



Municipality of the District of Argyle

Item: Municipal Election 2020

Date: June 16, 2020

VISION

We see Argyle as home to a healthy and thriving rural population. Our municipality promotes and supports economic and social opportunities for the region and engages in the active expression of our unique Acadian heritage. We are a place of choice for rural living and are widely recognized for our warm hospitality and joie de vivre. Surrounded by fresh air and cool ocean breezes, we work and play in the great outdoors. People choose to live in Argyle because of our commitment to each other, to our community and to our neighbors. Argyle is a place we are proud to call home.

Background:

In October of this year, another municipal election will be held in the Municipality of Argyle. In preparation of this election, staff seeks Council's direction on the method of voting which will be used.

Council has already passed a motion to accept alternative (electronic) voting, along with a paper ballot option. As we progress in our COVID-19 environment, we note that the paper ballot option may not be a safe option for our citizens in the pandemic environment.

Many municipalities have, for the first time, gone with an electronic (alternative) voting option. Many have gone from entirely paper to entirely electronic/telephone. This represents a large change in their elections process.

In 2013, the Municipality created a by law which allows the municipal election to have alternative voting from paper ballots to electronic voting, such as internet & phone ballots. See attached bylaw for your information. Council will recall that our original decision to go electronic did NOT have a paper option. Based on feedback from our electorate, we made the change for a paper option in the next byelection and the next regular election.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic ongoing and many uncertainties, staff would recommend the use of primarily electronic voting within the Municipality. Due to the pandemic more residents are on online and are able to access the internet.

In analyzing paper options, we are faced with considerable challenges on social distancing. One solution would be to increase the amount of polling stations for voting, which would result in increased costs, increased need to clean and ensure a safe voting process. Also, it increases the need to train more deputy returning officers. A paper ballot option is not practical in a COVID environment. It attracts groups of people in a location, and presents challenged, that in staff's view, are unnecessary, as electronic and telephone voting enables a safe way to vote.

That being said, staff is not insensitive to some of the mobility and other factors that would make it difficult for some of our residents to vote easily. We will continue to offer special mobile voting for Pont du Marais and Nakile, presuming a non-acclaimed candidate in those

areas. Furthermore, we would add options for assisted electronic voting in the week of the election at locations to be determined, but central to the elections occurring. This service would allow residents to receive assistance in e-voting. This would be managed by a smaller group of deputy returning officers, training a smaller group to handle the e-voting, and hygiene related processes required.

Section 146A of the Municipal Elections Act indicates that council may by by-law authorize voters to vote by mail. In terms of simplicity of vote and access to vote, staff is confident that the e-voting/telephone voting, with e-voting polling stations in the final week up to the day of election, would be more than sufficient to ensure residents have easy and convenient access to vote. A mail in vote is certainly an option available to Council if you truly believe a paper ballot is a necessary service to offer. As we have not provided that option in decades (if ever), we would have to develop security features specific to protecting privacy and integrity of voting for our residents. This option would be recommended by staff as a replacement to a paper ballot poll, **and no other alternative**. With e/tel voting, we would recommend against a mail in, as it is easier for the voter to use electronic options. We would put our recourses toward helping voters in an e-environment rather than propose alternative methods.

CAO's Recommendation:

Based on the information received thus far from public health, and based on internal assessment of our options, I would recommend that Council alter its course of action for the October 2020 election. Specifically, I would recommend electronic/telephone voting with no paper ballots. For those residents that require assistance to vote, we will ensure that there are multiple options in the week of the election up until election day to provide assistance through modified mobile poll stations.

The elimination of the paper ballot polls reduces costs, and reduces risk of spread in the event we are in another COVID phase at the time of the October elections.

Suggested motion:

Move that Council alter its course of action in the 2020 election, eliminating the paper ballot option from its original decision, and instruct CAO and the Returning Officer to lead an entirely electronic and telephone election, and providing assistance options or our residents.