



The Corporation of the Township of King Report to Council

From: Corporate Services Department – Clerks Division

Report Number: COR-CLK-2025-002

Date: Monday, March 17, 2025

Title: **Selection of Voting Method for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections**

Recommendation

1. That Council receive Report COR-CLK-2025-002; and
2. That Council approve the use of paper ballots with optical scan tabulators, internet voting, and alternative voting methods for accessibility purposes including a vote at home program for municipal and school board elections held in the Township of King; and
3. That Staff bring forward the necessary by-law to enable the approved voting methods in accordance with Section 42(1) of the *Municipal Elections Act*; and
4. That Staff report back to Council in Q2 of 2025 with an approximate cost for internet voting in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.

1. Report Highlights

- The next regular Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled for October 26, 2026, and Council is responsible for selecting the voting method.
- Staff are recommending a hybrid voting model using paper ballots with tabulators and internet voting.
- King is the only municipality in York Region that has not committed to internet voting.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Council's decision to select a voting method for local elections in the Township in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*. More specifically, the report explores Staff's recommendation to use King's traditional method of paper ballots and tabulators in tandem with internet voting.

3. Background

The next regular Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled for October 26, 2026. Under Sections 11 and 12 of the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996 ("the Act") the Township Clerk is responsible for conducting the election and may provide for any other matter or procedure

that in the Clerk's opinion, is necessary or desirable for conducting the election. Section 42(1) of the Act provides that Council may pass by-laws to:

1. Authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scan vote tabulators; and,
2. 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.

It is critical to recognize the role of Council is to approve the voting method while the role of the Clerk is to plan, prepare and implement that method. In the absence of any by-law passed by Council, the Act assumes the election to be conducted with paper ballots and counted by hand. Accordingly, prior to each recent election, Council has considered various voting options and passed a by-law under section 42(1) of the Act to allow optical scan vote tabulators and alternative voting methods for accessibility purposes.

Staff [reported to Council in 2021](#) to select a voting method (optical scan tabulators) for the 2022 election and committed to monitoring developments and experiences for municipalities conducting internet voting with the goal of possibly recommending this method for Council's consideration in 2026.

4. Analysis

Staff are proposing Council pass a by-law authorizing the use of both traditional paper ballots with tabulators and internet voting for municipal and school board elections in the Township of King. The introduction of internet voting will provide electors with a flexible and convenient voting option making it easier than ever to vote. At the same time, this proposal will maintain paper ballots for those who prefer to cast their ballot in-person. Staff are recommending this change for the upcoming election to maintain pace with the evolving landscapes of technology and elections and to capitalize on a joint procurement opportunity led by the City of Vaughan with several partnering municipalities in York and Durham Regions. The shift is consistent with King's commitment to innovation and ensures we are offering the Township's electors the same service standards that voters experience across the Region.

In line with several neighboring municipalities, the authorizing by-law is not restricted to the 2026 Municipal Election but will apply to future elections and by-elections as well. This approach permits staff to undertake necessary planning for upcoming events and initiate the appropriate procurement processes in advance.

4.1. Paper Ballots and Optical Scan Tabulators

The use of paper ballots with tabulators has been the established approach for several of King's past elections. Staff are recommending this approach be maintained for 2026. This voting method incorporates the use of paper ballots with optical scan tabulators that allow for efficient and accurate counting of ballots for reliable and fast election results. The use of vote tabulators eliminates the need for manual counting and has become a familiar and trusted method for residents and election administrators.

4.2. Introduction to Internet Voting

Internet voting was first used in Canadian municipal elections in 2003 and has since been steadily adopted, a trend which has accelerated through each election cycle. With additional use in Indigenous communities, provinces and territories, Canada is leading the world in adoption of internet voting.

Municipalities have adopted internet voting to increase convenience and accessibility for voters, find administrative efficiencies, and potentially increase turnout. Internet voting also provides an opportunity to address historical inclusion challenges faced by groups such as absentee voters, voters with disabilities, and voters who may be unable to leave their homes.

Internet voting provides for a convenient and secure method of voting and allows electors to cast their ballot online anywhere with internet access using several devices including computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. Overall, internet voting provides a multitude of benefits including:

- Increased convenience for voters;
- Potentially increased participation and turnout;
- More attuned to the needs of an increasingly mobile society;
- Prevention of error or fraud in polling stations and during the transmission and tabulation of results by reducing human intervention;
- Increased accessibility for housebound voters and voters from abroad;
- 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);
- Potential long-term cost savings through savings in poll worker time; and,
- Potential cost savings through the removal of in-person, logistical overhead.

4.3. Internet Profile of Voters

Voters in municipalities that have adopted internet voting report an overall satisfaction with the voting experience and a desire to continue voting online. This trend looks set to continue with demand for internet voting increasing post-pandemic. Canadians both young and old 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. Canadians aged 75 and older saw the largest increase from 62% in 2020 to 72% in 2022.

Voting in local elections across the province has continued to shift towards technology-based methods. In 2022, 217 municipal governments offered internet voting, an increase of 42 from the 2018 election with the trend expected to continue in 2026. This already represents over half of lower and single tier municipalities in Ontario. Attachment 1 to this report is a table indicating the methods used by York Region municipalities in 2022 and their plans for 2026. King is the only municipality in the Region to not yet commit to internet voting.

King's voter's have expressed an interest in using internet voting. After voting in the 2022 election, King voters were asked: Acknowledging you are attending this in-person poll today, if there was an option to vote via internet instead, would you have? Out of 366 respondents, 187 (51%) said yes, and 179 (49%) said no.

Residents and non-residents alike will also enjoy better access to internet voting in 2026 as the Township continues to actively support the installation of broadband and fibre since the inception of King Connects in 2017. This commitment was also a Key Action contained within our [2019-2022 Corporate Strategic Plan](#), within the Priority Area: Investing in Infrastructure and its associated Objective: Connecting People and Places. In addition to King Connects, YorkNet and the Province have continued expansion of fibre networks throughout King with construction and services targeted for completion by the end of 2025. Internet voting solutions can also be accessed on mobile devices through cellular networks giving voters even more flexibility.

4.4. Joint Procurement Opportunity

The City of Vaughan is spearheading a collaborative procurement for internet voting in the 2026 municipal election, with seven participating municipalities across York and Durham Regions. Due to the timing of the opportunity, King staff are participating in the early stages of this process. Vaughan will manage the administrative aspects of the procurement, and coordinate between the participating municipalities and prospective vendors. An evaluation committee comprised of one member from each participating municipality will score the proposals and select the successful vendor.

Engaging in a joint procurement process offers multiple advantages for King. Acting as a significantly larger customer, the joint procurement group would possess enhanced negotiating power compared to each municipality conducting its own separate procurement, which is especially beneficial for King. The larger potential customer base for prospective bidders may attract interest from a broader range of vendors and result in more competitive pricing. Furthermore, as King has not previously conducted internet voting, the joint procurement gives the Township the opportunity to leverage the combined experience and expertise of election, IT, and procurement professionals across the participating municipalities. Selecting a single vendor for multiple municipalities will promote greater consistency and standardization in the use of online voting across the Region.

Participation in the procurement process is not equal to an obligation to sign with the selected vendor or even to use internet voting in the 2026 election. King will retain authority for negotiating any contract with the successful proponent and may choose not to award a contract if the Township Clerk is not satisfied with the solution. Should the Township proceed with internet voting and award a contract, it will remain solely responsible for managing the contract and implementing the online voting solution together with the vendor.

The joint procurement process does not include a contract for tabulator services. Optical scan tabulators and accessibility equipment will be procured from a separate vendor to deliver traditional paper ballot voting concurrent to internet voting. The Township Clerk will proceed with procuring these services in accordance with the authority granted under the Township's Procurement By-law.

4.5. Hybrid Voting Model

Staff are recommending a hybrid voting model to give voters the choice to vote in-person or via the internet. This model will provide both paper ballot and internet voting during the advance vote period, with only paper ballots on voting day. All voters would be automatically eligible to vote via either method without additional registration required. Paper ballot voting would continue to function in the same manner as in-person voting has been offered in the past. Internet voting, subject to vendor specifics, and the vote-at-home program are explored in more detail below.

Voter Information Package

During an election where internet voting is available, a Voter Information Package (VIP) is mailed to all voters on the voters' list which includes a Personal Identification Number (PIN) and instructions to access the voting website to cast a vote. The VIP also includes the voting locations that the voter may attend to cast their vote in-person if they prefer.

Casting a Ballot

Voters can vote from anywhere including their home, work, in transit and at any time of day during the designated voting period. Using the link provided in their VIP, voters visit the voting page on their preferred device and enter unique credentials using two factor authentication (2FA) to securely access their ballot.

2FA is an additional layer of security that requires users to input two types of credentials. These credentials are typically something you know, such as a date or answer to a question and something you have, such as a PIN or password.

Having properly entered their 2FA credentials, voters are able to mark their ballots and submit. A final review is required where voters confirm their ballot is correct as marked before proceeding to final submission. A confirmation page then loads to inform the voter their vote has been cast successfully.

Processing Ballots

Each ballot that is submitted is encrypted and anonymized for additional security. Encryption is the process in which information is converted into cipher or code to prevent unauthorized access. Only authorized parties can decipher a code. Data anonymization is the process that removes identifiable information. The combination of these two processes, 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.

At the ballot processing stage, all authentication information has been stripped. When ready, each ballot is decrypted, the votes counted and integrated into the overall totals. Votes are archived for recounts and audits (no authentication information is stored).

Vote at Home Program

The Clerk has a statutory obligation to ensure that the needs of electors with disabilities are properly met. In addition to the flexibility offered by internet voting, staff are proposing to continue the vote at home program established in 2022. As part of the program, eligible

voters may contact the Township by phone, email or through King's website and schedule an at-home visit. Two election officials then attend the voter's property and provide a ballot for the voter to complete prior to the election officials securely returning the ballot to a designated location where ballots are centrally tabulated.

4.6. Standards and Security for Internet Voting

In 2024, the Digital Governance Standards Institute of Canada published standards for the implementation of online voting in Canadian municipal elections. The standard specifies technical design requirements for online voting services and best practices for election administrators who are implementing online voting in Canadian municipal elections. This new standard addresses a gap in local elections as neither the federal nor provincial governments have provided standards for any voting solution. The municipalities participating in the joint procurement process have used the standards along with their experience to provide a thorough set of technical standards that any prospective proponent must meet.

In addition to these standards, the successful vendor from the joint procurement will be required to provide proof of a completed Treat Risk Assessment (TRA), Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) and a cyber security audit of the voting system upon contract execution. These assessments will be no older than 12 months on receipt and the vendor must prove that any vulnerabilities identified have been addressed.

The Township Clerk may also require the successful proponent to participate in a cyber security audit specifically for King. The cyber security audit would be conducted by an independent third-party selected by Township staff. The scope of the audit would include (at minimum):

- Security assessment (authenticated vulnerability scan of Successful Proponent's infrastructure using an industry standard vulnerability scanner);
- Penetration testing;
- System infrastructure review (e.g., servers, network, firewall configuration);
- Source code review;
- Assessment of physical and administrative security controls
- Proof of concept testing and;
- Logging and reporting controls
- Architecture review
- Any other reviews outlined in industry standard security frameworks

After receiving the results of the audit, the vendor will be expected to develop a workplan and schedule to address any deficiencies, completion of which will be reported to the Township Clerk.

Any adoption of internet voting is ultimately subject to the proposed solution meeting the standards of the Township Clerk set in accordance with the principles of the Act including but not limited to: the secrecy and confidentiality of the vote, fairness and equity, accessibility for voters, and certainty that the results reflect the votes cast. If the vendor is unable to address any deficiencies identified, or if the solution proposed by the vendor will not work for King,

whether that be technically, administratively, financially, or otherwise, the Township Clerk may reject the vendor's services. In the event a suitable vendor is not found, the election will proceed to be in-person with paper ballots and optical scan tabulators in addition to alternative voting methods for accessibility purposes.

5. Financial Considerations

The cost of the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election is funded through the Township's Election Reserve. The current balance of the election reserve balance is \$163,000 with an estimated balance of \$230,000 for the election in 2026. This is sufficient to cover the election based on the previous process of paper ballots with tabulators.

N6 partners have reported costs for the implementation of internet voting in 2022 ranging from \$40,000 to \$140,000. Staff do not have updated costing for internet voting in 2026 and are currently unable to accurately forecast a total cost for the hybrid election model. However, the joint procurement process is expected to finalize in Q2 of 2025 at which time staff will report back to Council with a final cost estimate and budgetary impacts for 2026.

6. Alignment to Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Corporate Strategic Plan (CSP) was adopted by Council on June 12, 2023. The CSP reflects the priorities of upmost importance to the community and defines the obligations and commitments of the Township of King to its citizens and to the public. The CSP is aligned with the Townships long-term vision defined in the "Our King" Official Plan. The CSP also aims to ensure that staff initiatives focus on and work towards supporting King's Vision, Mission and Values.

This report is in alignment with the CSP's Priority Area(s), and/or associated Objective(s) and/or Key Results(s):

Priority Area: Service Excellence

Objective: Enhance Citizen Service Experiences.

Key Result: Not Applicable.

The addition of internet voting to in-person voting in King's local elections will modernize, streamline, and improve the overall voting experience for electors. Voters will be able to vote from anywhere at any time during the advance vote period on a device of their choosing. This allows them not only greater flexibility and convenience in voting but reduces the burden and time spent in attending a voting place during set hours and returns that time to them.

7. Conclusion

Staff are recommending the use of both traditional paper ballots with tabulators and internet voting for the 2026 municipal election in the Township of King to enhance convenience for voters and efficiency for staff while maintaining high service standards and accessibility.

Selection of Voting Method for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections

Council's approval will allow staff to partner with the City of Vaughan as part of a joint procurement process for internet voting, which offers advantages such as enhanced negotiating power and consistency across participating municipalities. Any internet voting solution will be subject to final approval of the Township Clerk based on the solution's ability to meet the principles of the *Municipal Elections Act*.

8. Attachments

Attachment 1 - Election Method Comparison Chart – York Region Municipalities

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