

Election 2017 - Response and Next Steps

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elections are complex and must meet legislative requirements while balancing the provision of voting opportunities which encourage voters to participate. Every four years, Elections Calgary conducts four elections: Mayor, Councillor, Public School Trustee, and Separate School Trustee. For these elections to be successful, all pre-election and election day processes must be fully developed, tested and integrated to ensure that The City is delivering the election expected by voters.

The 2017 General Election was compliant with legislative requirements and the results were accurate but events during election day in particular highlighted gaps in Election Calgary's planning and its implementation of processes.

The Returning Officer has requested that the City Auditor conduct a root cause analysis review of the issues that occurred on election day and evaluate proposed strategies to improve the election day process. The City Auditor discussed the scope of her review with the Audit Committee on December 14. In a parallel process, the Returning Officer is working with City staff and external experts to develop a comprehensive four-year election program. She will provide Council with a report, on or before the third quarter of 2018, outlining the investment in technology and processes required to deliver a modern election program that meets the expectations of voters, media and candidates.

RETURNING OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION:

That Council direct that on or before the end of Q3 2018, the Returning Officer provide Council with a comprehensive four-year election program that modernizes and enhances Calgary's election processes and meets the expectations of voters, media and candidates.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

Included in the Attachment.

BACKGROUND

While the 2017 General Election was compliant with legislation, voters, candidates and media expressed concerns about their election experience. The Returning Officer has been analyzing these concerns and has identified that the majority of issues arose from election day, legislative and/or administrative process matters.

Election Day/Legislative Process Matters

Some election process complaints resulted from processes prescribed by legislation governing elections in Alberta. Resolving these types of complaints may not be possible until changes are made to the Local Authorities Election Act (the "LAEA") or the City Charter is adopted.

Voting stations opened at 10:00 a.m. There is an option for Council to set an earlier opening but such a decision would need to take into account the fact that election workers already work a long day from station set-up to completing the manual count of ballots.

The LAEA, related Regulations including the *Calgary Election Regulation* and 10 bylaws regulate the conduct of elections in Calgary. Legislation regulates the date of elections, election

worker responsibilities, candidate eligibility, voter eligibility, voting station establishment, advertising, election and voting processes, disclosure and nomination requirements, and penalties for non-compliance. The City has also passed various bylaws permitted by the LAEA which establish processes regarding the conduct of Calgary's election and regulate signage requirements, nomination signatures, deposit requirements, hours of nomination day, the rotation of names on a ballot, and the holding of an advance vote.

In 2016, Calgary and Edmonton submitted to Alberta Municipal Affairs proposed changes to their election regulation. Calgary's proposals included the ability to start processing advance and mail-in ballots earlier on election day to allow for earlier results, the establishment of a voting station perimeter restricting the placement of signage and the ability to satisfy legal notice requirements through electronic means. These proposed changes were not approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Once enacted, the City Charter should allow for The City to develop an election bylaw that better responds to the expected needs of voters, media and candidates.

Administrative Matters

Some concerns resulted from administrative processes adopted by Elections Calgary when implementing legislated requirements.

Ballot Supply, Demand and Distribution on Election Day: Elections Calgary ordered a minimum of 105% of ballots required for each election based on The City's 2017 census results. The distribution of ballots for election day mirrored previous distribution rates. When voting stations opened on election day, each station had ballots equating to 60% of Mayoral ballots, 45 - 50% of Councillor ballots, 40-45% of Public School Board ballots, and 30-35% of Separate School Board ballots. Additional ballots (8000 ballots for Mayor, 8000 ballots for Councillors, 6000 Public and 6000 Separate School Board Trustee ballots, which equaled approximately 15% of a Ward's required ballots) were also deployed to Ward-based area supervisors for emergency distribution. The third form of ballot deployment was from the Elections Calgary office itself. At approximately 5:00 p.m. on election day, the three systems of deployment did not keep up with the demand.

An extensive review of ballot demand forecasting, deployment to voting stations and emergency distribution will be completed.

Voting Station Placement and Accessibility: On election day there were 166 regular voting stations. In addition, special voting stations were provided for residents located at four hospitals and 68 long term care facilities. During the advance vote, there were 26 different voting opportunities including the vote bus, drive up voting and Special (Mail-in) ballots.

When choosing voting stations for voting opportunities, criteria used included finding a location within a community within a Ward, availability for single-day use on election day or multi-day use for advance votes and the size of the station. Comments received since election day indicate that some stations were too small and that 11 voting stations did not provide adequate wheelchair accessibility.

A review of voting station placement and accessibility requirements will be undertaken and new processes established.

Staffing, Training and Voting Process Review: Staffing at voting stations is determined by the number of enumerated voters eligible to vote at each voting station and the physical size of the

station. The average number of staff at a voting station was 12 with larger voting stations having 22 staff. More than 3000 individuals were hired by Elections Calgary to fill various positions. In-person training at the election office started in August and included information about legislation and the procedures required to process each voter. Whether additional training closer to the time of the election would have been beneficial will be examined.

The voting process established by Elections Calgary for the 2017 General Election required voters to line up four times, first, to obtain their Voting Register card, second, to obtain their ballot and sign their Voting Register card, third, to vote, and finally, to deposit their ballot into the ballot box.

A review of staffing, training and voting processes is required to reduce wait times at voting stations. Consideration will be given to the concept of Ward-based training stations to provide timely training and external experts will be asked to review and develop training materials to ensure all learning styles are accommodated.

Information sharing capabilities: Elections Calgary communications staff successfully used many forms of communication mediums to communicate voting opportunities to residents including a mix of online, TV, radio, social media, print, and sign advertising.

“Where Do I Vote” web map application: This was used throughout the four-week election period, initially to assist voters with determining advance vote locations and then to display assigned voting stations on election day. A second text-only search option was added for accessibility. Information Technology (IT) and Corporate Analytics & Innovation had conducted testing on the original “Where Do I Vote” web map application and confirmed accessibility and ability to accommodate the number of requests received from the public. However, shortly after voting stations opened on election day, issues with these tools were reported given high traffic volumes causing slow loading of the web map. As a result, additional servers were redirected to handle the load performance issue and as a precaution, the “Where do I Vote” text only search option was removed from the site.

Election Results: At approximately 8:54 p.m. on election day, the IT support team began to receive alerts indicating that the election result server/website was encountering issues receiving the file containing election results. IT quickly determined that the server was dealing with an even higher volume of traffic than had been anticipated. This impacted the media's ability to log in to retrieve election results and the public's ability to access election results via the Election Results link on the Calgary.ca election website.

Load testing prior to election day indicated that an average of 148 hits per second could be handled, two times the average volume from the peak hours of 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on election day in 2013. However, the average for election day in 2017 during the same time frame was an unprecedented 437 hits per second with a peak of 812 hits per second. IT continued its attempts to tune the server to respond to the high load until approximately 11:00 p.m. at which time the load dropped to a level the server could handle.

An alternate website was provided to display a simplified version of the election results. Recommendations going forward will include hosting the results on a more rapidly scalable solution and ensuring that the public web and media results are on separate servers.

Ward Boundary Issues: Some of the newly established Ward boundaries split communities between Wards causing confusion for voters as to which Ward they were in. Concerns have been raised about Ward boundary lines shown on Election Calgary materials. In the case of Greenvue Industrial, the split (an error by Elections Calgary) did not impact any voters as

there are no residents living in that area. However, the neighbouring community of Winston Heights was split with new boundaries being between Wards 4 and 7. This meant that approximately 350 Winston Heights residents were in Ward 4 and the remainder were in Ward 7.

It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on ensuring that Ward boundaries do not split communities. If a community is divided, communications to impacted households need to be enhanced.

Voter Accessibility Initiatives implemented for 2017: In response to Council's Notice of Motion NM2016-30, the Returning Officer implemented many of Council's suggestions to improve voter accessibility and encourage greater participation. The result was an 80-year record breaking voter turnout. The following initiatives contributed to increased voter turnout:

- Every voting station was assigned an Information Officer (over 50% of Information Officers were youth);
- iPads were deployed to all stations to speed up voter look-up through an electronic database;
- Translation manuals were loaded on all iPads for use by voters;
- The "Where do I Vote" web map application included an interactive map with turn by turn directions for voters and the application was loaded on all iPads;
- Separate advance vote and election day mail outs were sent;
- The vote bus was located at C-Train stations during morning and evening commutes and made mid-day stops at the Drop-in Centre and the Kerby Centre;
- Drive-up voting at McMahon Stadium was very popular and over 3000 voters cast their vote there over three days;
- The election website was redesigned and also included a simplified "Election App" for mobile devices. Overall visits to the elections website were 4.5 times higher compared to the 2013 election;
- Candidate Profile Pages including biographies, platforms and short videos were facilitated. These had over 2.9 million views during the four-week election period;
- Locations and dates of externally organized debates and forums were published;
- Free election day transit tickets were mailed to Calgarians and 9262 voters took advantage of these;
- "I voted" stickers and a social media virtual frame were deployed;
- An "I voted" selfie wall was created to minimize instances of voters photographing their ballots;
- New types of voting station directional signs were provided; and
- Outreach was conducted at summer events including Folkfest, Canada Day festivities and on Stephen Avenue during the Stampede.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

External and internal expertise will be used to help develop and implement a four-year program that results in the delivery of an election that meets the expectation of voters, media and candidates. The Returning Officer will engage with experts in the fields of hiring contract workers, forecasting supply and demand, logistics, election processes, accessibility, and technology to identify and integrate improvements necessary to ensure the election is aligned with voters', candidates' and the media's expectations of a large city election.

The following areas will be the focus of further investigation and improvement:

- Accessibility – Review number and type of voting stations; ensure locations meet provincial standards for accessibility; increased voting hours; ensuring that methods of casting a ballot are logical and understandable; enhanced distribution of ballots and supplies to voting stations; and managing lineups at voting stations throughout the day.
- Accuracy – That any new voting technology proposed meets legislative requirements, counts the vote accurately and allows results to be reported in a timely manner.
- Equality – All voters are informed of voting opportunities and provided with an efficient voting station process.
- Transparency – The electoral process is open to observers and scrutineers.
- Legislative Compliance – The election continues to be carried out in a manner that complies with all legislative requirements and new processes developed through the Charter.
- Training - Changes in the timing and delivery of training will ensure that election workers receive enhanced training and that training is adhered to in voting stations. Best practices will be used to hire and on-board election workers.
- Technology – A further review of technology requirements and redundancies is required to enhance processes and the performance of applications, servers and websites.
- Project management and staff development – A comprehensive training program including project management training will be developed.
- City Auditor – The role of the City Auditor in the lead up to and on election day will be further canvassed.
- Communications – Robust communications will be provided to voters, candidates, and media.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

The Returning Officer is completing post-2017 General Election debriefs, documenting issues, conducting business process reviews, and engaging with other jurisdictions to determine best practices that need to be implemented in Calgary. Opportunities that will result from the City Charter will also be explored as these may allow new solutions to problems specific to large city elections that could not previously be overcome.

Strategic Alignment

This report aligns with Council's priority of a well-run city: "Calgary's government is open, responsive, accountable and transparent, delivering excellent services at a fair price."

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

None.

Financial Capacity

Investment and resource requests will be included in the Returning Officer's 2018 Report.

Risk Assessment

Elections Calgary has a long-standing reputation of delivering legislatively compliant elections. However, significant improvements must be made to election processes to enhance the experience of voters, candidates and the media when voting and receiving election results. To identify and implement these, both the continuation of the review outlined in this report and the City Auditor's review are essential.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The City has outgrown the election processes used in past and changes are required to continue to ensure legislative compliance and enhance the experience of voters, candidates and the media when voting and receiving election results.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Previous Council Direction/Policy
2. October 24, 2017 General Election memo to the Mayor and Council from the City Clerk and Returning Officer