

DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: 2024 Municipal By-Elections Report and Recommendations

Date Prepared: February 7, 2025

Report To: Committee of the Whole

Councillor and Role: Mayor Danny Breen, Governance & Strategic Priorities

Ward: N/A

Decision/Direction Required:

Council approval is sought for the recommendations contained in the 2024 Municipal By-Elections Report.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

In 2024 two by-elections were held to fill vacated Council seats. On Tuesday, March 12th a by-election was held in Ward 4 at which time Councillor Tom Davis was elected. The Ward 3 by-election, held on November 5th, saw the election of Councillor Greg Noseworthy.

The 2024 Municipal By-Elections Report is provided to Council for their information and review, and to consider the recommendations the report contains.

The recommendations are:

1. Mandatory Voter Pre-Registration
2. Seek Legislative Changes to allow for Electronic and Telephone Voting Options
3. Reduce the number of Satellite Drop-off Centres (SDOCs)

The recommendations are closely linked, as one could directly influence the other. If the Municipal Elections Act is amended to allow municipalities to offer electronic and telephone voting options, the City could then explore the implementation of mandatory pre-registration for vote-by-mail kits. This would be based on assessing to what extent electronic/telephone voting options reduces the need for the vote-by-mail option. This change would mean that vote-by-mail kits would only be mailed to registered voters that request them, and not to all individuals on the voters list. The addition of alternative voting methods, along with the provision of one SDOC for in-person voting on election day, would allow the City to limit vote-by-mail kit distribution to those who register, without hindering accessibility to democracy and the right to vote.

While recommendations 1 and 2 are not expected to be ready for the October 2, 2025, Municipal General Election, it is recommended that the City implement recommendation 3 effective immediately. SDOCs allow in-person registration and voting on election day, as well

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as the drop off of completed vote-by-mail kits. In the 2013 and 2017 elections, the City of St. John's offered 1 SDOC in each Ward on election day.

For the Municipal General Election in 2021, the number of SDOCs available in each Ward on election day was increased due to an abundance of caution related to COVID protocols. This by-election report, and other prior election reports, shows that the majority of votes are returned to the City through regular mail or the drop-off box in front of City Hall.

Staff are investigating the possibility of acquiring additional drop-boxes, like the one used for every election in front of City Hall, which could be placed in City-owned facilities during the election period. This would improve accessibility for voters, increase election awareness to City residents using these facilities, and allow another convenient option for returning completed kits.

Council is asked to consider implementing the third recommendation for the upcoming October 2025 Municipal General Election, returning to the practice of having 1 SDOC open in each Ward, from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm on election day. This will be a small cost savings for the City while still providing residents the convenience of visiting a location near them on election day to register and vote or to drop off their completed vote-by-mail kit.

Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications: The report provides a summary of costs for each of the by-elections held in 2024. The recommendations, if implemented, should see savings for the City in future elections.
2. Partners or Other Stakeholders: n/a
3. Is this a New Plan or Strategy: Yes

If yes, are there recommendations or actions that require progress reporting? Yes

If yes, how will progress be reported? (e.g.: through the strategic plan, through Cascade, annual update to Council, etc.)

Members of Council will be provided with ongoing updates on the discussions with the province, and a report after the election in October will show the statistics of usage of the SDOC in each of the Wards.

4. Alignment with Strategic Directions:

A Sustainable City: Be financially responsible and accountable.

An Effective City: Ensure accountability and good governance through transparent and open decision making.

5. Alignment with Adopted Plans: Effective City - The City needs to have the right strategies, policies, procedures and tools in place to ensure a focus on the right things, while delivering the best services possible, and making decisions for the benefit of the community. Good governance and accountability drive performance.
6. Accessibility and Inclusion: The City of St. John's strives to ensure that all services provided to residents are accessible and inclusive. Municipal Elections are very accessible to our residents, and the Staff of Community Services, namely the Accessibility and Inclusion division, have worked tirelessly to ensure that all resident who are eligible to vote are provided with the services they require to fully participate. The election is coordinated with an accessible and inclusive lens to ensure that the needs of the community are met.
7. Legal or Policy Implications: Discussions amongst the City's Legal and City Clerk's Departments will begin internally on future legislative changes required to implement telephone and electronic voting.
8. Privacy Implications: n/a
9. Engagement and Communications Considerations: The City Clerk's Department will work with Communications to ensure that election related information is available through the City's social media, other advertising and through the elections section of the City's webpage.
10. Human Resource Implications: n/a
11. Procurement Implications: n/a
12. Information Technology Implications: The City Clerk's Department will work closely with IT Department to ensure that the equipment required for the upcoming election, in the SDOC locations and at City Hall is available for use for election day.
13. Other Implications: n/a

Recommendation:

That Council accept the 2024 Municipal By-Election Report, allowing staff to begin work on the recommendations it contains, deferring mandatory registration until legislation allows for telephone/electronic voting. Council also approves the reduction of the number of Satellite Drop-off Centres per Ward, returning to pre-pandemic practice, with one location per Ward for the upcoming 2025 Municipal General Election in October.

Prepared by: Christine Carter, Election Coordinator, Office of the City Clerk
Approved by: Theresa Walsh, City Clerk

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	2024 Municipal By-Elections Report and Recommendations.docx
Attachments:	- Draft Ward 3-4 By-Election Report - January 31.docx
Final Approval Date:	Feb 10, 2025

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

Theresa Walsh - Feb 10, 2025 - 11:39 AM