

Council opts to include internet voting for 2026 election

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal JournalismInitiative Reporter

King residents will have the option of voting via the internet, in this year's municipal election. Council opted to pursue staff recommendations that combine the use of Internet Voting, in addition to the alternative voting methods approved at its meeting of March being use of paper ballots with optical scan tabulators, and alternative voting methods for accessibility purposes, including a vote at home program for municipal and school board elections held in the Township of King. Staff noted that a survey of in-person voters in 2022 were split on internet voting (51% yes, 49% no), while a 2025 survey showed strong support for future internet voting, with 81% of respondents favoring the option for the 2026 elections. Studies suggest internet voting can modestly increase turnout (around 3.5% initially) by reducing the 'cost' of voting compared to in-person methods, though overall turnout trends remain downward and depend on multiple factors. King partnered with Vaughan and neighboring municipalities in a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) for internet voting services, resulting in Vaughan awarding Neuvote Systems Inc. The process offers cost savings and technical expertise, but King is not obligated to proceed. Back in March 17, Council considered a staff report on the matter and subsequently approved the use of paper ballots with optical scan tabulators, and alternative voting methods for accessibility purposes including a vote at home program for municipal and school board elections. Council also approved internet voting in concept and directed staff to report back to Council in 2025 with an approximate cost for internet voting in the 2026 election. Following the March 17 report, Clerks staff surveyed the public on internet voting and participated in a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) for internet voting services led by the City of Vaughan. Staff polled residents, asking if they would vote via the internet and out of 366 respondents, 187 (51%) said yes, and 179 (49%) said no. Staff conducted an additional Internet Voting Survey over a three-week period through June and July of 2025. Respondents were asked: 'If you had the option to vote via internet in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections, would you?' Of the 136 respondents, 110 (81%) said yes, and 26 (19%) said no. Multiple studies have demonstrated that the introduction of internet voting can on average provide a modest increase in turnout during the first year of use. A commonly cited 2018 study by Dr. Nicole Goodman put this increase at 3.5 per cent for municipalities using internet voting from 2000-2014. Despite more municipalities providing internet voting, voter turnout continues to trend downwards overall with AMO noting a downturn from 38.3 per cent in 2018 to 32.9 per cent in 2022. Several factors play into voter turnout including voter engagement, competitiveness of races, number of races, barriers to voting, and the cost of voting. The cost of voting refers to the time it takes for voters to cast their ballot. Voting in-person is considered to have a higher cost due to the length of time spent prior to casting a ballot including travelling to the voting place, navigating the voting place, having the ballot issued, and successfully completing it. Internet voting has a significantly lower cost as voters can simply vote from any location on their preferred device in a matter of minutes, staff pointed out. This can therefore help raise voter turnout in some instances but must be weighed against the other cited factors to consider potential overall turnout. Following staff's March report to Council, the Clerks Division participated in a joint RFP led by the City of Vaughan. This initiative included further participation by the municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, and Whitchurch-Stouffville. With Vaughan's procurement team administering the RFP, an evaluation committee consisting of 7 members with subject matter and technical expertise reviewed the proposals. This structure and approach allowed King to maintain a more competitive position in the market and leverage the technical expertise and experience of neighbouring municipalities. On November 19, notice of award was provided by Vaughan to Neuvote Systems Inc. to provide internet voting services for the City in 2026. This now allows King to enter into discussions with the vendor for services based on the terms and provisions outlined in the reviewed proposal. As noted in staff's previous report, there is no obligation to proceed with the vendor or with internet voting. The main benefits of the process are the reduced cost and thorough review of the proposed solution. Funding for the 2026 election comes from the Township's Election Reserve, which is projected to total \$230,000 in 2026. This amount is sufficient to cover the election using the traditional process of paper ballots with tabulators. The joint procurement process with Vaughan and neighboring municipalities positions King to access a vetted, cost-effective solution without immediate obligation, allowing flexibility to make an informed decision that balances accessibility, security, and fiscal responsibility.