

CLERKS DEPARTMENT REPORT

REPORT 16/38

TO: Mayor and Members of Council
FROM: Meaghen Reid, Clerk/Director of Legislative Services
MEETING DATE: Monday, November-21-16
SUBJECT: Ranked Ballot Election

RECOMMENDATION:

Be it resolved that the Council of the Township of Guelph/Eramosa has received Clerk's Report 16-38 regarding a Ranked Ballot Election; and

That the Township of Guelph/Eramosa maintains the existing first-past-the-post election model for the 2018 Municipal Election.

BACKGROUND:

At the Strategic Planning Committee Meeting on Wednesday, November 16, 2016, the Committee passed the following recommendation:

Be it resolved that the Strategic Planning Committee has received Clerk's Report 16-29 regarding a Ranked Ballot Election; and

That the Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the Township of Guelph/Eramosa maintains the existing first-past-the-post election model for the 2018 Municipal Election; and

That the Clerk be directed to bring a report forward to Council for consideration of this matter.

In accordance with the changes to the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, municipal councils will have the option of passing by-laws to use ranked ballots starting in the 2018 Municipal Election.

Ontario Regulation (O. Reg) 310/16 (attached to this report) sets out specific requirements for the authority to conduct ranked ballot elections, procedures for conducting ranked ballot election, as well as vote counting for ranked ballot elections.

What is a ranked ballot election?

A ranked ballot election allows a voter to rank candidates in order of preference (ie. first choice, second choice and third choice). This differs from the first-past-the-post elections traditionally conducted in Ontario municipal elections, which allows the voter to vote for one candidate only.

There are different types of ranked ballot elections:

- Single member elections: only one candidate will win (Mayor or representative of ward)
- Multi-member elections: more than one candidate will win a seat (Council Members elected at large or 2 or more representatives of ward)

With a ward system in place in which one candidate is selected per ward (Township and County wards) and one candidate is selected for Mayor, a single member election would apply for the Township of Guelph/Eramosa.

With a ranked ballot election, there may be multiple rounds of counting before a candidate is declared a winner. With a single member ranked ballot election, all votes are counted, if a candidate reaches a majority (50%+1), then that candidate is declared the winner. If a candidate has not reached a majority, the last place candidate is eliminated and the remaining votes are distributed. This continues until a candidate reaches a majority.

Staff have reviewed ranked ballot as a voting method for the 2018 Municipal Election and identified the following challenges:

- Ranked ballots are a new method without any case studies or experience within Ontario municipalities.
- Vote counting could be complicated and costs are unknown at this time:
 - A manual count could take many hours.
 - Ranked ballot counting could require either specialized tabulators or online voting tools.
- School board trustees would still be elected through a first-past-the-post system, which could require two or more vote count methods for one election since Municipal Clerks conduct municipal and school board elections under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.
- Ranked ballot method would require increased and specialized communications to better assist voters.

What are the requirements?

Before passing a by-law to authorize ranked ballots, Council must give consideration to the public interest, the costs of the municipality conducting the elections, the availability of technology and administrative practices and procedures that would be required to conduct the elections.

In order to conduct a ranked ballot election, the municipality will be required to:

- Pass a by-law, which may specify the maximum number of rankings for each office.
- Hold an open house prior to the passage of a by-law to provide information on how the election would be conducted, including vote counting, costs, vote counting equipment.

SUMMARY:

Ranked ballot elections are a new option for municipalities, as per the recent changes to the Municipal Elections Act, 1996. While ranked ballot elections may provide voters with more voting options, these types of elections are untested among Ontario municipalities and could pose challenges for election communications, voting counting and the conducting of elections, as an additional voting method would be required for the election of school board trustee positions.

At this time, staff would recommend that the Township of Guelph/Eramosa maintains the existing first-past-the-post election model for the 2018 Municipal Election. Staff would prefer to learn from other municipalities that choose to implement ranked ballots for the 2018 Municipal Election, in order to better understand the costs, the experience of the elector and to identify the challenges that need to be addressed throughout the election process.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact to the 2016 budget as a result of this report.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meaghen Reid, Clerk/Director of Legislative Services

Reviewed By:

Ian Roger, P. Eng
CAO