



City Auditor's Office

2017 Municipal Election Follow-up

February 3, 2020

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The City Auditor's Office conducted this audit in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

Executive Summary

The 2018 audit¹ on the 2017 Municipal Election process identified significant contributing factors that led to increased voter wait times, voting station accessibility concerns and delays in the reporting of election results on election day. In concluding the 2018 audit the City Auditor's Office committed to a follow-up audit of Elections and Census management action plans to improve the election day process.

Follow-up audits deliver value to The City by providing independent assurance on the progress of management action plans and whether the actions taken effectively mitigate the significant risks they were intended to address. Follow-up audits may also identify further opportunities for improvement. The objective of this follow-up audit was to answer the question whether management action plans for all four recommendations raised in our 2017 Review have been completed and effectively designed to mitigate the following election day risks:

- Insufficient initial ballot supply;
- Voting station facilities not having accessibility, space and parking available that meet stakeholder expectations;
- Inadequate allocated staff to support the voting process and facilitate timely voting; and,
- Delayed reporting of election day results.

Our conclusion to the follow-up audit question above is yes. All management action plans are now complete, and the design of planned election processes effectively mitigates the underlying risks identified. In addition, many of the action plans were implemented ahead of the September 30, 2019 original commitment date and were in place for the 2026 Olympic Bid Plebiscite held on November 13, 2018. As a result, we were able to confirm the operating approach effectiveness for key improvements, including:

- 100% ready-available initial ballot supply based on the estimated number of electors;
- Adoption of federal election accessibility criteria and elimination of "superstations" serving over 7,100 electors;
- Adequate staffing of voting stations; and,
- Simplified results reporting process using tabulators.

Further, Elections and Census shared their plans to continue to improve the voter experience for the upcoming 2021 Election, and based on this follow-up we have high confidence in their ability to deliver on these plans, and we have no recommendations for additional improvement.

This report serves as an example of how the City Auditor's Office provides value to Calgarians through objective assurance to Administration and Council and actively follows up on recommendations to support timely mitigation on identified risks.

¹ 2017 Municipal Election Review AC2018-0852

1.0 Background

General elections in Calgary are complex events held every four years, allowing electors to vote for Mayor, Councillor, and Public and Separate School Board Trustee candidates. General elections are governed by the Local Authorities Elections Act and administered by The City's Returning Officer. The Returning Officer must be independent and impartial when performing the duties of the Returning Officer.

The last general election was held on Oct. 16, 2017. The public expressed concerns about their election day experience, including long line ups at voting stations and delays in the reporting of election results. The City responded to these concerns, confirming the accuracy of election results and compliance with legislation, as well as committing to improving election processes. As part of the process improvement initiative, the City Clerk/Returning Officer requested that City Auditor's Office undertake a root cause analysis review, resulting in the 2017 Municipal Election Review report that was issued on July 17, 2018.

The 2017 Municipal Election Review (2017 Review) identified significant contributing factors that led to increased voter wait times, voting station accessibility concerns and delays in the reporting of election results on election day. Four recommendations were raised to minimize the identified contributing factors and to improve the voter experience during the next election day scheduled for Oct. 18, 2021 (2021 Election Day). In concluding the 2017 Review, the City Auditor's Office committed to a subsequent review of Elections' proposed strategies to improve the 2021 Election Day process.

The City held a 2026 Olympic Bid Plebiscite (Plebiscite) on Nov. 13, 2018 on the matter of whether Calgary should host the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. The City Auditor's Office conducted a plebiscite readiness review at the request of the Returning Officer/City Clerk to validate Plebiscite readiness and to support greater transparency on the actions taken by Elections and Census (Elections) to provide an improved voter experience. The Plebiscite was conducted utilizing voting tabulator technology to count votes for the first time in The City of Calgary's history and incorporated several key process changes intended to improve the voter experience, including:

- Initial ballot distribution;
- Voting station facility selection;
- Voting station staffing, layout and process flow; and,
- End of night count and results reporting.

Elections completed their 2021 Election Day process design, incorporating learnings from the Plebiscite, and indicated their management action plans in response to the 2017 Review were complete in Q3 2019. As a result, this follow-up audit on the progress of management action plans was completed as part of the approved City Auditor's 2019 Audit Plan.

2.0 Audit Objectives, Scope and Approach

2.1 Audit Objective

The objective of this audit was to assess whether management action plans in response to the four recommendations raised in our 2017 Review have been completed and have been effectively designed to mitigate the underlying risks as intended.

2.2 Audit Scope

The scope of our audit was limited to the management action plans in response to the four recommendations raised in our 2017 Review.

Changes to the Local Authorities Election Act and Alberta Senate Election Act in 2019 will be considered by Elections when finalizing their processes in advance of the 2021 Election Day. However, these changes were excluded from the scope of our election follow-up audit.

2.3 Audit Approach

To achieve the audit objective, for each management action plan in response to the four recommendations raised in our 2017 Review (as identified in the Appendix), we:

- Assessed the design of planned election processes; and, where planned election processes were implemented for the Plebiscite,
- Independently validated the operating effectiveness of election processes.

3.0 Results

Our audit included review of process flow documentation, plans, procedures, and staff manuals to assess the design of planned election processes. Validation of operating effectiveness of election processes tested included review of the Plebiscite debrief, incident reports, facility checklist summary results, and analysis of ballot distribution, staffing and number of electors by voting station. We observed that all four recommendations have been completed and the processes are effectively designed to mitigate the underlying risks identified in the 2017 Review. In addition, we observed that several key improvements in the operational approach planned for the 2021 Election Day were effective during the Plebiscite.

3.1 Ballot Supply and Distribution

The 2017 Review identified a risk of a reoccurrence of insufficient initial ballot supply to voting stations. We reviewed the planned ballot supply and distribution methodology for the 2021 Election Day. The process design effectively mitigates the underlying risk by ensuring that voting stations receive 100% ready-available initial ballot supply based on the estimated number of electors. Ballots will be distributed to voting stations using a de-centralized ward-based model with an additional supply of 25,000 emergency ballots of each ballot type.

The Plebiscite summary record of ballots distributed, used and returned by voting station, incident reports and the debrief performed with election workers and staff from Elections and other city support services were reviewed. Key improvements in Elections' operating approach planned for the 2021 Election Day that were in place for the Plebiscite were effective, as follows:

- 100% ready available initial ballot supply, with 156/160 voting stations receiving at least 98% of ballots based on enumeration data and the remaining four voting stations receiving sufficient ballots (of at least 62% of ballots based on enumeration data).
- The initial delivery of ballots was split (approximate ratio of 75:25 on average) between the voting station Presiding Deputy Returning Officer (PDRO), responsible for the overall conduct of their assigned voting station, and Area Supervisor, who oversee three to four voting stations, to reduce the potential risk of a PDRO "no show" on the initial ballot

supply. A similar operating approach targeting an initial ballot delivery PDRO/Area Supervisor split of an approximate ratio of 60:40 is planned for the 2021 Election Day.

- No voting stations required additional ballots or reported ballot supply shortages.

3.2 Voting Station Facility Accessibility and Space

The 2017 Review identified a risk of a reoccurrence of voting station facilities not having adequate accessibility, space and parking available to meet stakeholder expectations. Review of the planned process and criteria to establish voting stations for the 2021 Election Day, confirmed the design effectively mitigates the underlying risk through:

- Utilization of federal election voting station accessibility and suitability criteria.
- Setting a maximum number of enumerated electors (7,100) to be served by any voting station to ensure all voting stations serve a manageable number of electors.
- Pre-election inspections of all voting stations to verify suitability.

The Plebiscite summary of voting station facility inspections, the number of enumerated electors served by each voting station, incident reports and the debrief performed with election workers and staff from Elections and other city support services were reviewed. Key improvements in Elections' operating approach planned for the 2021 Election Day that were in place for the Plebiscite were effective, as follows:

- Voting stations on the federal approved list of voting stations were utilized where possible and pre-election visits performed on 43 voting stations not on the federal approved list.
- No "superstations" were used serving over 7,100 enumerated electors.
- No major facility concerns were reported. Elections identified that voting stations meeting Elections' selection criteria were not available in 15 ward subdivisions. Elections expect to have a greater choice of voting stations ahead of the 2021 Election Day due to a longer planning timeline available.

3.3 Voting Station Staffing

The 2017 Review identified a risk of a reoccurrence of inadequate staffing to support the voting process and to facilitate timely voting. Review of the planned voting station staffing process, staffing standards, and staff manuals, confirmed that the design for the 2021 Election Day effectively mitigates the underlying risk through:

- Documented voting station staffing procedures and standards that reflect the estimated number of electors.
- Flexibility to redeploy staff and standby staff to address large voter turnout or other contingencies, with plans to have standby staff stationed at Ward offices for deployment during the 2021 Election Day.

- Updated voting station processes and election worker roles and responsibilities around which staffing standards have been created (See Figure 1 Sample Voting Station Layout). Each voting station will be staffed with a Presiding Deputy Returning Officer (PDRO), who is responsible for the overall conduct of their assigned voting station, and an Assistant Presiding Deputy Returning Officer, who assists the PDRO with assigned duties. Voting stations will also have a Ballot Clerk (new position), who will manage and account for all ballots, and a Tabulator Clerk (new position), who is responsible for operating the tabulator. A variable number of Deputy Returning Officers (DRO) will be assigned to voting stations in accordance with Elections' staffing standards, who will perform a variety of duties, including staffing of the voter register tables.
- Elections plan to use registered voter lists for the 2021 Election Day and perform additional end-to-end process validation to test their capability of responding to a variety of election day scenarios.

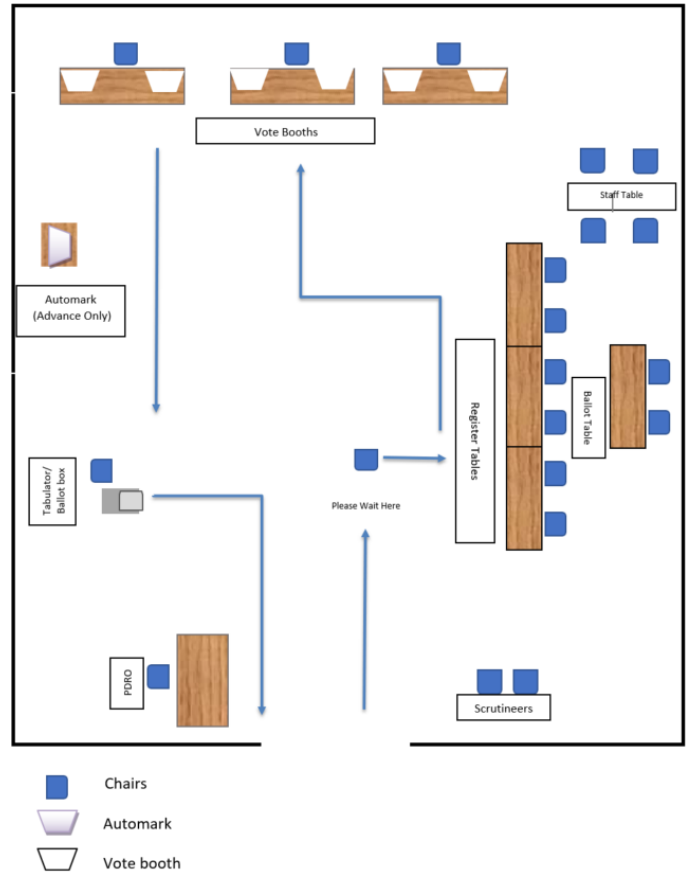


Figure 1 Sample Voting Station Layout (source Elections)

The Plebiscite voting station staffing plan, actual voting station staffing versus Election staffing standards by voting station, incident reports and debrief performed with election workers and staff from Elections and other city support services were reviewed. Key improvements in Elections' operating approach planned for the 2021 Election Day that were in place for the Plebiscite were effective, as follows:

- Adequate regular voting station staffing follows Elections' staffing standard. There was some variation in DRO hired (average of 116% of standard) across voting stations. This variation was largely due to a decision made by Elections to add additional staff to specific voting stations with higher expected peak period elector turnout and some differences in the rates of staff attrition across voting stations.
- No major voting delays due to staffing shortages were reported.

3.4 Election Day Results Reporting

The 2017 Review identified the risk of a reoccurrence of delayed election results reporting. Review of the planned election day results reporting process and staff manuals confirmed the design for the 2021 Election Day effectively mitigates the underlying risk through:

- Simplified results reporting process using tabulators.
- A defined “After the Vote” process with a clear sequence of procedures and expected reporting timelines.
- The existence of staff manuals for all key voting station positions identified in section 3.3 - Voting Station and Staffing, with further training material planned for the next 2021 Election Day.

The Plebiscite results timeline, incident reports and the debrief performed with election workers and staff from Elections and other city support services were reviewed. Key improvements in Elections’ operating approach planned for the 2021 Election Day that were in place for the Plebiscite were effective, as follows:

- Implemented simplified results reporting process using tabulators.
- Results reporting timelines met Plebiscite reporting timeline expectations.
- No major results reporting issues were reported.

Thank you to Elections staff for your assistance and support throughout this audit.

APPENDIX – Recommendations and Action Plans from the 2017 Review

2017 Municipal Election Review Report, July 17, 2018, Attachment AC2018-0852

Rec. #	Recommendation	Management Action Plan	Responsibility
1	<p>The City Clerk/Returning Officer establish voting station initial ballot allocation procedures based on the estimated number of electors and historic voting patterns for each ballot type, supported by documentation stating how elector estimates are to be determined, and requirements to collect and analyze historic voting patterns.</p>	<p>Document methodology used to determine ballot supply to voting stations based on enumeration data from other sources, current City census data and historical voter data over three general elections.</p> <p>Design a decentralized model of ballot distribution throughout the city by establishing ward-based distribution centres to improve the voting station 100% ready-available ballot allocation process.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> City Clerk/ Returning Officer</p> <p><u>Support:</u> Deputy City Clerk, Elections and Census</p> <p><u>Commitment Date:</u> September 30, 2019</p>
2	<p>The City Clerk/Returning Officer define facility criteria, establish minimum standards, develop procedures and design monitoring controls to ensure all voting station facilities in future elections meet stakeholder expectations.</p>	<p>Identify and consult with accessibility focused stakeholders (e.g. Advisory Committee on Accessibility and other disability-serving agencies in Calgary based on committee recommendations) and define facility criteria and standards that determine voting station accessibility and suitability that meet the City’s Access Design standards where feasible.</p> <p>Design and document a process for conducting a pre-election visit to each voting site prior to completing the rental contract to ensure minimum requirements are met that is supported by a facility check-list.</p> <p>Documented procedures to include review of voting stations used at the federal and provincial level and consideration of using these voting stations where possible that meet the City’s accessibility and suitability standards.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> City Clerk/ Returning Officer</p> <p><u>Support:</u> Deputy City Clerk, Elections and Census</p> <p><u>Commitment Date:</u> September 30, 2019</p>

Rec. #	Recommendation	Management Action Plan	Responsibility
3	The City Clerk/Returning Officer develop a voting station staffing plan based on analysis of process, staff capacity, and acceptable peak voter wait times, supported by procedures including the allocation of staff to voting stations and recording explanations for any exceptions made.	<p>Document procedures for developing a voting station staffing plan that allocates election workers required at each voting station using the staffing standards developed and the estimated number of electors, with an explanation documented for all exceptions. Procedures will include development of contingency plans for a large turnout including the ability to redeploy election workers to meet demand. (Note, the process for determining the estimated number of electors to be determined in the action plan for Recommendation 1).</p> <p>Review and update voting station processes and election worker roles and responsibilities to accommodate acceptable peak voter wait times around which staffing standards and plans will be created.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> City Clerk/ Returning Officer</p> <p><u>Support:</u> Deputy City Clerk, Elections and Census</p> <p><u>Commitment Date:</u> September 30, 2019</p>
4	The City Clerk/Returning Officer document and communicate the voting station critical path of After the Vote procedures required for timely reporting of election results, including the sequence of procedures and expected timelines for completion of key milestones.	<p>Design and document After the Vote procedures; with step-by-step instructions and the minimum required paperwork, that will identify the sequence of procedures, expected timelines for completion, and election worker guidance on solving problems that could prevent the reporting of accurate results in the shortest time possible.</p> <p>Design and document After the Vote training materials that assist the election worker's understanding.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> City Clerk/Returning Officer</p> <p><u>Support:</u> Deputy City Clerk, Elections and Census</p> <p><u>Commitment Date:</u> September 30, 2019</p>