

REPORT

Legislative Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: December 11, 2023

From: Jacque Killawee
Chief Election Officer 2022 Election
File: 05.1035.20
Item #: 2023-812

Subject: Report on the 2022 General Local Election

RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT Council, provide the following direction to staff:
 - a. That staff continue to use branded marketing and promote the election on all the City channels including social media, billboards, City facilities, and bus shelters.
 - b. In the 2026 election to provide a small number of voter guides distributed in City facilities and through partnerships with local malls.
 - c. Research other municipal candidate statements and work with Elections BC to develop a more structured candidate profile format.
 - d. To make the distribution of voter cards with a QR code link to the voter guide a standard feature of all City elections moving forward.
 - e. That the City offer mail-in ballot options for all future Local Elections.
 - f. To research providing an opt-out clause for mail-in ballots for by-elections to save costs.
 - g. To maintain the current alphabetic order of candidates on the ballot.
 - h. To provide name order analysis to the School Board for their consideration.
 - i. To investigate closing the loophole within the sign bylaw that allows for larger signs in some areas of the City.
-

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an analysis of the 2022 General Local Election. Staff propose some changes for the 2026 Local General Election for Council's approval.

SUMMARY

This report provides Council with an analysis of the Local Election of 2022. The voter turnout increased from 2018 with an analysis of the poll data showed that double the number of voters used advance polls. It also indicates voting was constant throughout the day without the usual large increase at noon.

It was the first election where the City offered mail-in ballots, mailed voter's guide and voters cards. Mail in ballots were popular with 386 votes being cast using this method. This voting option proves costly in a by-election situation so staff recommend evaluating their use in these types of election. Voter cards were also popular with 60% of voters bring them to the polls. The City mailed voters guides to all households to promote the election to residents of multifamily housing but the evidence does not indicate that it had any effect on voter turn-out. Given the cost of this advertising tool staff recommend only distributing the guide through community centres in 2026.

The changed rules around election staff being deemed employees of the City led to the election team creatively staffing the polling locations to reduce overtime and to provide additional training opportunities for poll staff during advance voting. Staffing costs will be a challenge in 2026.

In response to a School Board motion, an analysis of ballot ordering of candidate names was conducted to determine any effect on being elected. Ballot position was not found to be a factor in New Westminster elections.

As a result of inflation and costs for the 2022 election the budget for the 2026 has been adjusted for inflation to ensure that the City sets aside sufficient money in a reserve in the years leading up to 2026.

BACKGROUND

The 2022 General Local Election was held October 15, 2022. Advance voting opportunities were held on October 5, 8, and 12, 2022, and special voting opportunities were held on October 8 and 13, 2022.

Following the 2022 election, election staff, in conjunction with public engagement, conducted a survey between November 2 and 30, 2022 to seek public feedback on the election process. The survey was run on the City's Be Heard platform. There were a total of 134 responses, corresponding to 0.2% of the registered voters (54,592). The data from the survey is provided in analyzed form in Attachment 1.

Changes implemented in the 2022 General Local Election

In the 2022 election, several changes were made from the 2018 election. Many of these changes were requested by Council following the 2018 election and stem from a report entitled “Report on the 2018 General Local Election,” which was included on the open workshop agenda of April 29, 2019. These changes included:

- Voter Card
- Voter Guide
- Mail in Ballot
- Special voting opportunity at a social service centre
- Election material translated into five languages
- Advertising using electronic billboards and bus shelters and
- Engaging youth to engage other youth in the election process.

The election sign bylaw was updated in 2020 to limit the size of elections signs to 0.61m by 0.61m from the previous 3.0 square meter maximum.

The City again deployed third-party voter management software called VoterView, developed by Canadian company DataFix in Ontario. In 2022, the City utilized the software’s mail in ballot module to implement the mail in ballots procedure.

ANALYSIS

ELECTION COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

Based on the experience of the 2018 election, the Election Office sought to improve and expand outreach efforts in 2022.

The Election Office worked closely with the City’s Communications and Public Engagement departments in early 2022 to develop an outreach strategy, which included a unique and easily recognizable brand used across a variety of outreach tools. This comprehensive branding included key election information in seven languages (French, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, Korean, Arabic and Spanish).

The methods of communication and outreach employed by the Election Office in the 2022 General Local Election included:

1) City’s Election website (www.newwestcity.ca/elections)

As in previous general local elections, the City posted comprehensive election information on its website for voters and candidates.

- The Election Office, with the assistance of the City’s GIS team, expanded on the Interactive Voters map by adding images of the voting locations to assist voters to locate the correct entrance.
- The City’s Election website continued to host candidate profile information with candidates permitted to submit up to 150 words, a photo, and contact information for their website.

- It acts as the main repository of information for All Candidates Meetings in the City.

2) The Record newspaper

The Record newspaper continued its traditional role in publishing the City's paid statutory election notices required under the *Local Government Act*. In addition, advertisements promoting advance voter registration were published as early as June. On September 29, 2022, a full-colour, four-page advertising wrap promoting the election was included on all copies of the Record.

3) Electronic and static billboards

In 2022 branded election messages were regularly advertised on the City's electronic billboards. These messages included wording in the seven languages (French, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, Korean, Arabic and Spanish). This was supplemented with physical banners that rotated between community centres, as well as posters at selected bus shelters.

4) Voter Cards

In 2022, the City produced approximately 54,000 Voter Cards (attachment 2). These were sent to each registered voter in the City.

5) Voter Guide

At Council's direction, in 2022 Communications and the Election office produced a Voter's Guide. This included comprehensive information about the election and the candidate profile information. The English language version of this guide was mailed to 37,000 households in New Westminster. By mailing to every household the goal was to reach the citizens who were not registered to vote and to reach into the multifamily housing where the traditional advertising methods were thought not to be effective. In addition, the English language guide (excluding the candidate profiles) was translated into French, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, and Korean. The translated versions of the guide were available on the City's website.

6) Social media

Communications staff worked closely with the Election Office throughout 2022 to promote the election on the City's social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Election messaging was posted on all social media channels at least weekly. The advertising campaign escalated in October with paid posts as well as the regular posts to push the City's message out.

7) Youth Elections Ambassadors

In 2022 the City partnered with City Hive in a multi-community project to engage youth and young voters ages 18-30 in the municipal election and to support municipalities in building stronger relationships with local youth. The City supported four local Youth Elections Ambassadors as they each worked to promote the election in a large group setting and in small group settings with their peers. This

was a non-partisan activity geared towards raising awareness about the Local Election and democratic participation.

Survey Results on Election Communication

The election feedback survey indicated that the City was successful in getting the message about the election out. The majority of survey participants had seen the City's branded election material. An interesting result from the survey indicated that the most common source of information was The Record newspaper, with social media, the City website and Anchor e-newsletter as the next-most common sources. With the end of the paper edition of the Record, City election staff will need to give careful consideration to how to reach the residents of New Westminster for the 2026 election.

Staff Recommendation

That staff continue to use branded marketing and promote the election on all the City channels including social media, billboards, City facilities, and bus shelters.

VOTER TURNOUT

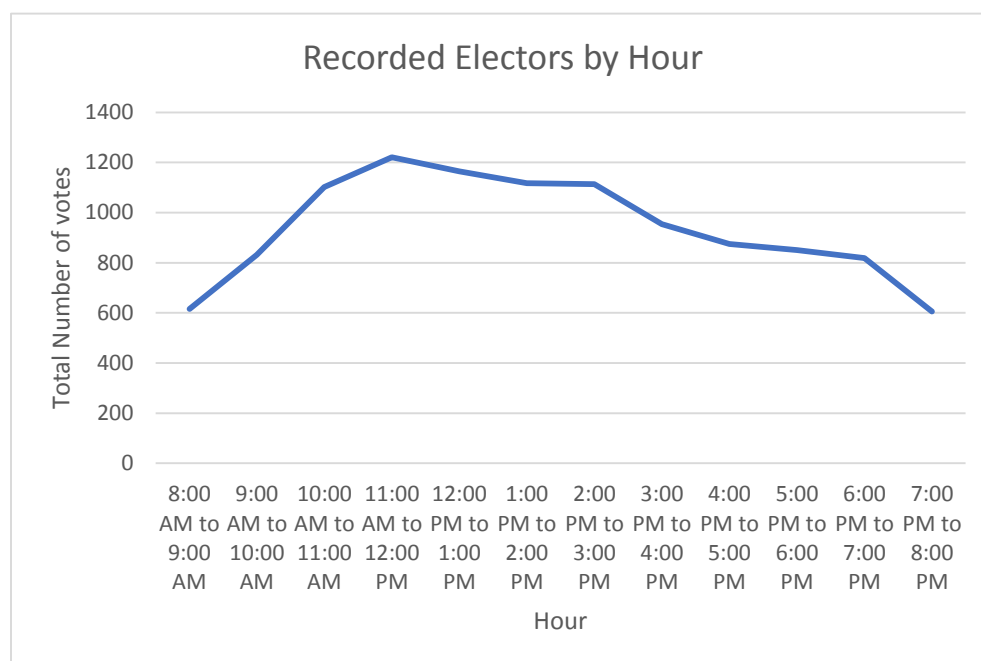
Voting Activity – A Snapshot

The following table compares general local election voter turnout from 2011 to 2022. The number of ballots cast in 2022 saw an increase from 2018 and continued the upward trend since 2008 (Table 1). The overall voter turnout percentage however, saw a very small increase, due to the significant increase in the number of registered electors since 2018.

Year	Registered Electors	Ballots Cast	Percentage
2011	45,273	10,614	23.45
2014	45,760	14,564	31.83
2018	50,616	14,665	28.97
2022	54,592	15,923	29.17

Table 1 Number of Ballots Cast

Graph 1 shows aggregated voter volumes across the City by hour, from poll opening at 8:00 AM to closing at 8:00 PM. The most active hour on General Voting Day was again between 11:00 AM and noon, when 1,221 ballots were issued across the city.



Graph 1 Aggregated voter activity by hour on General Voting Day

There was a change in distribution of votes cast during the day from 2018. In 2022 voting was strong from the 8am and remained more constant throughout the day than 2018. This distribution of voting activity informed the staffing of the poll locations.

There were 1000 new voters registered across the City during the 2022 Local election. This translates to 6% for the votes cast.

Number of ballots cast in all Advance, Special Voting Opportunities and Mail in Ballots: Data shows that voters continue to take advantage of advance voting opportunities in greater numbers than in previous elections (Table 2). In 2022, the City offered mail in ballot for the first time, with 386 votes being cast.

Year	2011	2014	2018	2022
Advance and Special Voting Ballots Cast	1097	2030	2982	4238
Mail in Ballots Cast	-	-	-	386

Table 2

Voter Turnout by Resident Association Areas

With the assistance of the City's GIS Coordinator and Senior Planning Analyst, election staff compiled the following table of the voter turnout for each neighbourhood.

Table 3 was compiled by overlaying election data from VoterView on top of GIS neighbourhood boundaries¹.

¹ The raw data was destroyed in 2022 as per the Election Act Requirements.

Resident Association Areas	Registered Voters	Vote Count by Residential Address	% voters
Brow of the Hill	10,471	2,430	23.2%
Connaught Heights	1,263	340	26.9%
Downtown	7,055	1,649	23.4%
Glenbrooke North	3,568	1,403	39.3%
Massey Victory Heights	2,506	942	37.6%
Moody Park	3,973	1,306	32.9%
Quayside	3,327	1,122	33.7%
Queens Park	2,160	973	45.0%
Queensborough	7,124	1,703	23.9%
Sapperton	6,777	2,185	32.2%
Victoria Hill Ginger Drive	2,885	666	23.1%
West End	3,304	1,163	35.2%

Table 3

Staff note the following based on the data compiled in the above table:

- Victoria Hill Ginger Drive, Brow of the Hill, Downtown, and Queensborough had the lowest voter turnout rates, while Queens Park and Glenbrooke North had the highest voter turnout rates. This is consistent with the 2018 vote distribution.
- It is important to note that while New Westminster's population as a whole grew by 11.2%, the number of citizens 18+ grew at a much smaller rate of 5.4% (based on the census analysis by CAPD staff).
- The City's growth had a significant effect in Quayside voting where two large buildings were added between elections and it resulted in a large increase in votes cast.

Voter Turnout Differences from 2018 to 2022

In 2019 following the 2018 election staff noted that there was a significantly lower turnout in Brow of the Hill and Downtown where the predominant housing forms are multifamily; whereas the highest was in Queens Park and Glenbrooke North affluent, single family neighbourhoods. The same trend is seen in the 2022 data. As a result of the 2018 data, this staff suggested that the City produce and distribute a voters guide to all homes in the City. This was coupled with a voter's card for all registered voters. It was the hope in 2019 that this would result in greater awareness in the Brow of the Hill and Downtown and would increase voter turnout.

To test if the City's strategies impacted voter turnout, the Senior Planning Analyst calculated the percentage change in voter turnout. The results of this analysis can be seen in attachment 3). Things to note from the analysis are:

- Voter turnout rates (%) decreased in Queensborough and Queens Park (although the rates in Queens Park remained the highest in the City).
- Brow of the Hill and Downtown remained among the areas with the lowest voter turnout rates (%). Although these areas did see increases in the voter turn-out rate, these increases were not large enough to bring their voter turnout rates close to the city average.
- The area that saw the greatest increase in voter turnout rates (%) was Massey Victory Heights

In reviewing this data, staff are unable to determine if the voter cards and voter guide had any impact on voting trends suggesting these was no impact.

VOTER GUIDE

The Voter Guide was a pamphlet that City staff created to explain to all residents of the City how to vote, where to vote and to provide candidates profiles. It was mailed to all residences in New Westminster.

In addition to providing an English version of the guide staff translated the guide into French, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean and Punjabi. These languages were selected after a careful analysis of the 2016 census data² considering mother tongue and the ability to communicate in the English language. The five languages selected were the languages with the greatest number of individual older than 20 who could not carry on a conversation in English. In addition to these five languages, election advertisements were also created in Arabic, and Spanish to ensure the City's outreach connected to those communities.

The cost of the production of the Voter Guide was approximately \$125,000. This includes design, translation, printing and mailing.

Survey Results

The feedback staff received on the guide was that it was comprehensive and valued. Survey results about the guide include:

- 65% of survey participants found the information useful or somewhat useful.
- The majority of participants accessed the paper version or the English version online.
- When asked about the benefit of the guide given its cost, 45% of the respondents suggested that a different delivery model should be used with the most popular being distribution at community centres.

² The 2021 data had not be released when these decisions needed to be made.

- The guide included a brief profile of the candidates and the survey found that 56% of respondents would like to see a more structured candidate profile including a list of the candidates' top three priorities.

Discussion on Voter Guide

The Voter Guide was a costly addition to the communication tools used in the 2022 election³ due to post-pandemic inflation and postage costs. The reason used to justify this expense was to reach voters in multifamily housing types. However, the evidence does not indicate that the Voter Guide increased the voter turnout in those areas.

In reviewing other municipalities' practices it was discovered that there is a trend away from physical guides to online electronic guides due to cost and poor return on investment. If physical guides are produced then they are distributed in City facilities to avoid the postage costs. .

Staff Recommendations

- That for the 2026 election the Voter Guide be updated but only a third of the number be printed to be distributed via City facilities and through partnerships with the malls. The guide in multiple languages would still be available on the City's website and promoted through social media. This will result in a significant cost saving while still providing the information to voters.
- That staff research other municipal candidate statements and work with Elections BC to develop a more structured candidate profile format.

VOTER CARDS

The biggest request from the public in 2018 was to have voter cards. Council directed staff to include voter cards in our 2022 strategy to engage voters. Of the 15,923 voters in 2022 over 60% of them brought their voter card to the poll with them.

The voter card made it easier for polling staff to find voters on the voting list.

Again, the analysis does not show that the voter card increased the voter turnout. However, staff saw with the return rate of voter cards at the poll station that voters appreciated them.

The production cost of the voter card is significantly less than that of the voter guide.

Survey Results

Of the people who participated, 93% had seen the card or used it to help them vote. This indicates that it was a popular addition to the City's communication tools. One suggestion from the public that came via the survey was to place a QR code on the card that linked to the voter's guide. This would be a creative and environmentally-friendly way of distributing the guide information.

³ The Voter Guide was approximately 20% of the total cost of the election.

Staff Recommendation

- That voter cards with a QR code link to the voter guide become a standard feature of all City elections moving forward.

ABSENTEE / MAIL-IN BALLOTS

The 2022 election was the first election in New Westminster that offered mail-in ballots. The City used the mail-in ballot module in Dataview to facilitate the process. The computer system allowed staff to track mail-in ballots that were mailed out, provisionally mark the voter as voted, and then strike them off when the ballot was returned. It also allowed voters the ability to change their minds and still vote in person if it was more convenient for the voter. Dataview made it possible for the complex process to be run with the rigor required, while being simple for staff to follow.

Table 4 provides the number of mail ballots processed

	Mailed	Cast	Return %	% of total ballots cast
Number of Mail in Ballots	533	388	73%	2.4

The addition of the process required additional software and staff, to both manage the process during the election period and on Election Day itself (receiving hand delivered ballots and process all the ballots). This added significantly to the cost of the election.

The application form for a mail in ballot opened before the nomination period to allow staff the ability to mail out ballot packages as soon as ballots were available. In a municipal election there is very little time between the election being called and voting day making mail in ballot distribution problematic.

Survey Results

The survey respondents who used the mail in ballot packages found them very easy to use.

Discussion

An informal survey of BC municipalities indicates that the percentage of mail in ballots to the total votes cast is comparably high at 2.4% with most large municipalities around 1%, indicating that the community found it was a useful service.

The mail in ballot process is costly to run, but the cost of the system is reduced in a local election where the numbers of voters warrants an electronic voter system and all the support systems.

In a by-election situation, the requirement to have a mail in ballot option is costly. The mail in ballot requirement means that the election must use electronic voting software, and use computers at poll stations. This increases the costs for a by-election from four

figures to six figures. Without the mail in ballot requirement by-elections could be run using paper voter books, thereby simplifying and reducing costs. This is significant as by-elections are not budgeted for; they are an unexpected expense for the municipality or school district.

Staff Recommendations

- That the City offer mail-in ballot options for all future Local Elections
- That Council direct staff to research providing an opt-out clause for mail-in ballots for by-elections to save costs.

CANDIDATE NAME ORDER ON THE BALLOT

In the lead up to the 2022 Local Election there was a motion from the School Board to move away from alphabetical name order on the ballot to an order determined by random draw⁴. The *School Act* allows for the school districts to have a different requirement in this area. At the time city staff agreed to bring back a report on the topic from the New Westminster perspective after the election.

The Senior Policy Analyst for the City used the 1990-2022 election data to determine if name order had an impact on election results in New Westminster. Each election race has been treated separately. The analysis can be seen in attachment 4.

The data presented below is from the New Westminster context. It is not representative of any other municipality. The City of Vancouver who has many more candidates in all election races researched the issue and found that in their context ballot placement did impact electability.

The analysis of New Westminster results indicate the following:

Mayoral Race:

The small number of candidates each year negates the impact of ballot placement.

Councillor Race:

The data does not support being earlier on the ballot providing any advantage to the candidate; in fact, the statistics suggest in the Council race being first on the ballot is a disadvantage. No matter where the candidate is in the top half or bottom half they tend to get the same percentage of the votes. And given the number of multi-term councillors with names at the end of the alphabet, the bottom half seems to be statistically better than the top half. This suggests that voters are voting for their candidates of choice and are willing to go to the bottom of the list to select them.

School Trustee Race:

The school trustee race does suggest that there is a different pattern on first analysis. But if a multi-term school trustee (Mr. Brent Atkinson) is removed from the analysis then the pattern returns to no linkage of ballot placement with electability.

⁴ The City of Vancouver may be the only municipality that uses this ballot order.

In conclusion, the analysis of the New Westminster election data does not support ballot placement affecting electability. The familiarity of voters with an alphabetic order on ballots makes the marking of ballots simpler for voters.

Staff Recommendations

- That the City maintain the current alphabetic order of candidates on the ballot.
- That the City provide this analysis to the School Board for their consideration.

ELECTION SIGNS

There were numerous election sign complaints during the election period. During the 2022 election period staff discovered that the sign bylaw was not applicable on Crown land. This allowed signs of greater size to be displayed there.

Staff Recommendation

- That Council direct staff to investigate closing the loophole within the sign bylaw that allows for larger signs in some areas of the City.

STAFFING

Staffing was a significant, unexpected cost driver for the 2022 election. In 2021, the Canada Revenue Agency ruled that municipal election workers must be considered employees of the municipality for tax purposes. This caused a significant increase in costs because of the difference between the normal election pay rate and the living wage rate paid.

The change in staff wages calculations encouraged the election team to think creatively to manage costs. This led to advance polls having split shifts to reduce overtime; staff found split shifts also acted as an additional training opportunity for more poll workers ahead of Election Day. The feedback received was also very favourable from the poll workers. Using the information gained from Dataview, the election team scheduled election day polls to have maximum staffing only in the middle of the day with poll workers having staggered shifts.

The hiring of poll workers was informed by the City's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Framework. The City reached out to the Canadian Action Network and the high school to provide new opportunities for people to benefit from the election. The City also recruited with second language in mind resulting in language assistance at all of the poll locations. The high school students were extremely effective at their roles and the City hopes they will be the next generation poll workers.

The election team were surprised in 2022 with the change in atmosphere with regards to the treatment of election staff. In the 2018 election there was a respectful environment but in 2022, election workers encountered verbal abuse from some campaign staff.

In 2026 the election team will review the number of poll stations with a view to optimizing the number of poll stations open on the general election day as this will allow cost savings in staffing and equipment.

Scrutineers

During both the advanced and general election day voting the election team and the poll location team encountered issues with scrutineers.

Queensborough

At the first advance poll in Queensborough, a candidate for School Board attended the poll to act as a scrutineer for a candidate for Council. This is contrary to section 120(4) of the Local Government Act, “a candidate must not be present at a voting place ... while voting proceedings are being conducted”, except in order to vote. This was brought to the attention of the Presiding Election Official who immediately informed the Chief Election Officer. The Chief Election Officer informed the campaign and candidate of the seriousness of the offence and the penalties for the offence. The Chief Election Officer took no further action.

Immediately after the advance poll, all Presiding Election Officials were provided with a sheet of names and photographs of all candidates to ensure there was no repeat of the issue.

The offence was reported to the police and the City took part in the subsequent legal investigation. This investigation with a Special Prosecutor determined that an offence was committed but that the public interest would not be served by prosecution of the trustee. The Special Prosecutor noted that the Chief Election Officer acted appropriately in notifying all parties and ensuring that the offence was not repeated.

The Special Prosecutor recommended that the City amend its scrutineer forms and statutory declarations to include a statement about candidates acting as scrutineers. The current election team are making the changes recommended to the documents that will be used in the upcoming by-election.

General Issues

Throughout the advance polls and into the general election day the election team and poll workers continued to encounter issues with scrutineers not understanding the rules for polling stations, including not conversing with voters and not using phones. All campaigns and candidates were provided informational material to share with scrutineers in advance of them attending a polling location. Looking toward future elections, the election team will make changes to the document scrutineers have to sign as they enter the voting location to ensure they understand the rules and confirm in writing they will follow them.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The election is financed by the City budgeting money into a reserve each year so that the money is available to the election team in the election year. Given the increased election costs in 2022, staff have increased the transfer for the anticipated costs of the 2026 election.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

This report has been prepared with input from the GIS Coordinator (IT), Senior Planning Analyst (Development Services), and Manager of Public Engagement (Chief Administrator's Office).

OPTIONS

1. That Council, provide the following direction to staff:
 - a. That staff continue to use branded marketing and promote the election on all the City channels including social media, billboards, City facilities, and bus shelters.
 - b. In the 2026 election to provide a small number of voter guides distributed in City facilities and through partnerships with local malls.
 - c. Research other municipal candidate statements and work with Elections BC to develop a more structured candidate profile format.
 - d. That voter cards with a QR code link to the voter guide become a standard feature of all City elections moving forward.
 - e. That the City offer mail-in ballot options for all future Local Elections.
 - f. Research providing an opt-out clause for mail-in ballots for by-elections to save costs.
 - g. Maintain the current alphabetic order of candidates on the ballot.
 - h. Provide name order analysis to the School Board for their consideration.
 - i. Investigate closing the loophole within the sign bylaw that allows for larger signs in some areas of the City.
2. THAT Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommend option 1.

CONCLUSION

The City successfully conducted the 2022 General Local Election; this report analyzes key performance indicators associated with the election and the methods used to promote and assist voters in participating, as well as providing some recommendations for future elections.

Voter cards and mail in ballots were well received and used by the community in the election as were advance voting opportunities. There were significant costs associated

with producing and mailing a voter's guide to each household, and the hoped for benefit of greater voter engagement from multi-family areas of the City was not observed, leading staff to recommend modifying the use of this tool in 2026.

Staff costs significantly increased in 2022, which led to more creative staffing of poll locations and use of advance polls to provide on the job training for more poll workers. The inflationary pressures of the post pandemic period affected the cost of the election, and the budget in 2024 and beyond will reflect higher transfers to the 2026 election reserve to ensure the City is well positioned for the 2026 election.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 Analyzed Survey Data
Attachment 2 Sample of the voter's card
Attachment 3 Voter Turnout Analysis
Attachment 4 Election vs Ballot Position Analysis

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Jacque Killawee, Chief Election Officer 2022

This report was reviewed by:
Peter DeJong, Corporate Officer
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Jennifer Miller, Manager of Public Engagement

This report was approved by:
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer