



Report to Council

Department: Office of the CAO
Division: Legal and Legislative Services
Date: October 20, 2025
Prepared by: Joe Malandruccolo, Director, Legal and Legislative Services/Clerk
Report Number: Legal and Legislative Services-2025-20
Subject: 2026 Municipal and School Board Election Voting Method
Number of Pages: 17

Recommendation(s)

That Legal and Legislative Services Report 2025-20 entitled 2026 Municipal and School Board Election Voting Method prepared by Joseph Malandruccolo, Director, Legal and Legislative Services/Clerk dated October 20, 2025 be received;

That the method of voting for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election be conducted with the use of online voting technology; and

That Council direct Administration to conduct the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election in the Town of Essex through the use of online voting technology employing either **Option One: Hybrid using Online Voting Platform with In-Person Voting Only** and return with the necessary By-law;

OR

That Council direct Administration to conduct the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election referred to as **Option Two: Fully Online Voting with Voter Assistance Centres** and return with the necessary By-Law.

Purpose

Municipal elections in Ontario are governed by the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the “**MEA**”).

Section 42(1) of the MEA, 1996, provides that Council may pass by-laws to:

- a) Authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators;
- b) Authorize electors to use an alternative voting method, such as voting by mail or by telephone that does not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote.

The 2026 Municipal and School Board Election will be held on October 26, 2026. The MEA requires that Council adopt by-laws authorizing voting and vote-counting equipment and authorize the use of an alternate voting method on or before May 1 in the year of an Election.

Background and Discussion

The 2026 Municipal Election takes place on October 26, 2026. Section 42 of the MEA, as amended, states that by May 1 in the year of an election, the Council of the local municipality may pass by-laws that authorize the use of voting and vote-counting equipment; and the use of alternative voting methods that do not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote.

There are 444 municipalities in Ontario, of which, 417 hold elections. This is because some upper tier municipal governments are populated by a lower tier election process e.g.; counties, some regions and one district.

Those 417 municipal governments include:

- All lower-tier municipal governments in a two-tier structure
- All single-tier municipal governments
- 3 regional municipal governments have a direct election of the Regional Chair at the lower tier (Durham Region, Halton Region, Region of Waterloo)

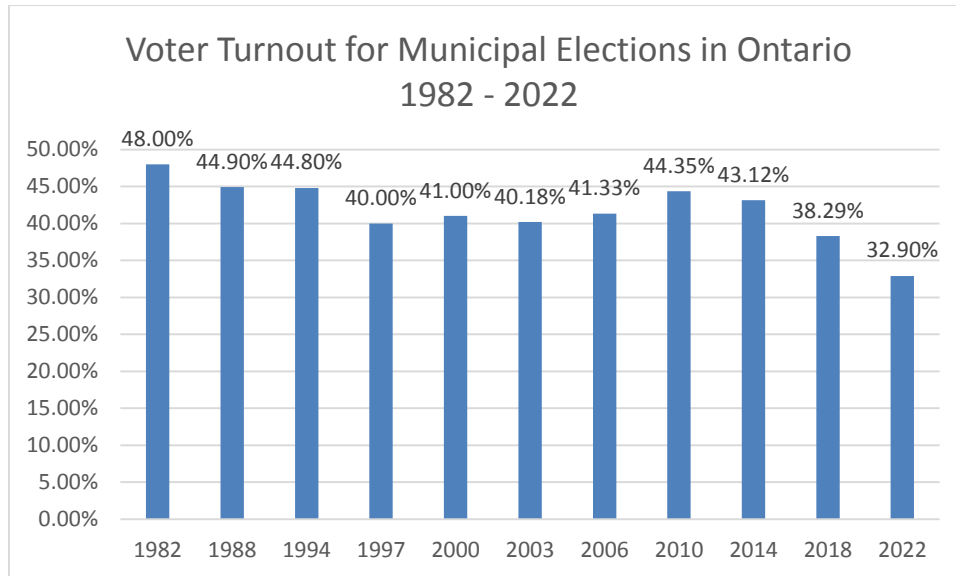
According to the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario](#), in 2022, 6,306 candidates competed for the 2,860 elected positions. 406 of the 2,860 elected officials also sit on the upper tier, for a total of 3,266 seats. In 2022, 692 incumbents did not run compared to 607 in 2018.

Voter Turnout

The following table provides a comparison of voter turnout for the local municipalities in the County of Essex in the 2022 municipal election.

Municipality	Voting Method for 2022 Election	Voter Turnout	Eligible Electors	Number of Voters
Amherstburg	In-Person	39.34%	18,653	7,339
Essex	In-Person	41.10%	17,111	7,032
Kingsville	Vote by Mail	50.19%	16,955	8,510
Lakeshore	In-Person	30.09%	30,197	9,085
LaSalle	Internet/Telephone	30.13%	25,702	7,743
Leamington	Vote by Mail	45.70%	18,138	8,289
Tecumseh	Internet/Telephone	28.72%	19,689	5,655

The following table provides a comparison of the voter turnout for municipal elections in Ontario from 1982 – 2022.



Source: [AMO](#)

There are many factors that affect voter turnout including voting method, voter engagement, number of candidates, acclamations, etc. The average voter turnout in Ontario was 32.9% in 2022. The average voter turnout in Ontario in 2018 was 38%. According to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario website, the decrease in voter turnout can be attributed to the increased number of acclamations in 2022 of 548 versus 477 in 2018. In 2022, Tecumseh had 2 acclamations, LaSalle had 1 and Essex had 1.

In 2014, 18 or 4% of municipal governments in Ontario were fully elected by the acclamation of each council seat. In 2018, that number rose to 26 council or 5%, while in 2022 that rose to 32 or 8%.

Election Legislative Changes since 2022

In 2024 the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (“**AMCTO**”) submitted to the province their recommendations to enact some much-needed changes that would modernize the MAE. These recommendations were introduced to Council in a previous Council Meeting. Some changes that

have occurred to date in the MEA which directly affect the 2026 Municipal Election include:

- the *Election Act* was amended to extend the Chief Electoral Officer’s responsibilities with respect to the permanent register of electors to include persons entitled to be electors in municipal elections, beginning 2024.
- The MEA was amended to move the responsibility for preparing the preliminary voters list in municipal elections from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to the Chief Electoral Officer, beginning in 2024.

Key Dates for the 2026 Municipal Election

The following are some key dates for the 2026 Municipal Election:

Dates	Events
April 30, 2026	Last day in a regular election year for municipalities and local boards to establish rules and procedures regarding the use of municipal and board resources during a campaign period (s.88.18)
May 1, 2026	Nomination Opening Day (s.33(4)) and the last day in a regular election to pass a by-law authorizing the use of voting and vote counting equipment and/or authorizing electors to use an alternate voting method (s.88.21(15))
June 1, 2026	Last day in a regular election year to establish procedures and forms for use of voting and vote counting equipment authorized by by-law. (s.42(4)1(i))
August 21, 2026	Nomination Closing Day (between 9am-2pm) (s. 33(4)(b))
August 24, 2026	Certification of nominations completed by 4pm by the Municipal Clerk (s.35(1), (2))
September 26, 2026	First possible date to hold an advance vote in the 30-day period before Voting Day (s.43(3))
October 1, 2026	Last day in a regular election for councils to establish an election compliance audit committee for the 2026-2030 term of office (s.88.37(1))
October 26, 2026	Voting day, the fourth Monday in October (s.5) Voting places are open from 10am to 8pm unless an earlier voting or reduced voting hours have been established by the clerk (s.46(2), (3), s.24(1))
October 27, 2026	The clerk shall, as soon as possible after Voting Day, declare the results and provide information to the public on a website or in

Dates	Events
	another electronic format on the number of votes, declined and rejected ballots, and the number of votes for the affirmative or negative on a by-law or question (s.55(4), (4.1))
November 14, 2026	The 2022-2026 term of office officially end (s.6(1))
December 16, 2026	First meeting of a new council shall be held at the time set out in the municipality's procedure by-law, but in any case, not later than 31 days after its term commences (s.230)
January 25, 2027	Last day of the 90-day period after Voting Day to make the Accessibility Report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities available to the public (s.12.1(3))
March 30, 2027	By 2pm, the last day for candidates and registered third party advertisers to file initial financial statements and auditors reports on the last Friday in March in the year following the Election (s.88.30(1))

Voting Methods

Historically, the Town of Essex has used both in-person and vote by mail voting methods and has experienced both successes and challenges with such methods.

When preparing for the upcoming 2026 Municipal Election, Administration considered all of the available voting methods focusing on the two most popular, being in-person and online voting. When determining a voting method, the following principles of the MEA need to be applied as they serve as the benchmark and guide for the conduct for municipal elections:

- Secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process;
- Fair and non-biased voting process;
- Accessible to voters;
- Integrity of the voting process;
- Results of the election reflect votes cast; and
- Voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently.

In-person voting

In-person voting is the voting method that has been traditionally used by municipalities and is the most familiar method for casting ballots in an election. Residents complete a paper ballot, which is then processed through a vote tabulator and immediately placed in a sealed ballot box.

This method requires significant election staff resources. Additionally, there are a limited number of tabulator equipment in Ontario, with equipment being reserved quickly and larger municipal clients having their order fulfilled first. There have also been concerns raised with regard to some tabulator machines being supplied by an American-owned company. In an election where tabulators are used, it is important to not only have access to the equipment needed for each poll, but a back-up in case of failure. This requirement will in 2026, even more than in the past, be a concern for Ontario municipalities due to the current economic relationship with America

Some considerations of In-person Voting include:

Pros:

- Familiarity – it is a long-standing method.
- Election officials are present to aid and guide voters on how to correctly complete and submit a ballot and make additions or corrections to the Voters' List.
- Physical presence of a ballot and a ballot box may inspire confidence for some voters.
- Polling station staff can directly verify voters' identities.

Cons:

- In-person voting may present physical barriers for some voters or to those unable to visit polling stations for various reasons.
- Wait times may deter voters from participating in the election.
- In-person voting is limited to specific hours when the polling stations are open.

- In-person voting has high costs associated with polling station setup, tabulator rentals, physical ballots and staffing.
- In-person voting requires significant staffing of polling stations. Recruitment is often difficult and can result in a lack of skilled and knowledgeable staff to run the election.
- Potential delays in election night results due to logistical requirements.

Online voting

Online voting enables voters to cast their ballots through the internet by logging into a secured site where the electronic ballot can be submitted during the designated voting period.

This method of voting has become increasingly popular, with a number of municipalities opting for this method. Internet voting modernizes the election experience for voters. It offers a convenient, accessible and secure way to cast a vote without the need to attend a physical voting location and inherently offers flexible voting times. Electors receive their voting letter in the mail providing the date of the voting period, voting website and their personal, unique voting Personal Identification Number (“**PIN**”) to cast their ballot. In conjunction with the PIN, many municipalities require that the date of birth of the elector be required as an additional security feature.

In December 2024, the Digital Governance Standards Institute (“**DGSI**”) published standards for online voting which provided guidance for the implementation of online voting for Canadian municipalities. These include standards for voting security, voter authentication, testing and auditing practices, ballot design and accessibility as well as election management. Should Council choose online voting as the voting method for the 2026 election, Administration will require adherence to the DGSI standards as part of the tender process.

Some considerations for on-line voting:

Pros:

- Can vote anywhere with internet access and a device that can access the voting site and at any time during the designated voting period, making it extremely convenient to cast a ballot.
- Eliminates the need for paper ballots, which reduces costs associated with physical polling stations.
- Greater accessibility by enhancing autonomy for electors with disabilities, allowing many individuals to vote unassisted.
- Eliminates travel and wait times.
- May not need to allow for the appointment of a proxy since electors can vote anytime, and from anywhere, once voting opens.
- Faster election results, as the software will tabulate the votes cast in real time.

Cons:

- Potential fraud threats
- Voting system requires security and redundancies to avoid potential breaches and system failures.
- Familiarity – it is a new method, which some voters may not yet trust.

Other Considerations:

- Requires access to the internet to cast ballot and municipally provided accommodations for those without internet access.
- Education and promotion on how to use the system will be necessary.
- Use of methods to confirm voter identify before providing passwords necessary.

The availability of alternate voting methods has been permitted since 1996. Since that time, a significant number of Ontario municipalities now use some sort of alternative or hybrid form of voting.

In Ontario, online voting was first introduced in 2003 by the City of Markham. During the 2014 election, 97 municipalities or 22% of all Ontario municipalities used internet voting. In 2018, that number increased to 178 or 42.3% of all Ontario municipalities offering internet voting. In 2022, that number increased again to 231 or 56% of all Ontario municipalities offering internet voting. This trend is expected to increase in the upcoming 2026 election.

Alternative Voting Method Options

Although not recommended by Administration, the following voting methods are also available to the Town:

Vote-by-Mail

The Vote-by-Mail method was employed by the Town in the past. Feedback with regard to this method has been negative. Although as a standalone option this method would be economical, it does come with fraud and mailing concerns. As an add-on option to other methods, Vote-by-Mail would also add additional costs.

Telephone Voting

The Telephone Voting method is avoided by most municipalities because of how inconvenient the process is in operation, as lengthy ballots being read out could be tedious and cause some to not complete the process. Although not recommended, this method can also be incorporated into other voting methods. If incorporated into the other voting methods, the Town would incur additional costs for what is expected to be an insignificant return.

Local Municipalities in 2026

At the time of writing this report, some neighbouring municipalities have finalized their voting methods. The following is a list of voting methods for the 2026 election.

Essex County

Municipality	2026 Election Voting Method
Amherstburg	In-Person Paper Ballots
Kingsville	Not yet determined*
Lakeshore	Not yet determined*
LaSalle	Internet Voting
Leamington	In-Person Paper Ballots
Tecumseh	Not yet determined*

**Not yet determined at the time this report was written.*

AMCTO Zone 1 – Southwestern Ontario

Method	Percentage
In-Person/Telephone/Online	29%
Telephone/Online	21%
Online (Only)	21%
In-Person (Only)	14%
Mail	7%
In-Person/Online	7%

**Statistics provided by AMCTO through their Municipal Elections Training platform, as of the writing of this report*

Recommendation for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election

The conducting of a municipal election is one of the most essential services to deliver. The 2022 Election in the Town of Essex posed some challenges including proper staffing, availability of space to accommodate polling stations, wait times at polling stations and connectivity issues with provider of the in-person voter list management services.

With this in mind, Administration explored all possible methods of conducting the 2026 Election with the intent of avoiding the challenges that we have experienced in the past, while modernizing our election method to allow for a more effective, efficient and accessible election.

After exploring each voting method, Administration recommends to Council that the 2026 Town of Essex Municipal Election be conducted using online voting technology through one of the following two options:

Option One: Hybrid using Online Voting Platform with In-Person Voting Only

- Hybrid online/in-person voting method, involving fully online voting but with voting restricted to taking place at physical locations in each Ward.
- Eligible voters will be required to attend at physical locations to vote through an online voting portal at a computer or tablet station set up and monitored by the Town of Essex.
- Similar setup to in-person paper ballots, where the voter goes behind a screen to make their vote but, instead of using paper ballots, the voter will vote using a computer or a tablet.
- Hybrid voting method will require less staff resources, as a tabulator clerk will be unnecessary. Focus is on the revision clerk who can add, remove and amend the voter's list.
- Cyber security risks with internet voting are mitigated through the selection of a vendor that is reputable, with proven system security features.

- Hybrid voting method provides for a more efficient and technologically advanced voting method, while appearing familiar to voters with the look and feel of in-person voting.
- Hybrid voting method may pose some challenges with regard to restricting voting to certain days and locations.
- Hybrid voting method removes some of the advantages of online voting, including being able to vote remotely and more accessibly.

The advance poll period shall not be held more than 30 days before voting day. It is proposed that the advance poll period commence at 12:00 AM on October 3, 2026 and end at 12:00 PM on October 22, 2026. It is recommended that the advance poll period end at this time to allow administration sufficient time to produce a Final Voters List in preparation for Election Day. Once voting for the Advance Poll opens, votes can be cast in person at physical locations as proposed on the following dates and locations:

- Saturday, October 3, 2026 **8:00 AM to 4:00 PM** in Essex Centre
- Wednesday, October 7, 2026 **12:00 PM to 8:00 PM** in McGregor
- Saturday, October 10, 2026 **8:00 AM to 4:00 PM** in Harrow
- Wednesday, October 14, 2026 **12:00 PM to 8:00 PM** in Colchester

In addition to these 4 dates, Administration is proposing a physical location at Town Hall where residents with no internet access or who are not available on the dates proposed above can cast their vote. These dates and times are as follows:

- Monday, October 19, 2026 **9:00 AM to 12:00 PM** and **1:00 PM and 4:00 PM**
- Wednesday, October 21, 2026 **9:00 AM to 12:00 PM** and **3:00 PM and 6:00 PM**

On Election Day, one polling station would be set up for each of the four wards.

Option Two: Fully Online Voting with Voter Assistance Centres

- Fully online voting method, involving online voting from any location but restricted to certain days.
- Voter Assistance Centres will include physical locations to vote through an online voting portal at a computer or tablet station set up and monitored by the Town of Essex.
- Fully online voting method will require lowest amount of staff resources.
- Fully online voting method is expected to result in lowest cost to Town.
- Cyber security risks with internet voting are mitigated through the selection of a vendor that is reputable, with proven system security features.
- Fully online voting methods usually result in higher voter turnout.
- Provides the advantages of flexible and accessible voting.

The advance poll period shall not be held more than 30 days before voting day. It is proposed that the advance poll period commence at 12:00 AM on October 12, 2026 and end at 12:00 PM on October 22 ,2026. It is recommended that the advance poll period end at this time to allow administration sufficient time to produce a Final Voters List in preparation for Election Day. Once voting for the

Advance Poll opens, votes can be cast online (for the entire duration of the advance polling period) or in person at physical Voter Assistance Centre locations as proposed on the following dates and locations:

- Saturday, October 10, 2026 **10:00 AM to 6:00 PM** in Harrow
- Wednesday, October 14, 2026 **12:00 PM to 8:00 PM** in Essex

In addition to these 4 dates, Administration is proposing a physical location at Town Hall where residents with no internet access or who are not available on the dates proposed above can cast their vote. These dates and times are as follows:

- Monday, October 19, 2026 **9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM**
- Wednesday, October 21, 2026 **9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM**

On Election Day, one Voter Assistance Centre would be set up for each of the four wards.

Accessibility

The Town of Essex conducted an in-person election in 2022 that included various accommodations for those requiring accommodations. Section 12.1(2) of the MEA requires that the Clerk prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election.

Administration will present an Election Accessibility Plan for Council's consideration in the spring of 2026.

Financial Impact

Option One- Hybrid: Online Voting Platform but In-Person Voting Only

The estimated cost to conduct an in-person election using online voting technology for the 2026 Municipal Election as proposed in this report is \$205,000.

Option Two: Fully Online Voting with Voter Assistance Centres

The estimated cost to conduct an fully online election with Voter Assistance Centres for the 2026 Municipal Election as proposed in this report is \$195,000.

In preparation for this report and for comparison purposes, Administration obtained updated costing to conduct the election in the same manner and form as the 2022 Municipal Election using paper ballots with optical scan vote tabulators with an estimated cost of \$215,000.

The actual cost to conduct the 2022 Municipal Election using paper ballots with optical scan vote tabulators was \$136,000.

Annually, \$35,000 is budgeted for an Election Stabilization Fund. To date, there is approximately \$96,000 in reserve to offset the costs of the 2026 municipal election. The remainder will be funded through the Town's General Contingency Reserve. The remaining shortfall will be factored into the draft budget for 2026 to be presented to council. Additionally, annual increases will be incorporated into

subsequent cycles to ensure that sufficient funding is available to cover future election expenses.

Consultations

Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer

Shelley Brown, Deputy Clerk

Kate Rowe, Director, Corporate Services

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain, and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure.
- Leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment.
- Take care of our natural environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to everyone who makes Essex "home".
- Deliver friendly customer service in an efficient, effective, and transparent manner while providing an exceptional working environment for our employees.
- Build corporate-level and community-level climate resilience through community engagement and partnership and corporate objectives.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	2026 Municipal Election - Voting Method Selection - LLS-2025-20.docx
Attachments:	- FINAL_CAN-DGSI-111-ONLINE-VOTING_2024-11-12.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 16, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



Joseph Malandrucolo, Director, Legal and Legislative Services/Clerk - Oct 16, 2025 - 3:21 PM



Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer - Oct 16, 2025 - 3:30 PM