

## **Municipality of East Ferris**

### **Report to Council**

Report No.: CLERK-2025-01

Date: March 11, 2025

Originator: Kari Hanselman, Clerk

Subject: **2026 Municipal Election Voting Methods**

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council for the Municipality of East Ferris receive Report CLERK-2025-01 - 2026 Municipal Election Voting Methods;

AND THAT for the 2026 Municipal Elections, the Clerk will continue to conduct the school board and municipal elections via traditional in-person paper ballots while offering more opportunities for in-person advanced voting.

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#### **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation for voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Election. Historically, the Municipality has conducted municipal and school board elections in-person using paper ballots only, while accommodating taxpayers who were not physically capable of attending a polling station to vote, and proxy voting.

Expenses for the 2018 and 2022 Municipal Elections came in at \$14,077.84 and \$13,904.18, respectively. The 2018 and 2022 Municipal Elections provided two advance voting opportunities: a full day of voting on the second Saturday before the election and an evening voting session on the Wednesday before election day.

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#### **ANALYSIS/OPTIONS**

The 2026 Municipal Election Day is Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Pursuant to the *Municipal Elections Act* ("MEA"), the Municipal Clerk is responsible for conducting the municipal election, and establishing all procedures, forms, and providing for any matters necessary for conducting the election. There are however certain matters related to the election that do require Council consideration and direction. Specifically, Section 42(1) of the MEA requires that:

The Council of a local municipality may pass by-laws:

- (a) authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators; and

- (b) authorizing 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.

Furthermore, the MEA requires the municipal Council to pass said by-law for use of voting and vote-counting equipment, authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method and circumstances in which the municipal Clerk shall hold a recount on or before May 1st in the year of the election.

In determining voting methods, three primary considerations warrant careful attention:

1. **Secrecy and Confidentiality:** Ensuring the secrecy and confidentiality of the vote is paramount for maintaining the security of the electoral process.
2. **Integrity and Verifiability:** It is essential that the integrity of the voting process is upheld, and that the final results accurately reflect the votes cast by the electorate.
3. **Accessibility:** The voting process should be accessible to all eligible candidates and voters, ensuring that barriers to participation are minimized.

The following section presents an overview of the various voting methods utilized in municipal elections. Understanding these methods is important for promoting transparency, optimizing efficiency, and ensuring informed decision-making in the electoral process. Commonly used voting methods in Ontario will be explored, detailing their processes, advantages, and potential challenges. Throughout this report it is being assumed that Council does not wish to eliminate in-person voting at advanced polls and on election day and that a hybrid option could be used.

### **Internet and Telephone Voting**

Internet and telephone voting has become more popular among municipal elections. While its impact on voter turnout has not yet been proven substantial, it holds the potential to attract younger generations.

Online voting enables electors to cast their ballots from their homes or anywhere in the world during the designated voting period. This digital shift eliminates manual paper ballots, leading to expedited tabulation of results. Online voting presents a modern, efficient, and accessible way for electors to participate in the democratic process.

#### *Advantages*

- **Attraction of Younger Voters:** The convenience of online voting is likely to appeal to younger generations.
- **Greater Accessibility and Equality:** Online voting enhances secrecy and autonomy for electors with disabilities, allowing them to vote unassisted and anonymously.
- **Increased Voting Opportunities:** Individuals with illnesses or those traveling abroad can participate in elections without the need to be physically present at a polling station. This expands voting opportunities for those who might otherwise be unable to vote.
- **Instant Vote Tabulation (if Online Voting only):** Provides for immediate vote tabulation, providing faster results.

- **Enhanced Voter Experience:** Eliminating the need for travel and reduced wait times improves the overall voting experience for electors.
- **Environmental Benefits (If Online Voting only):** The reduction in paper usage makes online voting an environmentally desirable option.

### *Disadvantages*

- **Standards:** Currently there are no national or provincial standards for online voting. Auditing and testing of the systems are left up to the vendors supplying the service.
- **Reliability and Security:** According to AMCTO's 2022 Post Election Survey Results, 20% of municipalities that used online voting encountered challenges. Problems included incorrect voter list data and issues with software providers.<sup>1</sup>
- **Access:** While online voting can increase accessibility for many, it can also create disparities. Not all voters have access to high-speed internet in our area.
- **Education:** Introducing online voting requires substantial education and communication efforts. Educating voters and election officials about the new system can incur significant costs.
- **Cost (If Online Voting Only):** While online voting can be more cost-effective than manual voting methods, the initial implementation can be expensive. Municipalities may need to invest in kiosks or devices like iPads to facilitate internet voting at designated stations for those without access to the necessary technology.
- **Social Networking:** Voting traditionally serves as a social activity. Online voting might diminish this, as it encourages individuals to vote independently rather than as part of a communal event. This could lead to a less engaged electorate.
- **Fraud or Coercion:** Voter notification cards, which contain unique passwords necessary for casting a vote, can be intercepted. Unlike in-person voting, verifying the voter's identity remotely is challenging. Although multi-factor authentication can mitigate some risks, it cannot fully eliminate the possibility of fraudulent activities.

Quotes for internet and telephone voting were requested from three online voting companies which the Clerk is aware of other municipalities in Ontario using. The intent was to get a rough estimate of what implementing telephone and internet voting would cost the municipality and the estimates were not based on an official RFQ as per our Procurement By-law. Simply Voting and Intelivote were the only vendors to provide a quote. See estimates in the Table 1.

Simply Voting was used by 50 municipalities in Ontario in the 2022 Municipal Election, including North Bay, Huntsville, and Lake of Bays. Intelivote was used by 12 northern Ontario municipalities in 2022. These included Calvin, Chapleau, and French River.

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<sup>1</sup> AMCTO. "2022 Post Election Survey Report", accessed February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025, <https://www.amcto.com/sites/default/files/2024-02/AMCTO%202022%20Post%20Election%20Survey%20Report.pdf>

**Table 1**

<b>Vendor</b>	<b>Price (Based on 5,000 electors. Final billing based on eligible voters list provided by Elections Ontario) – Subject to HST</b>
Simply Voting (Montreal, QC)	System Fees: \$1.75 per eligible elector (minimum charge of \$12,500.00)  Voter Information Letter: \$0.30 per eligible elector + postage  Approximately \$20,150.00
Intelivote (Dartmouth, NS)	System Fees: \$1.70 per eligible elector  Voter Information Letter: \$1.75 per eligible elector  Approximately \$17,250.00

If a hybrid approach was used, the Clerk's Department would have no way of knowing how successful the internet/telephone option would be and therefore would have to plan for and conduct in person voting to the full extent as in previous years, which could lead to a substantial increase in election costs. It is for this reason that internet and telephone voting is not being recommended at this time.

### **Postal Voting (Vote by Mail)**

Similar to online voting, postal voting offers high accessibility, enabling voters to participate from any location with postal service availability. In this method, paper ballots are mailed to voters who then complete and return them to the municipality. Returns can be made either via postal service or by depositing them in secure drop-box locations designated by the municipality, anytime before election day.

A municipal election can adopt a vote by mail only approach, eliminating in-person voting opportunities.

### ***Advantages***

- **Increased Voting Opportunities:** Individuals with illnesses or those traveling abroad can participate in elections without the need to be physically present at a polling station. This expands voting opportunities for those who might otherwise be unable to vote.
- **Enhanced Voter Experience:** Eliminating the need for travel and reduced wait times improves the overall voting experience for electors.
- **Greater Accessibility and Equality:** Postal voting enhances secrecy and autonomy for electors with disabilities, allowing them to vote unassisted and anonymously.

- **Attraction of Voters:** The convenience of postal voting can attract more voters, potentially increasing overall voter turnout by making it easier for people to participate in the electoral process.

### *Disadvantages*

- **Fraud or Coercion:** Voting in an uncontrolled environment can lead to coercion or ballot interception. While voters are required to take an oath verifying their identity, completely ensuring the voter's identity remotely is challenging.
- **Dependence on Postal Service:** The effectiveness of postal voting is reliant on the postal service, which may face disruptions or inefficiencies. Delays in voters receiving their ballots or municipalities receiving completed ballots can occur. For example, in 2018, the possibility of a Canada Post strike around election day caused significant concern for municipalities using postal voting.
- **Reliability and Security:** There is a risk of ballots being damaged or lost in transit. Additionally, voters may not fully understand the instructions, leading to incorrectly submitted ballots without the required signed paperwork. Although mitigation efforts are in place, these issues cannot be completely guaranteed.
- **Social Networking:** Voting traditionally serves as a social activity. Postal voting might diminish this, as it encourages individuals to vote independently rather than as part of a communal event. This could lead to a less engaged electorate.

Vote by mail is not being recommended as it would require significant staff time to process ballots coming in by mail and the uncertainties surrounding Canada Post.

### **In-Person Voting**

Traditional in-person voting is the oldest and most familiar method of casting ballots. This method requires voters to personally visit a polling station either during advanced voting periods or on election day. At the polling station, voters physically complete a paper ballot, which is then counted by hand on-site.

### *Advantages*

- **Familiarity:** As the longest-standing method, in-person voting requires fewer campaigns and advertisements to educate voters about the process.
- **Voter Assistance:** Election officials are present to provide immediate assistance and guidance to voters, ensuring that ballots are correctly completed and submitted.
- **Perceived Trustworthiness:** Despite the rising popularity of online and postal voting, many voters still prefer in-person voting due to its observable and transparent process, which fosters trust in the outcome.
- **Identity Verification:** Polling station staff can directly verify the identity of voters and uphold the integrity of their ballots, free from concerns about cyber threats or online security issues.
- **Social Engagement:** Voting in person promotes civic engagement and community participation, allowing voters to interact with one another.

### *Disadvantages*

- **Accessibility:** Despite ongoing efforts to improve accessibility, in-person voting can still present physical barriers for voters with disabilities or those unable to visit polling stations due to illness or location.
- **Long Wait Times:** During peak voting hours, such as before work or after business hours, long lines can deter voters.
- **Limited Voting Hours:** In-person voting is confined to specific hours on advanced poll days and election day, which may not accommodate voters with busy schedules or unexpected conflicts. Inclement weather or external events can further disrupt turnout.
- **Health Concerns:** Particularly highlighted during the pandemic, in-person voting involves the highest level of human contact compared to other voting methods, raising safety concerns for some voters.
- **Polling Station Employees:** Finding qualified and willing individuals to staff polling stations has become increasingly difficult, posing logistical challenges during elections.

Staff is recommending the continued use of in-person voting while offering more opportunities for advanced voting. The new municipal office affords the municipality the ability to host additional advanced polls during the week preceding election day without significant financial implications. Additional advanced polls could be run by staff without the need to hire additional personnel.

Although not required under the Municipal Elections Act, home visits under specific circumstances have been provided by the municipality in the past. For instance, to allow those who are unable to attend a voting location due to a disability, require additional assistance, or are unable to read or write. Staff will communicate this option to the public to ensure voters are aware of this service.

### **Proxy Voting**

Proxy voting permits an elector to delegate their voting power to a representative, ensuring their vote is cast even if they cannot attend in-person. To do this, the elector must pre-select their proxy and submit a completed form to the municipal clerk to be certified. The MEA allows for proxy voting in conjunction with in-person voting only.

### *Advantages*

- **Greater Accessibility:** Proxy voting allows electors to cast their vote through a representative when they cannot physically attend the polling station. This option is beneficial for electors who are abroad, in remote areas, ill, or facing other barriers to in-person attendance. Consequently, it can positively impact voter turnout.
- **Dependability:** In-person voting via proxy does not rely on postal services or internet connectivity, ensuring a reliable alternative voting method.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Proxy voting does not incur additional costs for the municipality. It offers a simple and cost-free alternative to other voting methods.

- **Perceived Trustworthiness:** Ideally, electors will appoint a trusted individual as their proxy, ensuring their vote is cast as intended.

#### *Disadvantages*

- **Accuracy:** There is a risk that the designated proxy may vote according to their own preferences rather than following the elector's instructions, potentially compromising the accuracy of the elector's intended vote.
- **Dependence on Proxy Voters:** Electors rely on their chosen proxy to vote on their behalf, which can be problematic if the proxy is unavailable or unreliable. Additionally, some electors may not have a trusted person to act as their proxy.
- **Shared Disadvantages with In-Person Voting:** All the disadvantages associated with in-person voting, such as the need to travel to the polling station and potential wait times, also apply to the proxy voter.

***The Municipality of East Ferris has held past elections via traditional paper ballots and the ability to use proxy voting. If Council approves by by-law an alternative voting method, proxy voting is not allowed.***

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#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Municipality would not incur any significant additional costs with the recommendation of continuing to use in-person voting with additional advanced voting options as advanced voting opportunities would be conducted in-house.

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Respectfully Submitted,



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Kari Hanselman, Dipl. M. A.  
Municipal Clerk

I concur with this report and recommendation,



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CAO/Treasurer