

## **VOTER TURNOUT IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides analysis of recent research on voter turnout, focusing on trends, theories on why people do/don't vote and strategies implemented by The City and other jurisdictions.

### **ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That Council:

1. Receive for information;
  - a) The research and analysis contained in this report,
  - b) The commencement of development of an election outreach program in accordance with the approved 2015-2018 Action Plan, and
  - c) The Returning Officer's decision to use existing funds to expand multi-cultural communication for the 2017 General Election; and
2. Direct the Returning Officer to report to Council, no later than June 2018, on an evaluation of the above initiatives to include the impact on voters and future budget implications.

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY**

At the March 31, 2014 Regular Meeting of Council the following Notice of Motion was adopted:

"That Council direct Administration to provide a report on the most recent research into increasing voter turnout and return to Council no later than June 2015 with options and budget implications."

At the June 29, 2015 Regular Meeting of Council the following recommendation was adopted:

"That Council approve Administration's request to defer the Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections Report to the 2015 September 28 Regular Meeting of Council."

### **BACKGROUND**

Administration conducted a thorough analysis of recent voter turnout research and best practices. The analysis of this research is presented in attachments 1-3:

- Attachment 1 provides statistical descriptions of voter turnout trends at the international, federal and provincial levels. It also includes historical turnout in Calgary and how it compares to other Albertan, Canadian and American cities;
- Attachment 2 presents the theories of why people do and do not vote; and
- Attachment 3 provides strategies that jurisdictions, including Calgary, have tried in an attempt to reduce barriers to voting and increase turnout.

### **INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS**

The research presented few options for The City to encourage voter turnout. The two most common themes presented in the research on encouraging turnout are (1) make voting as

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convenient as possible and (2) encourage persons to vote the first time they are eligible. Administration investigated options under these two categories:

- 1) **Make voting as convenient as possible:** The research yielded no additional procedures related to the election that improved turnout. There are no recommendations as:
  1. The City has many initiatives in place that go above and beyond legislated requirements in an attempt to minimize barriers to voting. Attachment 3 lists these initiatives; and
  2. Alternative methods of voting (e.g. internet, telephone and all-mail voting) are currently not provided for under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. The City Charter may allow for future consideration of alternative methods of voting.
- 2) **Create first-time voters:** Research indicates a person who votes the first time they are eligible is more likely to become a habitual voter. Education before the event is the main strategy that has been used for creating first-time voters. As part of the 2013 General Election after action discussions, it was decided that the potential for an outreach program needed to be explored. To this end, some existing budget dollars were allocated in the 2015-2018 Action Plan.
  - a) **Outreach:** An outreach program includes giving presentations on the electoral process to interested groups, creating resources for groups to use at their convenience, etc. A budget for an outreach program was approved in the 2015-2018 Action Plan with the allocation of \$77,770. The program is still in its planning stages and will be actively pursued in non-election years as it is important that the Election Office remain focused on the electoral process in general election years. The primary objective will be creating first-time voters by focusing on new Canadians, young people, the homeless, etc. The resources of the outreach program will be available to all citizens, regardless of whether or not they are first-time voters.
  - b) **Multi-cultural communication:** This includes publishing information about the electoral process through a variety of mediums such as print media, open houses and normal election advertising for a variety of cultures. The City currently has a robust advertising program for the English-speaking public but has had limited resources in other languages. To date, The City's non-English advertising has been limited to the local Chinese newspaper. Because people who access the news and are connected to their community are more likely to vote, it is important that ethnic populations have access to information in their primary languages. The City will use funds from its current budget to expand its multi-cultural communication program.

### Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

Academic work and best practices were analyzed and other jurisdictions were contacted for additional information.

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### **Strategic Alignment**

This report supports the City Clerk's Office action W7.1 within the 2015-2018 Action Plan to develop an outreach program to increase knowledge about Census, Elections, and Council and Committee.

### **Social, Environmental, Economic (External)**

Improving the election outreach and multi-cultural communication capacity of The City will help Calgary be a socially inclusive and accessible city with increased opportunity for citizens to be informed about the voting process.

### **Financial Capacity**

#### **Current and Future Operating Budget:**

There would be no impact on the current approved Action Plan operating budget.

#### **Current and Future Capital Budget:**

There would be no impact on the current or future capital budget.

### **Risk Assessment**

Development of an election outreach program will increase the capacity of The City to inform citizens but there is no guarantee that voter turnout will increase as a result.

### **REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):**

Ensuring citizens have the opportunity to understand the voting process is critical to encouraging voting, especially when trying to create first-time voters. A City election outreach program and improved multi-cultural communication program followed by a 2018 evaluation will allow the City to potentially determine the programs' effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Trends in Voting Turnout
2. Who Votes and Why
3. Initiatives used in Calgary and other Jurisdictions