

Township prepares for this year's municipal election

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Some modern technology will enhance the voting experience this year for King residents. Council recently approved staff recommendations to make the 2022 election more efficient. The Township will continue to use optical scanning vote tabulators and establish a vote-at-home program for homebound electors. Staff noted the scanning tabulators have been used for some time, and they've proven to be accurate, reliable and efficient. The new 'Vote at Home' method will be an enhanced service as a pilot project this time out. It will allow eligible voters, who are unable to vote in-person, to cast ballots. This year's municipal election is scheduled for Oct. 24. Staff wanted council to consider the options early, so municipal employees have ample time to get accustomed to any new methods. As well, the tabulators will be in high demand, so it's important to secure them early. The vote tabulators are not unlike lottery scanners - they read and record how the ballots are marked. The information is stored and at the close of voting on election day, the vote tabulator produces a cumulative total of all votes cast. It makes for efficient counting, and it ensures secret and confidential voting. It's accurate and maintains the integrity of the process. Internet or online voting has been implemented in some Ontario municipalities. It offers a convenient and accessible way to cast a vote without actually going to a polling station. You can basically vote any time, anywhere. King's clerks division said while it may be a feasible option, a lot would be required to get it going. It would demand more resources and funding, as well as a significant public education campaign. Although internet voting modernizes the election process and enhances the convenience to voters, it is evident that there continues to be a hesitancy to implement internet voting due to a lack of framework and best practices, staff noted. It was also pointed out that internet access to King voters is not 100% and service is limited in many areas. Staff are hopeful that once new standards are developed and a uniform model is in place, it may become an option. The pandemic is also a factor, but we don't know where we will be until closer to the fall. Staff will continue to plan for safety measures, cleaning protocols and distancing to be in place. There will be some enhancements for the 2022 vote. Staff plan to increase advanced polls, days and hours. The pilot 'Vote at Home' program will help. Staff are also looking at the potential of 'curbside' or 'drive-thru' voting, should it be required. Staff reported that a number of jurisdictions do have home visit programs to help people vote. Staff will consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and explore the costs, training and establishment of such a program. Staff believe the costs for such a program should be minimal by utilizing existing fleet and operating within regular business hours. The implementation of a home visit program as an alternative voting method for homebound electors will continue to improve the accessibility of its elections and further enable electors to exercise their right to vote. Curbside voting is a novel idea, but its usefulness has been demonstrated during the pandemic. Flu shots and vaccinations were delivered in this manner quite successfully. Staff have engaged Dominion Voting to obtain pricing and options. The estimated cost of running the election is roughly \$165,000. There is an election reserve fund and staff don't think any extra funds will be needed.