

2020 Municipal/School Boards Elections Debrief

Date	February 17, 2021
To	Executive Committee
From	City Clerk's Office
Service Area	Office of the City Clerk
Item No.	EX21-15

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Committee receive and file this report.

ISSUE

As follow up to report CR20-5 2020 Municipal Election Report considered by City Council on January 29, 2020 and CR20-72 Election Report – COVID-19 Contingency Plan, which was considered by City Council on July 29, 2020, this report provides a summary of what worked well and includes identified improvements in future elections.

IMPACTS

Accessibility Impacts

One goal was to make voting convenient and accessible for all eligible voters within the scope of *The Local Government Election Act, 2015*. The various types of polls operated smoothly throughout the election process.

Poll Type	# of Voters	Description
Regular Polls	22,005	A polling area review was conducted in the fall of 2019. Recommendation from the review was that 30 regular polls be situated throughout the city based on the population within each Ward and the availability of a facility that would accommodate accessibility requirements. An additional 2 polling locations were added by Council at the January 29, 2020 meeting. All polling stations were wheelchair accessible.
Mail-In Ballot	4,970	Due to the onset of COVID-19, the decision was made to open the option for mail-in ballots to all voters, which was previously only available for voters who would be out of town during the election. This provided a more accessible option for those wanting to avoid in-person voting. Applications for mail-in ballots were taken from June 1 – November 9.
Advance Polls	11,568	Four advance poll locations were stationed throughout four quadrants in the city, as well as a central location at City Hall from November 2 - 4. All advance polls were wheelchair accessible.
Drive- Thru Poll	1,806	Regina received national media attention for being the first municipality to offer this innovative voting alternative in 2012. Voters expressed that the drive-thru poll accommodates the following factors: mobility restraints, parents unable to secure childcare and parking challenges downtown. This year in particular, we heard the drive-thru poll was beneficial to avoid as much in-person contact and touch points during the global pandemic.
Mobile Poll/Voting in Residence	1,178	Available for voters and caregivers who were unable to leave their home to vote. Applications were accepted until October 19.
Special Polls		In-person polling stations were set up at 43 senior and long-term care facilities throughout the city and were scheduled over the advance polling dates (Nov 2 – 4) and 10 facilities chose to take advantage of the mail-in ballot option to facilitate voting for their residents. Polling stations and bed-to-bed voting were facilitated at the General Hospital, Pasqua Hospital and Wascana Rehabilitation Center on Election Day.

- Free transit was offered on Election Day to assist voters in getting to the polls.
- Changes were made to *The Mail-in Ballot Bylaw, Bylaw No. 2012-42* to allow voters to apply for a mail-in ballot by mail, fax, or email.
- Mail-In Ballot applications were also accepted in-person at the following locations in the city to provide an additional accessible and available option for voters who preferred to apply in-person or who were unable to meet the requirements to apply by mail, fax or email:

- City Hall
- Neil Balkwill Community Centre
- Field House
- Northwest Leisure Centre
- Sandra Schmirler Leisure Centre

Financial Impact

The allocated budget for the 2020 election was \$1.2 million. Currently, the preliminary number for the cost of the election is approximately \$1,116,000, which is within the allocated budget amount. The school boards will share 50 per cent of the cost of the election.

Elections Regina hosted the Advance Polls over three days, rather than the historical four days. With the onset of the pandemic, the decision was made to reduce the number of election workers at the polling locations to ensure adherence to the Saskatchewan Health Authorities physical distancing requirements. This enabled reallocation of funds to respond to the pandemic. \$328,000 was originally budgeted for election workers and the amount spent was reduced by approximately \$136,000 which was reallocated to cover the additional costs of printing, supplies, postage, PPE and cleaning supplies for the 2020 election.

Salary & Benefit Expenses **\$390,775**
This includes the dedicated support staff and Communications Strategist

Office & Administrative Expenses **\$178,245**
This includes Postage and Office Supplies for Employees and the Mail-In Ballots

Professional & Other External Services **\$228,500**
This includes the Contracted Services and Advertising & Media Related Services

Materials, Goods & Supplies Expenses **\$180,350**
This includes the Vote Counting Equipment Lease and General Supplies

Rent for Election Office/Warehouse **\$57,000**

Internal Expenses **\$80,600**
This includes printing, trades, engineering and facilities

Educational Videos

Elections Regina worked in collaboration with nine other municipalities across Saskatchewan to create the Election advertising and training videos that were used to educate voters and election workers for the 2020 Municipal/School Board Election.

The overall cost of the videos was approximately \$42,260 which was then shared with the other municipalities. As this was a shared expense between those involved, Elections

Regina was able to recover \$26,260 making the final cost of the videos for Elections Regina \$16,000.

Elections Regina looks forward to utilizing these videos in the future and will continue to collaborate with other municipalities on other cost saving initiatives whenever possible.

There are no Environmental, Legal or Strategic related impacts related to this report.

OTHER OPTIONS

There are no other options.

COMMUNICATIONS

A robust communications plan was developed in late 2019 and revised as needed throughout the year. The goal of the plan was to ensure eligible voters had all the information they need on when, where and how to vote. A Communications Strategist was dedicated as the lead, with additional support from communications team. An external advertising agency was also hired to deliver on multiple components of the plan. Some of the communications plan highlights included:

- Website redesign
- New branding
- Social media strategy
- Paid marketing campaign
- Voter Information Cards
- Candidate Information Guide
- Candidate profiles and videos online
- Five educational videos
- Multiple media interviews with the Chief Returning Officer

The 2020 election received a great deal of positive media attention from local media outlets (newspaper, radio and television). Shifts in messaging and adaptations to the campaign were needed along the way due to the global pandemic. New branding was developed to help differentiate the municipal election from the provincial election that took place two weeks prior. A large part of the campaign directed voters to [Regina.ca/elections](https://regina.ca/elections) for all the information they needed to vote.

Appendix A provides an overview of the main Communications components.

A copy of this report will be provided to the Regina Public School board and the Regina Catholic School Board. It will be available on the City's website and on the City's Open Government site.

DISCUSSION

The 2020 Municipal/School Board Election was a significant undertaking with the Provincial Election being held just 2 weeks prior as well as the challenges presented with the current pandemic. The Elections Regina Team, Election Officials, Office of the City Clerk, Communications, ITS, Senior Administration and employees in various areas throughout the corporation and both School Boards played a significant role in the overall operation of the election.

With the onset of COVID-19, many changes and adjustments were required to accommodate election workers and voters to ensure residents were provided with every opportunity to safely exercise their democratic right to vote. Appendix B outlines the additional measures that were put into place at the polls, such as cleaning protocols. There were no cases of COVID-19 being spread at any of the polls reported.

Appendix C provides an overview of what took place at the Regular, Advance and Special Polls.

Historically, mail-in ballots were only available to those voters who were planning to be out of town during the scheduled polling dates. When the pandemic set in, it became apparent that municipalities needed to find additional ways for voters to cast their ballots. Elections Regina worked with municipalities across Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Government Relations to find a way to make the mail-in ballot option available to everyone and provide a contactless voting solution for voters. City Council considered item CR20-72 Election Report – COVID-19 Contingency Plan on July 29, 2020 and approved changes to *The Mail-in Ballot Bylaw, Bylaw No. 2012-42*, allowing voters to apply by email and vote from the comfort of their home. Appendix D provides an overview of the mail-in ballot process and recommendations for future years.

Election Officials

The 2020 election required approximately 480 Election Officials. Staffing at the polls was reduced to accommodate the number of people within a voting station at any one time to stay within the Public Health Order requirements allowing a 30 person maximum within the space at any time. Due to this, there were some modest delays at the polls, but voters were able to move through the polls within 15-25 minutes.

Workers were required to complete the online application and attend the required training session(s) in-person. Approximately 90 standby workers were fully trained in the event workers were unable to attend their work assignment on the date of the election or if additional workers were required due to a high volume of voters. Approximately 50% of the standby workers were called on this year.

The quality of Election Officials demonstrated strong work ethic, great teamwork, strong leadership and excellent customer service skills.

Tabulation and Reporting of Results

Regina has been using vote tabulating equipment successfully since 2000. At the close of polls, election data successfully transmitted from all polling locations to Elections Regina headquarters. Results started uploading to Elections Regina headquarters shortly after 8 p.m. All poll results were reported by 11:25 p.m.

Elections Regina worked closely with the City's Innovation, Energy & Technology and Communication departments to design and create an in-house election results display website. The development team ran extensive testing on the site to ensure all load and security requirements were met. The public display was built to be simple and user friendly and clearly displayed each individual race as well as a leader board which displayed the top candidate in each race. A second display was specifically built to clearly and automatically display the results in Henry Baker Hall.

In accordance with *The Local Government Election Act, 2015*, the official statement of results was posted to the Elections Regina website and announced at 1 p.m. on November 12, 2020.

Election Signage

Bylaw Enforcement is an important part of the Elections Regina team. Their responsibility is to ensure all signage complies with *The Local Government Election Act, 2015* and *The Clean Property Bylaw No. 9881*. They responded as required in a timely manner, to all 13 signage violation requests made by either Elections Regina or the general public, which is a vast improvement from the 36 complaints received in 2016. There were three instances where a Candidates' sign needed to be removed, seven instances where the Candidates removed the signage themselves and three instances where no action was required.

Weather

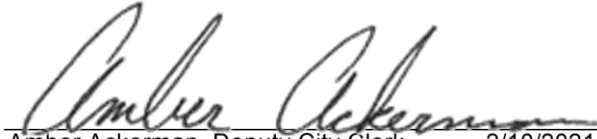
On Election Day, Regina experienced a significant weather event. Elections Regina worked closely with Winter Maintenance crews to have roads cleared for election workers, and keep traffic flowing to and around polling stations. The School Boards and polling station facilities also had their building maintenance staff keep their sidewalks and pathways clear at the polls to ensure voters were safe and accessible. Elections Regina worked with the Communications team and Media to advise the public that the snowfall would not impact the operations of the polls on Election Day.

DECISION HISTORY

CR20-5 2020 Municipal Election Report
CR20-72 Election Report – COVID-19 Contingency Plan

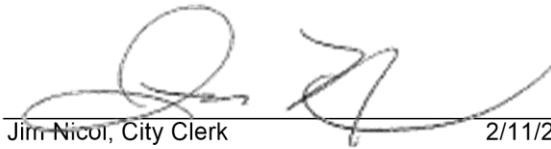
Respectfully Submitted,

Respectfully Submitted,



Amber Ackerman, Deputy City Clerk

2/10/2021



Jim Nicol, City Clerk

2/11/2021

Prepared by: Kristina Gentile, Business Performance Consultant

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A - Communications
- Appendix B - Covid Measures
- Appendix C - Regular, Advance, Special
- Appendix D - Mail in Ballots