

# Municipality of Lakeshore – Report to Council

## Legal and Legislative Services

### Legislative Services



**To:** Mayor and Members of Council

**From:** Brianna Coughlin, Division Leader – Legislative Services

**Date:** May 30, 2025

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

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### Recommendation

Approve Internet Voting as the voting method for the 2026 municipal election, as presented at the July 8, 2025 Council meeting; and

Direct the Clerk to prepare a by-law authorizing the alternative voting method as required by Section 42(1)(b) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.

### Background

The next Municipal Election will take place October 26, 2026. Under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA), should Council wish to approve an alternative method of voting such as internet, mail or telephone, Council must pass a by-law by May 1, 2026.

Despite the May 1, 2026 deadline, Administration recommends that Council make a decision on the method at this time in order to allow for sufficient preparation and proper resource allocation for the 2026 Budget. The Budget deliberations are scheduled for December 4, 2025. Sufficient time is also required to prepare and issue the necessary requests for proposal associated with the election process.

The Municipality of Lakeshore used the Vote By Mail method for five election cycles before moving to in-person voting in 2022. Voter turnout for Vote By Mail ranged between 40% and 53%, and the most recent voter turnout with in-person method in 2022 at 30.09%.

The following table provides a comparison of voting methods used by municipalities in the County of Essex for the 2022 municipal election along with voter turnout. Please note that this is the base method only; in-person voting may have also included the use of assistive devices such as electronic tabulators while alternative methods such as internet/telephone voting may have also utilized in-person voting assistance centres.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Voting Method for 2022 Election</b>	<b>Voter Turnout</b> (source: <a href="#">AMO</a> )
Amherstburg	In-person	39.34%
Essex	In-person	41.10%
Kingsville	Vote by mail	50.19%
<b>Lakeshore</b>	<b>In-person</b>	<b>30.09%</b>
LaSalle	Internet/telephone	30.13%
Leamington	Vote by mail	45.7%
Tecumseh	Internet/telephone	28.72%

The voter turnout results noted above are included as a base comparator only. There are many factors involved in voter turnout including voting method, voter engagement, number of candidates, acclamations, etc. The average voter turnout Ontario-wide was 38.29% in 2018.

## Comments

In providing the options and recommendations outlined in this report, Administration has considered the following key principles:

1. The election shall be fair and non-biased for all voters and candidates.
2. The election shall be accessible to all voters and comply with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.
3. The secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount.
4. The election shall be administered as efficiently as possible while ensuring adequate staffing, communication or technological resources.

Although Administration has not included COVID protocols as was required for the 2022 election, Administration nevertheless will have regard to health and safety precautions for voters, candidates and election staff.

For traditional voting methods, election officials must ensure that each voting location is physically accessible and ensure alternative methods are available for the casting of the ballot itself. Accessibility must be considered in the procurement process for vote tabulating equipment as well as during the hiring process of election officials.

Alternative methods of voting such as Vote By Mail or remote Internet Voting provide increased independence of voting for voters with disabilities. Voter assistance centres must also be considered to provide assistance in the voting process and these must comply with accessibility requirements.

## Traditional In-Person Polling Stations

This method of vote requires printing hard-copy ballots that are provided to voters in person at their designated voting location. The counting of the ballots can be enhanced through the use of electronic voting tabulators.

Although In-Person voting with tabulators was the method used for the 2022 election, Administration is not recommending In-person Voting for the 2026 election.

The use of in-person polling stations is the most labour-intensive option, with over 100 election workers in 2022. This method requires additional considerations for safety and accessibility requirements, as well as the rental of accessible polling locations.

This method of vote provides the option of proxy votes for those electors who cannot attend the voting place in person. Proxy voting has been an issue of concern in recent elections, relating to voter fraud or access to proxy forms. Procedures would need to be put in place to ensure these concerns are mitigated.

In-Person Polling Stations		
Category	Advantages	Disadvantages
Accessibility		Least accessible voting method for voters with disabilities; may require voter assistance and rental of assistive devices because all voting locations must be fully accessible for voters and election staff
Voter Convenience	Voting locations would be located close to home	Must vote in-person during prescribed hours or the use of a registered proxy vote if not able to attend in-person
Staffing Requirements		Labour intensive: would require approximately 100 election officials
Safety Precautions		Voting locations must comply with safety protocols (spacing, increased cleaning of touch spots, etc). This method does not provide a voting alternative for those self-isolating or unable to physically attend the voting place.
Technology	No technology required for voters	Recommend renting at least 2 electronic voting tabulators per voting location. This voting method does not eliminate unintentional spoiled ballots.

## Vote By Mail

Lakeshore has conducted 5 elections using the Vote By Mail method. This method relies on significant up-front planning prior to mailing the voting kits but is overall less labour intensive than traditional in-person polling stations.

Of special consideration is the reliance on mail delivery through Canada Post, which has the inherent risk of a postal strike or other delivery delays.

Should Council choose this method of vote, Administration recommends drive-thru drop-off locations be planned in each of the six wards on Election Day. Even if there are no postal delivery delays, this provides an additional element of convenience for electors who may choose to drop off their ballot at any of these locations thereby potentially increasing ballot returns.

Vote By Mail		
Category	Advantages	Disadvantages
Accessibility	Allows independence for voters using assistive devices at home	Concerns with perceived voter fraud
	Eliminates the requirement for proxy votes	
Voter Convenience	Convenient mail or in-person drop off at designated locations	Relies on swift delivery through Canada Post. Recommend the use of drive-thru drop-off locations on Election Day
Staffing Requirements	Less labour intensive than traditional voting polls; would require additional election officials for drive-thru drop-off locations	Multiple election officials required on Election Day, can take several hours to tabulate ballots
Safety Precautions	Option of drive-thru drop-off locations can easily comply with safety protocols	
Technology	No technology required for voters. Recommend renting 4 electronic voting tabulators for counting ballots	Requires the rental of voting tabulators and several election officials to count votes on Election Day. Does not eliminate unintentional spoiled ballots.

The Vote By Mail method is a good alternative voting method for the 2026 Municipal Election. Lakeshore electors are familiar with this method and the convenience and accessibility can be improved upon with the option of drive-thru locations.

## Internet Only or Internet and Telephone Voting

The use of remote internet and telephone voting for municipal elections has become more popular over the past decade, as it allows for convenient and accessible voting from any location. Electors are mailed a confidential access code that must be used in conjunction with a personal identifying code (such as birth date) in order to access the ballot online or by telephone.

This method allows for the most flexibility in the voting process, as votes can be cast any time during the 10-day voting period from anywhere in North America. Although the voting process is very accessible, it is recommended that at least one voting assistance centre be established to help voters who are not comfortable with technology or simply wish to cast their ballot “in-person”.

In December 2024, the Digital Governance Standards Institute [published standards for online voting](#) which provided guidance for the implementation of internet voting for Canadian municipalities. These include standards for voting security, voter authentication, testing and auditing practices, ballot design and accessibility as well as election management. Should Council choose Internet Voting as the voting method for the 2026 election, Administration will require adherence to the DGSi standards as part of the tender process.

Internet/Telephone Voting		
Category	Advantages	Disadvantages
Accessibility	<p>Allows independence for voters using assistive devices such as screen readers and TTY phones</p> <p>Eliminates the requirement for proxy votes</p>	<p>Some voters may lack internet access or skills to use the technology. This can be eliminated with the use of phone voting.</p> <p>Recommend having one Voter Assistance Centre located at the Atlas Tube Recreation Centre during the 10-day voting period staffed with election officials and voting kiosks</p>
Voter Convenience	Vote anywhere, anytime during the 10-day voting period	Telephone voting can be confusing if there are more than 5 candidates for one position
Staffing Requirements	Requires fewest election officials, can be implemented with internal staff	

Safety Precautions	<p>Internet and phone voting can be done “hands off” from any location, even if voters are self-isolating</p> <p>Voter Assistance Centre at ATRC would be accessible and able to provide safety measures</p>	Requires training for election officials at the Voter Assistance Centre
Technology	<p>No requirement for vote tabulators</p> <p>Can vote from any computer, tablet or smart phone (internet voting) or any non-rotary phone (phone voting)</p> <p>Eliminates unintentional spoiled ballots (would still allow spoiling a ballot on purpose if desired by voter)</p>	<p>Concerns with voter fraud (reduced with use of PIN and personal identifiers)</p> <p>Perceived security concerns (reduced through frequent auditing and other measures outlined in RFP process)</p> <p>Requires the use of laptops or tablets at the Voter Assistance Centre</p>

While the use of internet and telephone voting has increased over time, several municipalities have stepped away from the use of telephone voting. This is particularly true of municipalities with “at-large” voting where there are no wards, as there may be a long list of candidates to choose from. There have been perceived concerns with voting fatigue, where candidates at the top of the (alphabetical) list are selected when voting by phone to get through the process faster.

The elimination of telephone voting also provides a more streamlined approach, resulting in a reduction in cost for the procurement of services as well as a more targeted communications campaign.

The use of Internet Voting with one in-person Voter Assistance Centre is the **recommended option** of Administration for the most accessible “vote anytime anywhere” approach.

## **Election Resources**

Administration will continue to use the Voter View system to maintain, revise and finalize the Voters List. This will be especially important for the 2026 election, as this will be the first election receiving the Voters List from Elections Ontario (previously received from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation).

Administration will be including funds in the 2026 Budget for a temporary Election Coordinator position, estimated to be \$101,000 with benefits for a 12-month contract. This position is intended to be a key resource in responding to voter and candidate inquiries and would be responsible for:

- Assisting with the development and implementation of the election workplan;
- Coordinating the assignment of tasks and deployment of staff and resources;
- Assisting with the registration of voters, third-party advertisers and nomination of candidates;
- Performing revisions to the Preliminary List of Electors and maintaining, finalizing, producing and distributing the Voters List;
- Assisting with the development and distribution of communications materials, including public notices and website content;
- Preparing, distributing and securing forms, signs, ballots and other election materials;
- Coordinating the preparation, deployment and use of voting equipment/technology;
- Assisting with the coordination, tabulation and finalization of election results and election statistics;
- Assisting with the inaugural meeting and new Council training sessions.

In addition to this position, Administration will develop an Elections Engagement Plan for the overall communication and branding of the election materials, with the intention of providing consistent and frequent messaging to engage voters in the election process.

## **Financial Impacts**

The following table outlines the estimated cost of each of the above-noted voting methods, based on the number of eligible voters from the 2022 election (30,197). Please note that these costs are estimates only at this time and cannot be finalized until after the RFP process and confirmation of voting locations.

Method of Vote	Contract Cost	Location and Equipment Rental	Staffing (including Election Coordinator position)	Total
Vote By Mail with drop off station at Town Hall or ATRC	\$162,000 \$5.35 per elector	\$2,000 4 tabulators	\$101,000	\$265,000
Vote By Mail with drive-thru in each ward on Election Day	\$162,000 \$5.35 per elector	\$5,000 4 tabulators plus location rental	\$106,000	\$273,000
Internet Voting with voting assistance centre at ATRC	\$75,000 \$2.50 per elector	\$4,000 Tablet/laptops	\$101,000	\$180,000
Internet/Telephone Voting with voting assistance centre at ATRC	\$91,000 \$3.00 per elector	\$4,000 Tablet/laptops	\$101,000	\$196,000
Traditional ballots with tabulators and accessibility devices	Mailing and printing costs \$60,000	\$20,000 15 tabulators plus location rental and equipment	\$141,000	\$221,000

## Next Steps

Following the direction of Council, Administration will begin preparing a Request for Proposal (RFP). This will include exploring joint RFP opportunities with local municipalities to find efficiencies. Further information will be provided to Council as part of the 2026 Budget process.

Lakeshore has contributed to the Election reserve fund for the past three years in order to avoid one lump-sum cost in the election year. The Election reserve has a current balance of \$68,436. The annual budget allocation to this reserve is \$35,000. If this is approved as part of the 2026 budget, the Election reserve account will have a balance of \$103,436. As this will not be sufficient to cover the costs of the election based on the options above, there may need to be an increase in the transfer to the reserve for the 2026 budget.



## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Municipal Election 2026 - Alternative Voting Methods.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jun 14, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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Approved by the Corporate Leadership Team