

Plebiscite Readiness Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City Auditor's Office conducted a Plebiscite Readiness Review at the request of the Returning Officer/City Clerk to validate plebiscite readiness and support greater transparency on actions taken by Election and Census Services to provide an improved voter experience. This report reflects the results of the point in time review, which was concluded as at 2018 September 26, based on validation and evaluation of documentation, and information provided during Election and Census Services discussions. Results concluded with independent readiness assurance¹ on three of the five focus areas defined in the readiness review objective:

- Appropriate ballot distribution plans
- Efficient design of voting station process to mitigate queue line ups
- Timely escalation and resolution of issues

While the remaining two focus areas (i.e. appropriate end of night count processes and effective functionality of the tabulator) had various levels of readiness underway, the documentation provided was insufficient to provide complete readiness assurance. Independent validation could not be provided on end of night count processes, including balancing, as plans were not defined. Formal systems testing had not yet occurred to provide readiness assurance on effective functionality of the tabulator technology. Readiness results were shared with the Returning Officer/City Clerk, who in turn provided commitment to continue with readiness activities underway including finalization of draft documents, completion and testing of end of night count processes including tabulator, and delivery of training and roles and responsibility guidance to election workers. Since the conclusion of the readiness review, the Returning Officer/City Clerk has informed the City Auditor's Office of the following readiness activities completed or underway:

- Finalization of end of night processes have been integrated into the election worker training plans, legislated forms and support materials. The Voting Station help line will be open and staffed by election trainers who will provide additional support required for the end of night processes.
- Tabulator logic and accuracy validation and results generation processes have been finalized for use in Vote 2018. Formal testing including validation of the tabulators and end of night processes are underway and will be completed prior to October 26, 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Audit Committee receive this report for information; and
2. That Audit Committee recommend that Council receive this report for information.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

Bylaw 30M2004 (as amended) established the position of City Auditor and the powers, duties and functions of the position. Under the City Auditor's Office Charter, the City Auditor presents an annual risk-based audit plan to Audit Committee for approval. The City Auditor's 2017-18

¹ Readiness assurance is limited to the draft documents and information provided at the time the review occurred and should not be considered as full assurance that risks which could negatively impact voter experience on the plebiscite date of 2018 November 13 will not occur.

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plan was approved on 2016 November 10. At the 2018 September 18 Audit Committee, the City Auditor announced the intent to accept a Management request to perform a Plebiscite Readiness Review as an addition to the plan. The City Auditor is accountable to Council and subject to the oversight of Audit Committee under Bylaw 48M2012 (as amended).

BACKGROUND

In 2018 March, The City of Calgary received confirmation from the Provincial and Federal governments that they would commit funding to the Calgary 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (OPWG) Bid Corporation. The funding from the Provincial government is contingent upon several conditions including that The City holds a plebiscite at a time when there is enough information for Calgarians to make an informed decision on the costs and benefits of hosting the 2026 OPWG.

On 2018 June 25, Council approved and gave three readings to the Election Bylaw 35M2018 which included authority and requirements regarding use of a permanent elections register, established voting station hours as 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and use of automated voting systems.

On 2018 September 10, Council approved the 2026 Olympic Bid Plebiscite and confirmed the vote of the electors on the matter of whether Calgary should host the 2026 OPWG. The Plebiscite will proceed on 2018 November 13, now referred to as Vote 2018. The Election and Census Services Division under the direction of the Returning Officer/City Clerk holds responsibility for delivering a vote process which complies to the Local Authorities Election Act. The vote is scheduled to be conducted utilizing voting tabulator technology to count votes for the first time in The City of Calgary history.

The Returning Officer/City Clerk requested the City Auditor's Office conduct a readiness review as an addition to the Audit Committee approved 2017-18 Audit Plan. The objective of the readiness review was to provide independent validation on Election and Census Services documented procedures and processes which support:

- Appropriate ballot distribution plans;
- Efficient design of voting station process to mitigate queue line ups;
- Appropriate end of night count processes;
- Timely escalation and resolution of issues; and
- Effective functionality of the tabulator.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Results of our review, as of 2018 September 26, noted significant readiness work effort underway in the form of draft processes, business rules, and end-to-end testing plans, which addressed appropriate ballot distribution, and timely escalation and resolution of issues. Other key activities were in first stages of development and could not be fully validated or confirmed at the time of the review. These key activities included the end of night tabulator count and reconciliation. It is important to note our independent validation was specific to draft documentation and plans, many of which were undergoing final amendments at the time of the audit review.

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Specifically, our review confirmed:

- Election and Census Services has utilized Alberta election registration data to determine “active voter” numbers anticipated at each ward voting station.
- Ballots ordered provide an anticipated surplus (represent 123% of active voters) to cover “new” voters, spoiled ballots (through tabulator process), and support coverage of higher than anticipated turnouts.
- Plans are in place to fully distribute ballots, equal to 100% of active voters, to voting stations.
- Business Rules articulate distribution and control of ballots, and security of tabulator.
- Tabulator logic and accuracy checklist steps have been established to validate functioning of each of the 160 voting station tabulators.
- Voting station layout has been updated to reflect elimination of voter card and associated increased voter registration.
- A staffing plan with allocation of Deputy Returning Officers based on a ratio of one Deputy Returning Officer supporting 30-40 voters per hour.
- Monitoring plan to identify and mitigate the risk of queues building at voting stations, utilizing hourly reporting of activity from voting stations.
- Draft Command Centre Plan which identifies resourcing to support mitigation responses to potential incidents, as well as, issue escalation processes and accountabilities.

The review also identified the following outstanding readiness work to be completed:

- Election vote worker training materials were not drafted, roles and responsibilities were not fully defined, and training has not yet been delivered, which is a key consideration in mitigating queue line-ups.
- End of night processes, including balancing routine, were not fully defined and tested to support timely production of results.
- Voting results generation test plan was not drafted and testing had not been completed, which is a key determinate in assessing full functionality of the tabulator.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

Key stakeholders involved in this review were Election and Census Services and Information Technology. Information Technology was involved during 3-day end to end walkthrough testing and are expected to provide significant support during the Plebiscite.

This review was conducted with the full support and cooperation of Election and Census Services who provided access to documents stored on the SharePoint site, supported auditor attendance at the first day of the 3-day walk-through testing, and provided prompt responses to audit questions. We also benefited from support from Information Technology regarding their support and planned testing of the tabulator.

Strategic Alignment

Audit activity assists Council in its oversight of the City Manager’s administration and accountability for stewardship over public funds and achievement on value for money in City operations.

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Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

N/A

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget

N/A

Current and Future Capital Budget

N/A

Risk Assessment

The activities of the City Auditor's Office serve to promote accountability, mitigate risk, and support an effective governance structure. The 2018 Plebiscite was not anticipated when the 2017-18 Audit Plan was approved in November 2016. The City Auditor's Office approved Audit Plan, by design, supports a level of agility to respond to new and emerging risks. The high level of public interest and the opportunity for Council to utilize the voter results, as well as recognition of Election and Census Services Division's initiatives to improve voter experience prompted the City Auditor to accept this Management request to conduct a readiness review. The feedback provided by the readiness review will further support the Election and Census Services Division in meeting their objectives in delivery of Vote 2018.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Bylaw 48M2012 (as amended) states: "Audit Committee receives directly from the City Auditor any individual audit report and forwards these to Council for information."

ATTACHMENT

None.