologies including risk management strategies, provided the results of a public engagement exercise to determine the interest associated with utilizing internet

voting and recommended the use of internet voting in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections.

This report also set out a number of benefits associated with internet voting, including:

- Increased convenience for voters;
- Potential for increased participation and turnout;
- More attuned to the needs of an increasingly mobile society;
- Prevention of fraud in polling stations and during the transmission and tabulation of results by reducing human intervention;
- Increased accessibility, for housebound voters and non-resident voters;
- Possibility of multilingual user interfaces that can serve a multilingual electorate better than paper ballots;
- Reduction of rejected ballots as the voting system prevents any inadvertent or incorrect markings and voting systems can warn voters about any blank votes (although voters are able to cast a blank vote should they so choose); and,
- Potential cost savings through savings in poll worker time, paper ballots and use of vote counting equipment, if used as a single method of election.

Report <u>CF-24-68</u> highlights that internet voting can help reduce long lines at voting locations by decreasing the number of in-person voters and eliminating the need for proxy voting. While these are notable advantages, internet voting also presents certain risks. However, with strong security protocols and system safeguards in place, these risks can be effectively managed.

4.2 Technical Security and Voter Authentication

The largest apprehension related to the adoption of internet voting is the technical security of the system, ensuring only those authorized to vote are able to cast a ballot and the election is protected from outside interference. As municipalities adopt new voting technologies including online voter services, internet voting, and digitization of the voters' list, a corresponding array of cybersecurity tools have emerged to address the potential for disruptive cyber-attacks. It is critical that the City address any physical and cybersecurity threats to the elections system.

Mitigating technical security and voter authentication concerns surrounding internet voting requires a layered, standards-based approach that prioritizes risk prevention, detection, and response, while also ensuring voter integrity and trust in the system. <u>The National Standards of Canada DGSI 111-1:2024 "Online Voting – Part 1: Implementation of Online Voting in Canadian Municipal Elections"</u> is the guiding document used by City staff to address and mitigate concerns. Key measures to be employed are:

I. **End-to-end encryption**: Each ballot that is submitted is encrypted and identifying information is removed for additional security. This will protect voter data and ballot secrecy.

- II. **Penetration testing:** Conducting independent third-party testing to simulate realworld cyberattacks to identify and address vulnerabilities in the system.
- III. **Multi-factor authentication ("M.F.A."):** This will ensure only eligible voters access the system by requiring voters to authenticate using multi-factor credentials, such as a unique PIN; a one-time code sent to a verified mobile device or email; or, a voter-specific identifier (e.g., birth date or voter I.D.).
- IV. One vote per elector: Ensuring the system enforces one vote per elector through secure credential delivery, session monitoring, and built-in controls to prevent impersonation or duplicate voting.
- V. **Audit logs, logic and accuracy testing:** Audit logs and public logic and accuracy testing are implemented to ensure transparency, verifiability, and trust in the election process.

4.3 Internet Voting Standards

Internet voting standards were developed in response to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections. At that time concerns were raised due to a lack of standards governing the implementation and use of internet voting for Canadian municipalities. To address these concerns, Dr. Nicole Goodman of Brock University and Dr. Aleksander Essex of Western University, in collaboration with the Digital Governance Standards Institute ("D.G.S.I."), spearheaded the creation of the new standard. The D.G.S.I. is a Canadian organization that works to create standards for the management of digital technologies in order to reduce risks for Canadians and Canadian organizations participating in the digital economy.

The D.G.S.I. worked with thought leaders and experts in cybersecurity, political science, public policy, election administration and related subjects to publish the National Standards of Canada DGSI 111-1:2024, "Online Voting – Part 1: Implementation of Online Voting in Canadian Municipal Elections" ("the Standard") which was released December 2024. The Standard specifies technical design requirements for internet voting and best practices for Election Management Bodies who are implementing online voting in Canadian municipal elections. It outlines a range of best practices, both technical and administrative, designed to guide municipalities in implementing secure and verifiable online voting systems. These practices cover areas such as voter authentication, ballot secrecy, auditability, and system transparency.

The Standard includes provisions on the following matters:

- Security of systems and data;
- Voter Identity and vote authentication;
- Testing and auditability;
- Access to online voting services and voter information;
- Secrecy of the vote;
- Ballot design and casting options;
- Bandwidth and network capacity;

- Election Management/Administration;
- Accessibility requirements;
- The roles of candidates and scrutineers; and,
- Transparency of product design and compliance with the Standard.

The Standard was used as a guiding document throughout the City's cybersecurity review and penetration testing process with Digital Boundary Group ("D.B.G."), a highly reputable and independent cybersecurity firm. This Standard provided a comprehensive framework for evaluating the technical integrity, security controls, privacy protections, auditability, and operational readiness of the internet voting system. All penetration and security testing conducted by D.B.G. adhered to the principles and requirements outlined in the Standard, ensuring that the system meets or exceeds best practices for secure and reliable online voting in a Canadian municipal context.

4.4 Request for Proposal (RFP)

As previously mentioned, the following direction was passed by Council at its meeting on December 16, 2024:

"That based on Report CF-24-68 dated November 27, 2024, concerning the method of election for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections:

- 1. That City Council direct staff to investigate internet voting for Advance Polls and internet voting and paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day as the methods of voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections; and,
- 2. That staff be directed to issue a Request for Proposal for an internet voting system vendor capable of conducting internet voting in conjunction with paper ballots and vote tabulators, with the execution of any agreement being contingent upon a successful penetration test and security analysis to the satisfaction of the Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk and Chief Information Officer; and,
- 3. That staff report back to City Council regarding the penetration test and security analysis in order to pass the appropriate by-law concerning the method(s) of voting and any use of vote counting equipment as set out in Section 42(1) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32, Sched."

In response to Council's direction, a Request for Proposal ("R.F.P.") for an internet voting system vendor capable of conducting internet voting in conjunction with paper ballots and vote tabulators was issued. The R.F.P. for internet voting services was issued with comprehensive technical requirements based on expert recommendations and industry best practices, including the National Standards of Canada DGSI 111-1:2024 "Online Voting – Part 1: Implementation of Online Voting in Canadian Municipal Elections". A key critical component was for applicants to outline how their proposal either meets or exceeds each of the minimum requirements as outlined by the National Standards of Canada.

As part of the process, the City retained D.B.G. to conduct an in-depth cybersecurity assessment and penetration test of the proposed internet voting system. The assessment was completed in alignment with the Standard which establishes key technical, operational, and governance benchmarks for secure online voting in Canadian municipalities. The analysis and evaluation of internet voting services included requirements covering voting process, accessibility and useability, voters' list integration, system configuration, integrity, secrecy, security, reporting and results, auditing, third party providers, system administration, data, performance/scalability, testing and acceptance, training and knowledge transfer, upgrades, system support, and maintenance and support services. Based on the responses received during the process, and the satisfactory completion of the penetration test and security analysis, the Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk and the Chief Information Officer recommend that Council authorize the implementation of internet voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections.

4.4.1 Summary of Results – Penetration Testing and Security Analysis

The results of the penetration testing and security analysis confirmed the requirements were either met or exceeded in accordance with the Standard. Compliance with the following key areas was confirmed through independent third-party testing and documentation by D.B.G.:

I. Security of Systems and Data

The proponent provided proof of documented protection against external threat actors, insider threats, malware, DoS/DDoS attacks, social engineering, device tampering, and data exfiltration. A comprehensive response plan will be integrated with City's I.T. protocols to ensure stakeholders are informed in case of an incident.

II. Penetration Testing

D.B.G. conducted a Cyber Security Assessment and penetration test to identify any vulnerabilities or risks within the system. The assessment evaluated the major public facing components including both Web and native application platforms on Android and IOS devices.

Critical infrastructure was scanned to identify any lack of security controls which could be used to breach systems. Both public facing and administrative tools were scanned and resulted in no significant risks. The outcome of the assessment is that there are no current cyber security risks or vulnerabilities which affect the recommendation to proceed.

III. Bandwidth and network capacity

Documentation validated that the online voting platform will be fully operational and accessible throughout the designated voting period. A formal network capacity test was conducted simulating peak voting periods. The test confirmed the platform's ability to handle the anticipated maximum voter load without performance degradation.

IV. Election Management/Administration

Testing confirmed measures are in place to prevent duplicate voting (e.g., internet and paper), ensuring each voter's ballot was counted only once per race, regardless of voting method. Testing confirmed different levels of access can be assigned to election staff.

V. Voter Identity and Authentication

Voter authentication measures in place require a multi-factor authentication ("M.F.A.") for voters to access the system to help prevent impersonation or fraudulent voting. Authentication methods range from a unique PIN to personal identification, such as a driver's licence or passport.

VI. Testing and Auditability

Mechanisms exist to verify vote integrity and inclusion without compromising secrecy of the vote. Audit trails, reports, and system logs exist to monitor and record all activities, transactions, and changes within the system. This record serves as evidence for audits, investigations, and compliance, while ensuring transparency and accountability. As per the Standard, logic and accuracy testing has been completed.

VII. Accessibility and Inclusion

The system is user-friendly and is compatible with common assistive technologies and programs, and compliance with current accessibility legislation and standards. The system supports English and French language(s), mobile devices, and screen reader technologies.

VIII. Privacy and Vote Secrecy

The voting system maintains strict voter anonymity throughout all stages of the election lifecycle. System design prohibits any linkage between voters and their ballot selections. Each ballot that is submitted is encrypted and identifying information is removed for additional security. Encryption is the process in which information is converted into cipher or code to prevent unauthorized access. Only authorized parties can decrypt the code. The combination of encryption and removal of identifying information ensures the confidentiality and secrecy of all ballots cast. Under no circumstances would a voter's ballot be associated to them and vice versa. A ballot cannot be traced back to a specific voter.

4.5 Security Framework for Internet Voting

Staff have undertaken extensive measures to ensure the security of internet voting, understanding that public trust in the electoral process is tied to the voting system the City chooses. Since receiving direction from Council to further explore internet voting, City staff has prioritized the identification, assessment, and mitigation of security risks associated with internet voting technology.

As part of these efforts, City staff have conducted ongoing research including environmental scanning with comparable municipalities and reviewed benchmarking statistics from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario ("A.M.O.") and the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario ("A.M.C.T.O."). These efforts have led to a better understanding of emerging trends and best practices in the field of online election administration. Research indicates that voters in municipalities that have implemented internet voting generally report a positive voting experience and a strong interest in continuing to vote online. This is reinforced by the 2022 post-election survey conducted by A.M.C.T.O., which found that 93% of municipalities that used internet voting were "very satisfied" with the process. The survey also highlighted a growth in satisfaction over time, with a 15% increase in the number of municipalities reporting being "very satisfied" with internet voting in 2022 compared to 2018.

In support of Council's direction from its meeting of December 16, 2024, significant consideration has been given to the principles of end-to-end verifiability, which enable voters to confirm that their vote was cast, recorded, and counted as intended, without compromising the secrecy of the ballot. This is an important feature in modern internet voting systems as it reinforces public trust in the electoral process and is aligned with the requirements outlined in the Standard for implementing online voting in municipal elections.

City staff understand the significance of security and will be implementing robust authentication protocols to ensure that only eligible voters can access and cast a ballot. These protocols will include the use of multi-factor authentication options and secure voter identification checks at the time of registration. City staff recognizes that protecting the secrecy and integrity of voter credentials delivered by mail is critical and has committed to educating voters that tampering with mail or accessing another individual's voting information is a criminal offence under Canadian law.

Additionally, a key component is the requirement that any internet voting provider engaged by the City must undergo extensive third-party security and penetration testing. These evaluations have been completed by D.B.G. and the results have shown the internet voting provider's platform can withstand malicious attacks, detect anomalies, and maintain continuous service availability. Further, the vendor complies with the national cybersecurity standards and demonstrates a proven track record of secure election delivery in other jurisdictions.

Report to City Council Meeting Date: June 23, 2025

City staff have emphasized the importance of auditability and transparency within the process, requiring the internet voting system to generate audit logs and real time system monitoring. Emphasis has been placed on the cybersecurity infrastructure of the voting system and its ability to monitor and analyze network or system activity for signs of unauthorized access or malicious behavior. To protect data confidentiality and integrity, the City will ensure the use of end-to-end encryption.

In addition, City staff will develop a comprehensive contingency and incident response plan, which includes protocols for communication with voters, escalation procedures for technical failures or threats, and backup options such as in-person or paper-based voting in the event of a major system disruption. These plans will be tested in advance of any election deployment. Public transparency and accountability are imperative to the implementation of internet voting. Voters will be provided with detailed information about how the system works, how their vote is protected, and how to recognize and report suspicious activity.

City staff have made significant and deliberate efforts to ensure that internet voting, if implemented, is secure, trustworthy, and resilient. By integrating national standards, independent technical assessments, strong authentication practices, and proactive public education, the City is building a voting environment that not only embraces innovation but also prioritizes electoral integrity and public confidence.

4.6 Implementation of Internet Voting

Pending Council approval, implementation will include internet voting for the Advance Vote period of the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election and internet voting and paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day. This hybrid model will allow for a phased in approach to the introduction of the internet voting method in the City of Oshawa. A comprehensive education and training program will be included in a robust communication plan to inform voters and engage them in this new voting method.

Potential barriers to participation by internet voting related to internet access and requirements for assistance will be mitigated through the implementation of Voting Assistance Centres ("V.A.C.s"), which will provide computers and support staff to help guide electors through the process. These V.A.C.s allow voters to cast their ballot in person using a tablet or laptop provided by the municipality. The same secure authentication credentials are required, but voters are not dependent on having their own device or internet connection.

To further alleviate barriers or concerns, electors will still have the option to vote by paper ballot on Voting Day. The paper ballots with vote tabulators on Voting Day will remain consistent with previous elections, allowing the voter to mark paper ballots and deposit them into the vote tabulators at the V.A.C.s in their neighbourhoods.

4.6.1 Casting Your Vote Online: How It Works

Voter Information Package

In an election where internet voting is offered, all individuals on the voters' list receive a Voter Information Package ("V.I.P.") by mail. This package includes a Personal Identification Number ("PIN") and step-by-step instructions for accessing the online voting website. The V.I.P. is similar to the City's current voter information card but also contains the PIN and specific directions for voting online.

Further Risk Mitigation – Legal Deterrence

To further deter voter fraud, voters will be clearly advised on the V.I.P. that it is a criminal offence under the *Criminal Code of Canada* to open, intercept, or tamper with mail addressed to another individual. Unauthorized access to a voter's internet voting credentials, which are distributed by mail, may constitute mail theft or fraud and could result in prosecution. Public education materials, including voter instruction letters and online resources, will include this warning to reinforce the seriousness of such actions and discourage tampering.

Casting a Ballot

Eligible voters can cast their ballot from virtually anywhere, such as their home, workplace, a public library, or even on public transit, using a computer or personal device at any time during the official voting period. By following the link provided in their V.I.P., voters access the secure voting portal and log in using unique credentials and two-factor authentication.

Two-factor authentication adds an extra layer of security by requiring any two of the following four credential types:

- Something you know, such as a birthdate or security question;
- Something you have, like a PIN or password;
- Something you **are**, including biometric data like a fingerprint, facial recognition, or voice recognition; and,
- Something to **identify** you, including personal identification, such as a government issued identification like a driver's licence or passport.

Typically, voters enter their PIN and a secondary form of authentication to be determined by the municipality. Once authenticated, they can mark their ballot, review it to confirm accuracy, and then submit their final vote. A confirmation screen is displayed to indicate that the vote has been successfully cast.

Processing Ballots

Each submitted ballot is encrypted and stripped of any identifying information to protect voter privacy. Encryption converts data into a secure code, accessible only to authorized parties. This process, along with the removal of personal identifiers, guarantees the confidentiality and anonymity of the vote. There is no way to trace a submitted ballot back to an individual voter.

When ballots are processed, all authentication data has already been removed. The encrypted votes are decrypted, counted, and included in the final tally. Votes are securely stored for potential recounts or audits, but no authentication data is retained.

4.7 Access and Accessibility of Internet Voting

Lack of access to the internet is often noted as a concern for the adoption of internet voting; however, most of the population do have some sort of device, such as a mobile phone, that can connect to the internet using data. For those without this capability, free public Wi-Fi is available in malls, grocery stores, coffee shops, public libraries and at City facilities where a user could bring their own device and connect to the internet to cast their vote.

Staff recognize that not everyone has a device, and for those who do, not everyone wishes to connect it to public Wi-Fi to complete their ballot. To ensure equal access for all eligible voters, a number of V.A.C.s would also be established throughout the city which would provide any voter access to use the online system to receive their electronic ballot. Such V.A.C.s would allow a voter to visit a voting location and use City-provided devices to complete and submit their electronic ballot.

Internet voting is known to increase accessibility options to electors, including the ability to vote virtually anywhere. Internet voting provides a convenient voting option for electors that are busy balancing work and family life, negating the need to attend a physical voting location. Following the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, Oshawa residents were asked to complete a survey regarding their voting experience. The results of the survey revealed that a number of respondents referenced the use of online or telephone voting with respect to improving accessibility. Of the 97 respondents who provided comments on the survey questions related to accessibility, 42 indicated they would prefer to vote online or via telephone, noting that this would also improve access for themselves or their families and friends. In addition, 4 of the 42 respondents who indicated they did not vote also stated that the lack of online voting options was a contributing factor in choosing not to vote.

Internet voting offers advantages, particularly when it comes to the accuracy of ballots received from special voting places. Special voting places, such as Long-Term Care facilities, are locations where voting occurs outside standard polling stations and are established to provide accessible and convenient voting options for individuals who reside in those facilities. Special voting places are a crucial part of ensuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to cast their ballot.

Report to City Council Meeting Date: June 23, 2025

Unlike traditional paper ballots, which can be spoiled, improperly marked, or rejected due to voter error, internet voting is designed to eliminate these issues. For example, an individual may have difficulty marking a paper ballot due to medical conditions such as arthritis or limited mobility, or a voter may improperly mark the ballot by circling the name which cannot be read by the tabulator. Internet voting helps overcome this barrier by offering a user-friendly digital interface that allows the voter to make selections with a simple tap or click, reducing physical strain and ensuring their vote is accurately recorded and counted. Moreover, reducing spoiled ballots through internet voting reduces the likelihood of a recount. In traditional voting, spoiled or improperly marked ballots can lead to uncertainty in close races, triggering recounts to ensure accuracy. Since internet voting is designed to prevent errors, such as incomplete or improper marked selections, every ballot cast is valid and clearly reflects a voter's intent. The digital interface of an internet voting system guides voters through the process, preventing common mistakes and ensures that each ballot is completed before it is submitted. As a result, every vote cast through internet voting is valid and counted, enhancing the reliability and inclusiveness of the electoral process.

Accessibility is a vital element of a fair and inclusive electoral process. Ensuring that all eligible voters, including individuals with disabilities, seniors, and those facing physical or technological barriers, can participate independently and effectively is essential to upholding democratic rights. Internet voting provides an opportunity to remove many of the obstacles associated with traditional in-person voting, such as mobility challenges, transportation issues, or the need for assistance in casting a ballot. It allows voters to mark and submit their ballots privately, using assistive technologies like screen readers, voice navigation, and adjustable text displays. Accessibility features also support broader inclusion by accommodating diverse language needs and cognitive abilities. In line with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act ("A.O.D.A.") and the National Standards of Canada for Online Voting, internet voting promotes equity, safeguards the secrecy of the vote, and ensures that no elector is disadvantaged or excluded due to disability or circumstance.

4.7.1 Risks without Internet Voting

Should City Council decide not to authorize internet voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections, paper ballots with vote tabulators will be the sole voting method available during both Advance Voting period and Voting Day. When evaluating whether to introduce additional voting methods, it is important to consider several long-term factors. These include the rising costs associated with hiring temporary election staff and increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified workers throughout the voting period. Continuing with the current voting model presents growing risks to the effective delivery and modernization of municipal elections in the City of Oshawa. The absence of online voting may ultimately result in reduced turnout and lower civic participation, especially among younger demographics.

Voters with disabilities who are unable to leave their homes face significant barriers to participating in the electoral process if accessible alternatives like internet voting are not made available. Without the ability to travel to a polling location, these individuals may be excluded from exercising their democratic rights. Internet voting addresses this gap by

allowing them to vote securely and independently from their own homes. Additionally, internet voting extends the voting period, as it remains available and open for 24 hours a day from the start of the Advancing Voting period until the close of polls on Voting Day. This flexibility provides greater convenience and accessibility for all voters. By not offering internet voting, municipalities may inadvertently widen the gap in electoral access and participation. With 231 of 414 Ontario municipalities adopting internet voting in 2022 and even more expected to follow in 2026, limiting voting options available to the public goes against the growing movement toward modernization and improved accessibility in municipal elections.

5.0 Financial Implications

Internet Voting on its own is more cost-effective and less expensive than traditional paper ballot voting. While a hybrid model that combines internet and paper ballot voting carries similar costs to a fully paper-based system, it offers potential for greater cost savings and operational efficiencies over time. Key areas of cost savings include:

- I. **Reduced staffing requirements**: Internet voting significantly decreases the number of temporary election workers required during the voting period, resulting in lower personnel and training costs.
- II. **Lower printing costs**: With fewer in-person voters, the volume of printed ballots is reduced.
- III. **Streamlined tabulation**: The integration of electronic ballots cast online with paper ballots on Voting Day simplifies vote counting and accelerates results reporting, reducing staffing costs.
- IV. **Administrative efficiency**: Online voting provides a self-serve model that shifts some of the administrative burden away from municipal staff, particularly around voter assistance, ballot distribution, and line management.

If Council approves the recommendation in this Report to offer internet voting during the Advance Voting Period and on Voting Day, with paper ballots and vote tabulators on Voting Day, the projected cost of the 2026 Municipal and School Board elections is estimated at \$1.2 million as compared to an in person paper only Election which would cost approximately \$1.5 million. This amount will be funded from the Elections Reserve.

6.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

This report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Priority Area "Lead: Governance and Service Excellence" with the goal to provide transparent, efficient, and responsible fiscal stewardship and use of resources and to expand, embed and modernize customer-centric service delivery.

Xal. Al

Peter Barrotti, Chief Information Officer, Information Technology Services

Mary Medeiros, Director, Legislative Services/City Clerk, Office of the C.A.O.



Draft By-law -2025 of The Corporation of the City of Oshawa

Being a by-law to authorize the use of internet voting and the use of optical scan vote tabulators and accessible voting equipment.

Whereas Section 42(1)(a) of the Municipal Elections Act,1996, SO 1996, c 32 ("Municipal Elections Act") provides that a Council of a Municipality may, by by-law, authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment for the purpose of counting votes at municipal elections; and,

Whereas Section 42(1)(b) of the Municipal Elections Act provides that a Council of a Municipality may, by by-law, authorize electors to use an alternative voting method such as voting by mail or telephone that does not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote.

Therefore it is enacted as a by-law of The Corporation of the City of Oshawa as follows:

- 1. That the use optical scan vote tabulators and accessible voting equipment for the purpose of counting votes is hereby authorized in accordance with Section 42(1)(a) of the Municipal Elections Act for Voting Day for the Municipal and School Board Election; and,
- That the use of internet voting is hereby authorized in accordance with Section 42(1)(b) of the Municipal Elections Act for Advance Voting Opportunities and Voting Day for the Municipal and School Board Election.

By-law passed this day of , 2025.

Mayor

City Clerk