

ST. JOHN'S

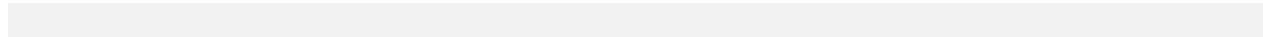
**2024 Municipal
By-Elections
Report**

January 2025



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Executive Summary

The City of St. John's held two By-Elections for vacated Council seats in 2024:

- Tuesday, March 12th - Councillor Tom Davis elected in Ward 4
- Tuesday, November 5th - Councillor Greg Noseworthy in Ward 3.

The By-Elections were conducted through the Vote By Mail process as enacted by City Council in July of 2001.

An Election Coordinator was hired to oversee both By-Elections and to create a business plan to ensure that the By-Elections were conducted in accordance with the applicable legislation, namely the *Municipal Elections Act, S.N.L. 2001, c. M20.2* and the *St. John's Municipal Elections Vote by Mail By-Law*.

The contract for Comprint Systems Incorporated (DataFix) from the 2021 election was still active, and they were engaged to prepare the Vote by Mail kits and provided Staff with access to the Municipal VoterView software to host the voters list. The ballots were hand sorted and hand counted after 8:00 pm on Election Day for each Ward election.

The voters' list was supplied by Elections NL through an information sharing agreement with the City of St. John's. The City also entered into a Business Reply Mail Account with Canada Post for the distribution and return of the Vote by Mail kits.

Four candidates were on the ballot for the Ward 4 By-Election in March, and five candidates ran for the Ward 3 seat in November.

Voter turnout for both By-Elections was lower than in the past. Voter turnout for the Ward 4 By-Election was 19.6% and Ward 3 had a voter turnout of 29.12%. Some possible reasons for the lower-than-normal voter turnout could possibly be due to weather related issues in March, infrequent checking of personal mailboxes, voter apathy. Generally, voter turnout for By-Elections is also lower than the general election.

The next Municipal General Election will be held on Thursday, October 2, 2025. The recommendations at the end of this report are being suggested for Council's consideration to improve the current vote by mail process, investigate and lobby for the addition of electronic and telephone voting to the current Municipal Elections Act and the reduction of Satellite Drop-off Centres per ward.

Voters List and Online Voter Registration Portal

The City of St. John’s uses the Permanent List of Electors provided by Elections NL through an information sharing agreement (ISA).

Voters List (Permanent List of Electors) Statistics – Ward 3 and Ward 4

Date	Action	# of Electors
Ward 4		
12-06-2023	Ward boundary applied to Elections NL voters list	14976
02-14-2024	Subsequent to data cleansing, master list sent to DataFix (for printing/distribution of vote by mail kits)	14513
03-12-2024	Voters list total as of Election Day	14649
Ward 3		
07-31-2024	Ward boundary applied to Elections NL voters list	15,768
10-15-2024	Subsequent to data cleansing, master list sent to DataFix (for printing/distribution of vote by mail kits)	15,660
11-05-2024	Voters list total as of Election Day	15,909

For each By-Election, the permanent list of electors (voters list) provided by Elections NL is analyzed to:

- Edit the lists to extract the areas known municipally as Ward 3 and Ward 4.
- Remove deceased residents from the lists by checking obituaries. Elections NL had adjusted the list through information they had received from Vital Statistics prior to sending it to the city.

The City offers on-line voter registration so that voters could confirm/update their information or register to vote via their mobile devices/computers. The portal was also available to the Access Center and elections staff to assist those preferring to register in person, at City Hall or via telephone.

The statistics of the voter traffic to the portal for each of the Ward By-Elections is reflected in the next tables.

It is interesting to note that although there is high traffic to the voter portal by residents to check to see if they are on the voters list, a large percentage of those residents who find that they are not on the voters list do not complete the process to be added to receive a vote by mail kit.

On-line Registration Statistics

These tables reflects the number of visitors that navigated to the voter portal on the City’s website for each of the By-Elections.

- Positive means that they did find themselves listed accurately.
- Negative means that they did not find themselves on the voters list.
- Total added reflects the number of residents that conducted a search in the voter portal and completed the process to be successfully added to the voters list (uploaded appropriate identification, etc.).

Ward	Am I on the Voters List?	Positive	Negative	Total Added Voter Registrations
Ward 4	1750	715	1035	383
Ward 3	2033	980	1053	351

Election Period – Vote by Mail

The Election Period for any City of St. John’s election is generally 12 business days. It is the period from when the vote by mail kits are inducted to the Canada Post plant in Ontario up until election day.

During that time, the vote by mail kits are inducted into the mail through Canada Post, the election drop box is placed outside of City Hall, two Election Period Staff begin work processing the returns and new vote by mail kits are issued upon registration.

On election day, Election Day Staff begin work and the Satellite Drop-off Centre opens. For By-Elections, the Staff in the Foran Greene room begin opening the secrecy envelopes and ballots are sorted by Candidate. The official count of ballots begins at 8:00 pm and the results are tabulated and released as soon as completed.

The breakdown of returns during the Election Period for the Ward 4 By-Election is as follows:

Ward 4	
Total Ballots Received:	2881
Total Number of Ballots Rejected:	58*
Total Number of Ballots Accepted:	2823

Ward 3	
Total Ballots Received:	4633
Total Number of Ballots Rejected:	67*
Total Number of Ballots Accepted:	4566

*The majority of rejected ballots were due to voter declaration forms not being returned with the kit or returned unsigned.

The votes processed at the Satellite Drop-off Centres for each of the By-Elections are as follows:

Votes Processed in Person at the Satellite Drop-Off Centres (excluding VBM drop offs)		
Ward	Satellite Centre	Total Votes Received
4	Holiday Inn St. John's	51
	Kenmount Terrace Community Centre	28
	Total Votes Received in Person on Election Day	79
Ward 3		
Ward	Satellite Centre	Total Votes Received
3	Village Mall Shopping Centre	152
	Total Votes Received in Person on Election Day	152

For the Ward 3 By-Election, data on the number of visitors to the SDOC was collected, and the total number of visitors on election day was 352. Given that 152 votes were

received by the Election Clerks on site, 200 vote by mail kits were presumed dropped at the location in the ballot box provided for drop-offs.

Ward 4 - Comparison of Votes Received via Drop Box/Mail vs. In Person at Satellite Drop-Off Centres				
Total Votes Received	Total Votes Received from Satellite Centres	Total Votes Received by Drop Box or Canada Post	Percentage Received via SDOC	Percentage Processed Via Drop Box or Canada Post
2881*	79	2802	2.8%	97.3%

Ward 3 - Comparison of Votes Received via Drop Box/Mail vs. In Person at Satellite Drop-Off Centres				
Total Votes Received	Total Votes Received from Satellite Centres	Total Votes Received by Drop Box or Canada Post	Percentage Received via SDOC	Percentage Processed Via Drop Box or Canada Post
4633*	152	4481	3.28%	96.72%

Voter Turnout For Recent By-Elections

	2016 (Ward 4)	2020 (Ward 2)	2024 (Ward 4)	2024 (Ward 3)
Votes Cast	5529*	5479*	2881*	4633*
Voters Registered	13869	13194	14649	15909
Voter Turnout	39.8%	41.5%	19.6%	29.1%

*includes rejected and spoiled ballots

Election Results

The following tables reflect the vote count for each of the candidates in the Ward By-Elections held in 2024.

The total ballots figure in these tables is the number of total ballots cast, less the rejected number of ballots and the spoiled ballots. The voter turnout percentage in each of the tables is based on the turnout of actual votes counted.

Please note: there is a slight margin of error expected when votes are counted manually.

Ward 4				
Candidate	Number of Votes (counted manually on Election Night)	%	Number of Votes (subsequent recount)	%
Davis, Tom	1211	43%	1235	44%
Hillier, Nicholas	272	10%	271	10%
Russell, Myles	657	24%	659	23%
Smith, Greg	650	23%	649	23%
TOTAL:	2790		2814	
Spoiled ballots	9		9	
Total ballots	2799		2823	
Voter turnout % of votes counted:	19.27%			

Ward 3				
Candidate	Number of Votes (counted manually on Election Night)	%	Number of Votes (subsequent recount)	%
Fitzgerald, Scott	837	18.44%	839	18.42%
Harding, Walter	958	21.07%	965	21.19%
House, Mark	319	7.01%	319	7%
Morgan, Paul	491	10.80%	492	10.80%
Noseworthy, Greg	1940	42.68%	1940	42.59%
Total:	4545		4555	
Spoiled ballots	6		6	
Total ballots	4551		4561	
Voter turnout % of Votes counted:	28.6%			

Voters

The following tables breakdown the total votes cast and percentages for the Ward By-Elections, as well as voter turnout by age range.

Voter Turnout			
Poll	Total Ballots Cast*	Eligible Voters	Turnout
Ward 4	2881	14649	19.66%
Ward 3	4633	15909	29.12%

*Please note that total ballots cast is the total number of ballots received for each By-Election.

Ward 4 - % of Voter Turnout by Age					
Age	Total Registrant Count	% of Overall Registrants	Total Ballots Cast	% of Turnout within Age Range	% Turnout Overall Registrants
18-24	938	6.4%	101	10.77%	.68%
25-34	2898	19.78%	227	7.83%	1.54%
35-44	2838	19.37%	271	9.55%	1.84%
45-54	1833	12.51%	301	16.42%	2.05%
55-64	2116	14.44%	530	25.04%	3.62%
65-74	2026	13.83%	710	35%	4.85%
75-84	1297	8.85%	507	39%	3.46%
85+	703	4.8%	176	25%	1.2%
Total:	14649	100%	2881		19.66%

Ward 3 - % of Voter Turnout by Age					
Age	Total Registrant Count	% of Overall Registrants	Total Ballots Cast	% of Turnout within Age Range	% Turnout Overall Registrants
18-24	658	4.1%	158	24%	.99%
25-34	2127	13.3%	282	13.26%	1.77%
35-44	2617	16.4%	362	13.83%	2.27%
45-54	2227	14%	448	20.11%	2.81%
55-64	2893	18.2%	1010	34.91%	6.35%
65-74	2889	18.4%	1281	44.34%	8.05%
75-84	1853	11.6%	826	44.57%	5.18%
85+	645	4.0%	199	30.85%	1.25%
Total:	15909	100%	4633		29.12%

Election Costs

The following tables illustrate cost comparisons for municipal general and By-Elections occurring since 2001. A slight but steady increase in costs is evident for general elections, particularly from 2013 onward. For By-Elections, the comparisons show a lower cost in 2020, mainly because of the use of manual instead of tabulated counting. The significant increase of \$24,000 from 2020 to 2024 reflects rises in contractual and postal services, accounting for approximately sixty-five percent (65%) of overall cost.

Election Costs: Vote by Mail for General Elections					
2001	2005	2009	2013	2017	2021
\$474,751.00	\$343,213.00	\$270,903.00	\$349,982.00	\$352,394.00	\$354,755.00

Election Costs: Vote by Mail for By-Elections				
2001	2016	2020	2024	
	Ward 4	Ward 2	Ward 4	Ward 3
N/A	\$104,738.00	\$89,934.00	\$119,027.00	\$121,683.00

Election Costs for 2024 Vote By Mail Ward By-Elections*		
	Ward 4	Ward 3
Personnel Services		
Salaries & Wages	25,745.00	23,692.83
Labour Overtime	994.00	908.99
Employer Contributions	5,830.00	5,814.39
Contractual Services		
Corp of Commissionaires	901.72	640.80
DataFix	59,583.60	67,324.17
Postage	18,886.05	20,577.61
Professional Services		
Braille Overlay	657.00	0.00
Postcards to Ward residents	1,422.89	0.00
Directional Signage	317.03	172.07
Rental of Space for SDOCs	1,144.96	312.86
Rental of Office Equipment	469.29	625.72
Materials and Supplies		
Food and Refreshments	2,675.04	1,606.99
Stationary & Office Supplies	65.36	0.00
Miscellaneous Materials	334.72	7.07
Total Cost:	\$119,026.66	\$121,683.50

*figures as of January 2025

Accessibility

Previously set accessibility benchmarks were met for both the Ward 4 and Ward 3 By-Elections, including:

- For the Ward 4 By-Election, Braille overlays were available for use at City Hall prior to the By-Election and at each of the Satellite Drop-off Centres on election day. A ballot overlay and braille instructions on how to use the overlay and the candidates were available for use at City Hall prior to the By-Election and at the Satellite Drop-off Centre on election day (used for Ward 3 By-Election).
- Election information dissemination in multiple formats including – website, social media, phone, email, and the Inclusion Advisory Committee network.
- Satellite Drop-off Centre Election staff received inclusion and accessibility orientation including facility and set up considerations as well as etiquette for supporting voters with disabilities, gender, and cultural diversity.
- Election voting kits and information met Clear Print Guideline standards.
- Satellite Centres were inspected and selected based on their adherence to accessibility standards and wheelchair accessible.
- A large print list of candidates was posted on each privacy screen, signature guides and magnifiers were available, the location had appropriate lighting and service animals were welcome.
- Elections Staff assistance was available to assist voters to mark their ballot if required.

Recommendations & Considerations

Recommendation 1: Mandatory Voter Pre-Registration.

Statistics from previous general elections indicate that the Vote by Mail (VBM) process is roughly half the cost of conducting municipal elections. However, the cost to mail the kits to all registered voters on the voters list, and the number of VBM kits returned makes the cost per VBM kit very high.

This cost is high due to the requirement to mail VBM kits to each person on the voters list. Data from the past twenty years of municipal elections also indicate that roughly half the population will vote in a municipal general election, (less in By-Elections), though this percentage has decreased in recent years, despite the mass mailing of kits to all registered voters.

In the 2024 Ward 3 By-Election, the service cost to prepare VBM kits and the postage to send them to all registered voters totaled \$87,902. The number of kits mailed to eligible voters was 15,909 and the number of completed kits returned was 4,633. The rate of return for the returned kits is approximately \$18.97 per kit.

The Province offers a similar VBM format (special ballot) which requires each elector to register to receive one. This process significantly cuts down on the costs of unnecessary mailouts and returns. If the City were to implement a similar process, the *Vote by Mail By-Law* would require amendment. This proposed change will enable the City more flexibility in how it chooses to conduct its elections. For example:

- by either continuing with the status quo of mailing Vote by Mail kits to each eligible elector on the voters' list; or
- by requiring voters to register for Vote by Mail kits, similar to that already being done by the province through its use of the special ballot.

A jurisdictional scan was conducted in 2020 by the City Clerk's Department of 54 Canadian cities that were using a vote by mail system. Of the cities using this system, St. John's was the only municipality that mass mails the vote by mail kits to those on the voters list. The other cities require registration in order for electors to receive a kit by mail.

Mandatory voter registration will enable Council to impose cost-saving measures particularly during By-Elections in between municipal general elections when there is no budget allocated and voter turnout is significantly less. Accessibility of voters will remain an important consideration as voters will always have the option to request VBM kits or alternatively to visit a polling station on election day.

It is recommended that the St. John's Municipal Elections Vote By Mail By-Law be amended to provide VBM kits only to those that pre-register to receive one.

Recommendation 2: Seek Legislative Changes to allow for Electronic and Telephone Voting Options.

The current Municipal Elections Act does not allow for any municipality in Newfoundland and Labrador to conduct their municipal elections through electronic or telephone means.

Many Canadian jurisdictions offer electronic and telephone voting options for their residents. Nova Scotia’s recent Municipal Elections held in October allowed for municipalities to have a combination of voting means such as – electronic voting, telephone voting, in-person voting at polling stations and vote by mail.

It is recommended that discussions begin internally* on the necessary legislative changes required that will allow the City to conduct future municipal elections (and By-Elections) using electronic and telephone options in addition to vote by mail and in-person voting.

A jurisdictional scan should be conducted to determine what provinces/municipalities are using electronic voting/telephone voting, determine the benefits and possible downfalls, impacts on voter turnout, costs and safeguards used. Discussions with other municipalities of similar size to the City of St. John’s should also be held to determine their experiences using electronic and telephone voting.

Once those discussions are held, and the jurisdictional scan complete, with Council’s approval, a meeting could be set up amongst City Officials and the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs to begin discussions on the merits of electronic and telephone voting and request that it be considered for future legislative changes to the Municipal Elections Act.

*City Clerk, Senior Legal Staff, Election Coordinator, and the City’s Policy Analyst

Recommendation 3: Reduce the number of Satellite Drop-off Centres (SDOCs).

If the current Vote By Mail system is to continue, it is recommended that Council consider reducing the number of Satellite Drop-off Centres used for future Municipal General Elections/By-Elections.

The recent Ward 3 and Ward 4 By-Elections, as well as the last Municipal General Election in 2021, saw less voter traffic at the SDOCs.

As the following information shows, the majority of voters are mailing their vote by mail kits versus using the SDOCs:

2020 Ward 2 By-Election:

- Votes received at SDOCs on election day – **468**
- Votes mailed/dropped at City Hall drop box - **5011**

2021 Municipal General Election:

- Votes received at SDOCs on election day – **1965**
- Votes mailed/dropped at City Hall drop box - **30602**

2024 – Ward 4 By-Election:

- Votes received at SDOC on election day – **79**
- Votes mailed/dropped at City Hall drop box – **2802**

2024 – Ward 3 By-Election:

- Votes received at SDOCs on election day – **152**
- Votes mailed/dropped at City Hall drop box - **4481**

As a cost savings measure, and to make better use of staffing resources, it is recommended that each Ward have 1 SDOC set up on election day versus 2, with the exception of Ward 5, which would be assigned 2 SDOCs, down from 3, due to the Ward’s geographic size.

To ensure that elector service levels remain high, staffing at each SDOC would be adjusted to have additional Election Clerks and Greeters on site at each location, if required.