CORPORATE REPORT

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NO: **R027**	COUNCIL DATE:	**February 28, 2011**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**　　　　　　　　　　　　　DATE: **February 18, 2011**

FROM: **City Clerk**　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　FILE: **4200-01**

SUBJECT: **2011 Local Government Election Preparations**

RECOMMENDATION

The Legislative Services Division recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the preparations that are underway for the 2011 Local Government Election.

BACKGROUND

The 2011 Local Government Election will be taking place on Saturday, November 19th, 2011. Legislative Services staff has undertaken an extensive review of past election records to identify potential areas for improvement. In accordance with the Election provisions of the *Local Government Act* a number of changes will be introduced for the 2011 Elections aimed at improving accessibility, increasing operational efficiencies and addressing past concerns. These changes are addressed in the remainder of this report.

DISCUSSION

1. Electronic Voters List –"Vote Anywhere"

In past elections the City has used "Voting Divisions" where voters are only permitted to vote in their designated voting division on General Voting Day. In each of the 2005 and 2008 Local Government Election 74 voting locations (divisions) were established, of which all but one location were either elementary or secondary schools. Registered electors were mailed their "where to vote cards" in advance of the election that indicated their assigned voting location. Based on experience during these previous elections, there were many instances where voters were frustrated due to their attendance at the wrong voting location and staff having to redirect them to their correct voting location. With the use of voting divisions, there is no flexibility in permitting voters to cast a vote outside of their designated division. In addition to the public concerns relative to only being able to vote at one location, the management of 74 separate voting divisions presents operational challenges.

In an effort to improve voter access and flexibility, the 2011 Local Government Election will use an Electronic Voters List. An electronic voters list will enable voters the flexibility of voting at any

voting location in the City on General Voting Day. The requirements for voter registration and eligibility do not change with an electronic voters list. In addition to improved voter accessibility to the election process, an electronic voters list will introduce a number of operational efficiencies in line with the Sustainability Charter.

Of key importance is that the principle of "one vote per person" will still be maintained, as the name of a voter is immediately struck off the electronic voters list when the voter casts his/her vote. The electronic voters list involves the use of a centralized, secure database that enables election staff at all voting locations to use one list and to see all the names that have been struck-off. When an elector votes, their name will be struck off the electronic voters list in real-time and the data base will indicate where and when the voter voted.

As with a paper-based system, all requirements under the *Local Government Act* must be met when using an electronic voters list, including the requirement for a voter to sign a written declaration confirming that the voter is entitled to vote in the election and that they have not voted before in the same election. Staff is familiar with the application of an electronic voters list, since in the 2008 Advance Voting period, an electronic voters list was utilized to strike off voters as votes were cast.

The use of an electronic voters list is not a new concept. This technology has been and continues to be utilized by a number of municipalities in BC (i.e. Coquitlam, Victoria, Abbotsford) and is common practice amongst Ontario municipalities. Those that have been utilizing this approach are satisfied with it.

2. Voting Locations

By introducing the ability of all voters to vote at any voting location it is not necessary to have the same number of voting locations. In 2008 staff noted that a number of voting locations were located in close proximity to one another.

The primary consideration in identifying voting locations relates to ensuring a reasonable level of accessibility to voting locations for the electorate. Staff has examined each of the locations that were used in the 2008 election in relation to wheelchair accessibility, parking, whether they were located on a bus route and proximity to shopping and other services that many voters would frequent on a Saturday. The following criteria were used in reviewing voting locations based on guidelines set out by the Province and other sources for creating an optimal voting experience. Voting locations should:

- be accessible to persons who have a physical disability or whose mobility is impaired;
- be as central as possible within the voting area it is meant to serve;
- be of adequate size to accommodate a potentially high voter turnout;
- be close to or on a bus route;
- provide adequate parking;
- provide adequate outside lighting;
- provide adequate heating of building; and
- provide adequate washroom facilities accessible to voters and staff.

Staff conducted site visits of schools that were used as voting locations in the 2008 election and reviewed information on file from past elections. Based on this detailed review, 42 of the 74 voting locations used in 2008 are considered satisfactory relative to the noted criteria and will

continue to be used in the 2011 election. In addition, some Surrey civic facilities and a few different school locations that meet all of the criteria will also be used in the 2011 election. The number of voting locations for the 2011 Local Government election will be reduced to a total of approximately 52 locations. Staff is confident that these voting locations in combination with the use of an electronic voters list that will provide flexibility for voters to vote at any voting location in the City will meet the needs of the electorate relative to the 2011 election.

3.   Public Education and Awareness

As highlighted below, the overall voter turn-out related to past elections has not been high, with the 2008 election exhibiting the lowest percentage to date. Voter turnout is defined as the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot during an election.

Election Year	No. of Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Percentage turnout
2008	256,913	61,965	24.1%
2005	239,444	83,997	35.0%
2002	172,684	54,114	31.3%

The use of an electronic voters list to enable voters to vote at any voting location will enhance the flexibility available to voters in relation to voting, which should increase voter turnout. A second component is to increasing voter turnout is a sound public education and information strategy to inform the voters of their opportunity to vote.

At this time, staff is undertaking a detailed review of the different means of engaging the public and raising awareness relative to the upcoming local elections. The conventional means of communication with the public including the City Website, mail-outs, handouts and newspaper advertisements will be used. In addition, staff is exploring the potential opportunities related to the use of social media. Further information relative to the public education and communication program related to the 2011 local government election will be forwarded to Council in due course.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

In keeping with the objectives of the Sustainability Charter, the preparations for the 2011 local government elections discussed in this report focus on increasing voter turnout and improving the voter experience to facilitate and encourage participation of citizens in local government elections.

CONCLUSION

This report provides an update in relation to preparations that are underway for the 2011 Local Government Election. Staff will provide further updates to Council on election-related initiatives over the coming months.

Jane Sullivan
City Clerk

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