2022
CITY OF VAUGHAN
MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Returning Officer's Report

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1 Executive Summary

The 2022 Municipal Election was successfully delivered on Monday October 24, 2022.

The election occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a profound impact on how election administrators planned and executed the election:

1. Accelerated the need for alternative voting methods. The City introduced Internet Voting as a safe and secure alternative voting method.

2. Decreased internal staff participation due to COVID-19 concerns. This was the lowest rate of internal staff participation in recent history.

3. Affected projected timelines and costs. Accommodations were required due to health protocols observed by the City. Additional costs were incurred to secure protective equipment and cleaning supplies.

4. Introduced ePoll technology to condos and special voting locations to streamline processes and improve efficiency.

The key change in this election was the introduction of Internet Voting. It was made available for the Advance Vote period only. For 14 consecutive days, 24 hours a day, the online voting platform was available to eligible voters to cast their ballot. Through this method, the City saw its highest Advance Vote turnout in history. 36,642 ballots were cast – equivalent to 60.38% of all votes. It significantly alleviated the pressure on physical locations on Voting Day.

The overall voter turnout was 27.03%, with over 60,000 ballots cast across the City. There was also a 0.14% increase in overall turnout.

The changes made by the City were well received. Over 85% of surveyed residents were very satisfied with Internet Voting and 90% would use it again. There were no discernable differences in the demographics of electors that voted online versus paper.

This report offers 18 recommendations based on feedback collected from staff involved in the election, and an analysis of data and documentation associated with the project. To continue delivering effective, accessible, and secure elections, election administrators should focus on these areas for the next election:

1. Implementation of project management best practices to improve project outcomes.

2. Streamline vendor management processes and strategies for increased accountability.

3. Evaluate the objectives and outcomes of established programs.

2   Background

The City Clerk has the statutory responsibility to conduct regular elections every four years, as well as by-elections when required. The general election of municipal and school board candidates for the four-year term commencing November 15, 2022, was held on October 24, 2022. Fourteen continuous Advance Vote dates were held via Internet Vote from October 6 to October 20. Pursuant to section 11 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the Act) in Ontario the Clerks of local municipalities are responsible for conducting the municipal and school board elections within their municipalities. This includes responsibility for:

1. Preparing for the election;

2. Preparing for and conducting a recount in the election; and

3. Maintaining peace and order in connection with the election.

3   Review Objective and Scope

The review objective was to assess whether the execution of the 2022 Municipal Election was completed in accordance with the plans. It is important to acknowledge that flexibility and contingency are key to the successful delivery of any large-scale project. Lessons learned from variances between plan and execution serve to identify opportunities for future elections and projects of similar scope and complexity.

The scope of this review was limited to February 2021 to June 2023. This period encompasses the 18-months leading up to Voting Day and the 8 months post-election period which has not been reviewed in the past.

The review was conducted between May 2023 and July 2023. There were five primary sources of information that were reviewed:

1. Transcripts from lessons learned interviews;

2. Vendor reports;

3. Internal project documentation;

4. Issue logs from Advance Vote and Voting Day*; and

5. Emails.

Only technical issue logs were available

A few notes on the quality and limitation of data analyzed:

1. Due to the time-lapse between the voting period and the review phase, external staff were not contacted to provide feedback. Therefore, the lessons learned transcripts reflect only the experience of internal staff. As such, it is important to note the potential bias in the feedback provided.

2. Extremely limited internal project documentation and vendor documentation was available for review. The reasons behind this will be discussed in the report.

4   Key Changes for 2022

1. **COVID-19** – Additional accommodations and planning was required due to COVID-19. The impact of the pandemic is covered in this report.

2. **Internet Voting** – The introduction of an alternative voting method allowed eligible residents to vote remotely via internet using computers and mobile devices. This option was piloted during the Advance Vote period only and was also the only voting method available for Advance Vote.

3. **Staff screening** – Applicants were screened through a phone interview prior to continuing through the application process. This practice allowed administrators to better gauge the interest, commitment, and prior election experience of applicants.

4. **ePoll technology deployed to all voting locations**- ePoll notebooks and peripherals were deployed to all voting locations. This technology was extended to condos and special voting locations for the first time and enabled real time access to the electronic Voters' List.

5. **Reduction in condo voting locations** – The total number of standalone condo voting locations was reduced by 3. This reduction is inclusive of the six new towers added since 2018.

5   Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt today. The pandemic completely changed the way administrators had to prepare for an election.

5.1   Need for Alternative Voting Methods

Discussions surrounding alternative voting methods (i.e. Internet Voting, voting by phone, mail-in ballots, etc.) were underway long before COVID-19 occurred. However, the onset of the pandemic accelerated the need for a decision and ultimately the implementation of these alternatives. Municipalities across the province scrambled to make decisions on how to make their upcoming elections accessible while complying with health protocols.

The City of Vaughan's Council had conditionally passed a motion for Internet Voting in 2019. The City Clerk was to report back no later than December 2020 with an analysis on the option. In the spring and summer of 2020, the City retained two consulting firms to assess the operational impact and technical security of Internet Voting. By December 2020, Council had passed the motion for Internet Voting as a voting method for the 2022 election. An Internet Vote vendor was secured through an open RFP process and a contract was signed in February 2022.

5.2   Tighter Timelines

Securing an alternative voting method was crucial as public concern for in-person voting during a pandemic remained high. This also meant that implementation had to be immediate – it would affect the current election cycle instead of waiting for the next. Because a final decision to go ahead with Internet Voting was made in late December 2021 the City had less than a year to draft and issue an RFP and select a vendor. The selected vendor as a result, also had tighter timelines to create and test their environment based on the City's specifications.

5.3   Impact on Culture

COVID-19 also impacted the culture of many teams across the City. Throughout much of late 2021 and 2022, the City remained in an alternative work setting. This limitation of staff being physically present at City Hall impacted the early stages of team building for the newly hired core election team. This delay in team bonding created siloed work streams for tasks that would have benefited from collaboration.

5.4　　　Additional Supplies and Costs

The market for COVID-19 related supplies was incredibly competitive between 2020 and 2022. The election team had to quickly procure protective gear (masks, face shields and gloves) as well as cleaning supplies (disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer) in large quantities in a short period of time. These additional supplies came at a premium cost. It also caused added logistical challenges since voting locations are already burdened with significant equipment and supplies.

6 Fact Sheet

6.1 55.93% Increase in Advance Vote Turnout

A total of 36,642 ballots were cast (60.38% of all votes) during the 2022 Advance Vote period. This was the first time Internet Voting was made available in Vaughan. It is important to note that Internet Voting was only method available during the Advance Vote period. Voting was also made available for 14 consecutive days (24 hours a day). **Table 1** shows the year-by-year comparison for Advance Vote metrics.

Table 1: Advance Vote Metrics

	2010	2014	2018	2022*
Number of Advance Vote Days	9	10	8	14
Number of Advance Vote Locations	8	8	8	Internet Voting
Number of Ballots Cast During Advance Vote	4,658	8,226	9,017	36,642
Advance Vote Turnout	2.65%	4.31%	4.45%	60.38%

Internet Voting introduced as the only Advance Vote method.

6.2 Increase in Overall Voter Turnout

Voter turnout increased very slightly for the first time since 2010. The City saw a 0.14% increase or 6,251 additional ballots cast. The overall trend of low voter engagement continues to be an issue in all elections across all levels of government. The metrics provided in **Table 2** are for information purposes only as administrators cannot control factors influencing voter turnout.

Table 2: Election Metrics

	2010	2014	2018	2022
Number of Eligible Voters	175,470	190,724	202,041	224,507
Number of Candidates	60	60	74	68
Number of Ballots Cast	71,145	57,749	54,434	60,685
Voter Turnout	40.55%	30.28%	26.89%	27.03%
Number of Voting Locations	107	79	118*	104
Number of Tabulators Used	105	107	132	132

Includes four Advance Vote locations not used on Voting Day: Promenade Mall, Dufferin Clark Community Centre, Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and Highway 407.

6.3 Growth in Eligible Voters

In 2022, City of Vaughan has saw an 11% growth in the number of eligible voters. 22,466 new eligible voters were added to the Voters' List. To accommodate this growth, 14 new polling subdivisions were added.

6.4 Registered Candidates

A total of 68 registered candidates ran for office in the City of Vaughan – the distribution by office is shown on **Table 3**. This number includes any offices which appeared in more than one municipality's ballots such as the York Region District School Board Area 1 Trustee, Conseil Scolaire Catholique MonAvenir Trustee and Conseil Scolaire Viamonde Trustee. Three registered candidates withdrew their application prior to the deadline. There were six fewer registered candidates compared to 2018.

Table 3: Distribution of Registered Candidates by Office

Office	Number of Candidates
Mayor*	9
Local and Regional Councillor	9
Ward 1 Councillor	6
Ward 2 Councillor	6
Ward 3 Councillor	6
Ward 4 Councillor	6
Ward 5 Councillor	2
York Catholic District School Board Area 1 Trustee	3
York Catholic District School Board Area 2 Trustee*	3
York Catholic District School Board Area 3 Trustee	4
York Region District School Board Area 1 Trustee	3
York Region District School Board Area 2 Trustee	2
York Region District School Board Area 3 Trustee	5
Conseil Scolaire Catholique Monavenir	1
Conseil Scolaire Viamonde	3
Total	**68**

Includes withdrawn candidates.

7   Staffing

7.1   Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

7.1.1   Decrease in Internal Staff Participation

Less than 30% of all hired staff were internal City employees. This election received 39 fewer internal applications compared to 2018. Throughout the interview process, two primary reasons stood out for low participation.

1. **Lack of management support.** This continues to be an unfortunate trend and the top quoted reason for not taking part in the election. Initially reported in the 2018 Returning Officer's Report to Council, there is little evidence to suggest managers and supervisors across the City have improved their stance on staff participation.

2. **COVID-19.** The potential exposure to COVID-19 was also a top concern mentioned by staff. Although by October 2022, health officials had removed the recommendations for social distancing and masking, staff continued to exercise these practices.

Recommendation 1

Collaborate with the Office of the City Manager to review and develop a sustainable election staffing model which would allow all election positions to be filled by internal staff only.

7.1.2   Screening Applicants Had Limited Success

Following a recommendation from the 2018 Returning Officer's Report to develop a screening process for election officials, a new phone interview/ screening process was implemented. Applicants from the first mass recruitment effort were personally called by a member of the election team. The conversation was to better understand their prior election experience, computer literacy as well gauge commitment and note any special requests. This exercise was helped to better assign individuals to the various roles available.

However, after the first mass recruitment, it became evident that it was too time consuming to continue. Efforts were abandoned with subsequent applications. The new applications were screened based on the responses to the online form.

No data was available to analyze the impact of screening applicants on the phone versus strictly assigning roles based on online responses. Based on the staff attrition data, no significant improvements were seen from prior years.

Recommendation 2

In collaboration with Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, develop a screening process that is aligned with existing corporate practices.

Recommendation 3

Screening processes should be consistently practiced for maximum impact. Election management should enforce best practices.

8 Training

8.1 Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

8.1.1 Additional In-Person Training Required

All positions were required to attend in-person training. The duration of these sessions varied by position from one to two hours. The training focused on policy, procedures and using the hardware and software. While the trainers were knowledgeable, all interviewed staff agreed that the given time was inadequate.

Recommendation 4

Separate the training into two learning streams. An eModule stream covering policy and procedures and an in-person session focusing on hands-on workflow.

8.1.2 Insufficient Time Spent on Use Cases

There are multiple use case scenarios on Voting Day from adding an elector to changing attributes such as school board support or residency. Staff were not provided with enough practice cases to familiarize themselves with the correct procedure to make these changes. All scenarios were completed once.

8.1.3 Inaccurate Reference Material

Paper based reference materials were re-introduced in 2022 after the paperless model in 2018 was not embraced by election officials. As part of the material refresh, guides were created for all positions except for the Customer Service Representative. Placemats were also refreshed. Staff reported inconsistencies in the reference material as well as problems with ease of use.

1. Inconsistent procedures. Largely influenced by provincial and federal election material. The processes in both of these elections varies greatly from the processes at the City of Vaughan. These discrepancies caused confusion during training. The errors were not captured during the material review process.

2. Lack of visual references. The guides were primarily written instructions. The lack of visual references to menus, queues, icons, etc. affected the ease of use of the material. Items could not be easily located without reading through heavy text.

Recommendation 5

Prepare training material prior to the start of an election year. Update based on voting methodology.

Recommendation 6

Establish a review and approval process for all training and external material for distribution.

8.1.4   Limited Internet Voting Reference Material

New material had to be created for the Advance Vote period which featured Internet Voting for the first time. This task fell on the election team to complete as the vendor did not supply reference material. Due to the unfamiliarity of the new voting method, the reference material produced was limited. Although the online voting workflow was very user friendly, staff wanted a quick reference guide to help troubleshoot. Some staff also stated that a visual manual (similar to a printed demo) would have been helpful to walk electors through.

Recommendation 7

Include explicit language listing the training support required from vendors into their contracts.

9   Internet Voting

The City of Vaughan introduced Internet Voting for the first time in 2022. Scytl was awarded the contract to provide the City with a secure online voting platform. This voting method was limited to the Advance Vote period only. During this period, the secure voting website was available 24 hours a day starting October 6 until October 20.

All eligible voters received a voter information letter by mail in late September. The letter included unique login credentials and an information page on how to access the secure voting platform. Users had to manually type the URL and enter their credentials to be granted access to the online ballot. A set of arrows could be clicked to navigate through the ballot before final submission.

9.1 Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

### 9.1.1 Demographics Consistent with Paper Voting

The demographics of voters that participated in the Advance Vote period via Internet Voting were consistent with those who voted on Voting Day via paper. That is, voters with similar demographics voted via both methods with no statistical outliers to report. There is no statistical evidence to suggest that any demographic was alienated by the introduction of Internet Voting. **Table 4** displays information about the voter turnout statistics by age and voting method separated by Ward. **Figure 1** shows the preferred voting methods by age group.

Table 4: Voter Turnout by Age and Ward

| Age Group	Ward 1		Ward 2			Ward 3			Ward 4		Ward 5	
	Internet Voting	In-Person Voting	Internet Voting	In-Person Voting	Proxy	Internet Voting	In-Person Voting	Proxy	Internet Voting	In-Person Voting	Internet Voting	In-Person Voting
18-24	728	355	670	302		599	311		357	119	366	152
25-34	942	412	823	311		719	310		432	145	564	268
35-44	1,115	532	887	388		1,073	565		926	350	592	371
45-54	1,811	1,069	1,653	901		1,848	1,078	1	1,533	706	926	553
55-64	2,148	1,311	1,799	1,051		1,770	1,092		1,021	506	1,720	1,063
65-74	1,047	898	1,200	1,216		1,076	1,206		530	311	2,111	1,345
75-84	503	664	689	1,189	1	515	804		191	159	946	816
85+	185	251	231	404		137	192		33	69	226	296

Figure 1: Voter Turnout by Age Group and Voting Method

Voter Turnout by Age Group and Voting Method
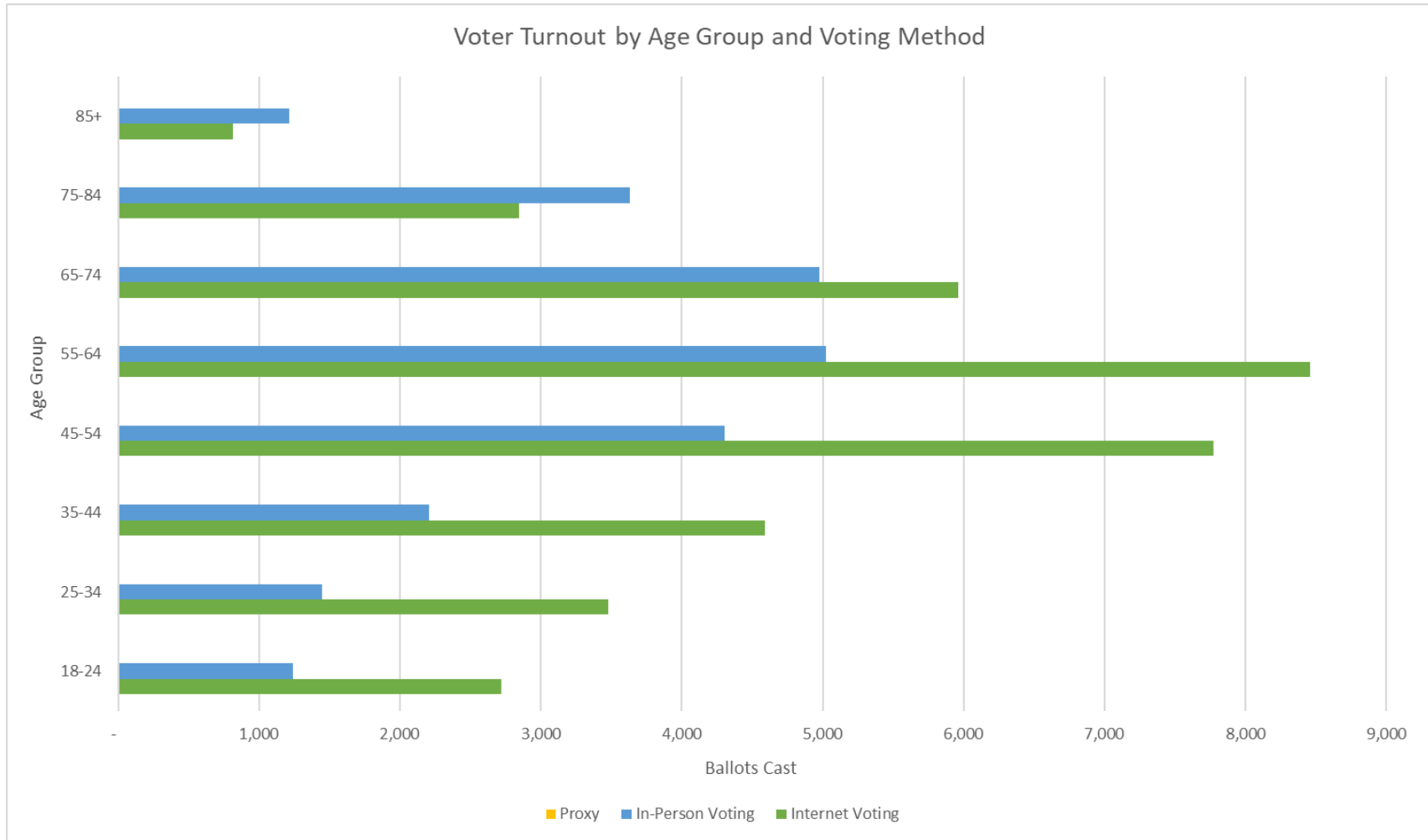
9.1.2   Internet Voting the Preferred Voting Method

Figure 2 displays the voter turnout by method by Ward. Ward 4 showed the most balanced preference between the two voting methods. That is, 53% voted via Internet and 47% via paper. The voting method preference is significantly more skewed (over 65%) towards Internet Voting across the remaining wards. Ward 2 had the highest preference for Internet Voting at 72% of all ballots cast online.

Figure 2: Voter Turnout by Ward and Voting Method
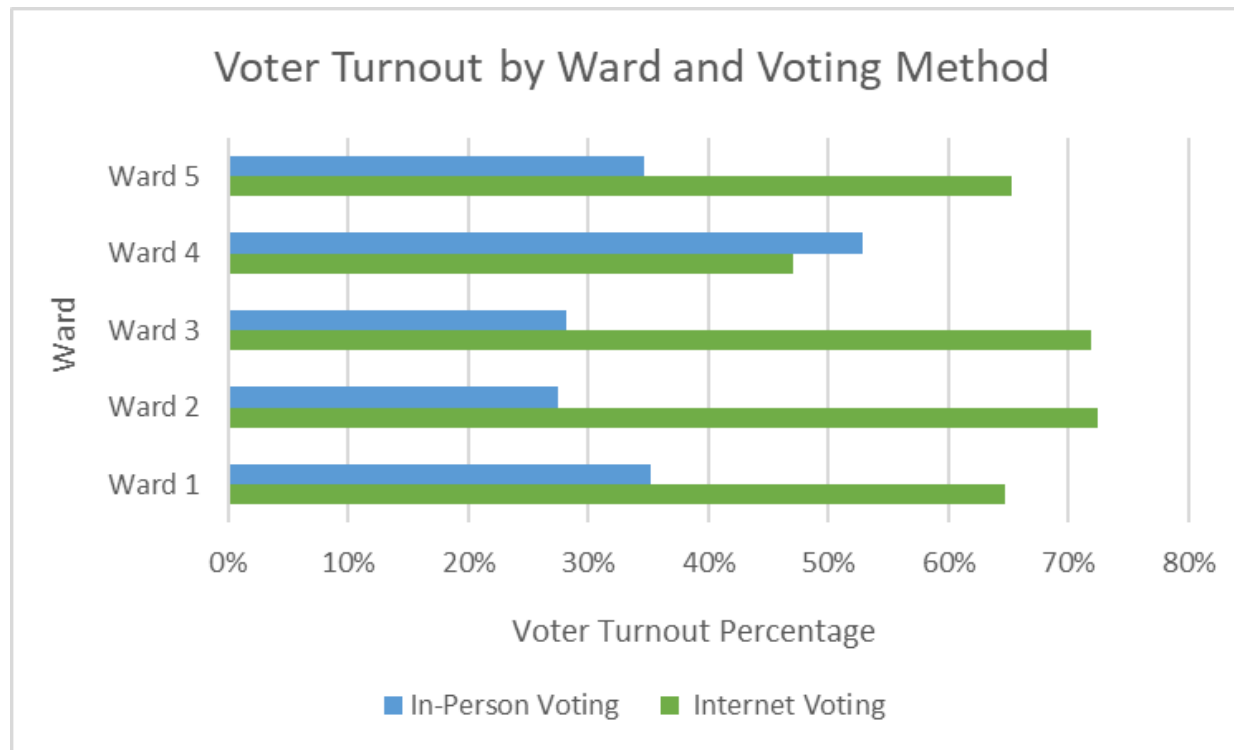
9.1.3   Very Positive Feedback

The City conducted a post-election survey in November 2022 to gather information about the voting experience of residents. Here are some highlights:

- **85%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the online voting platform was easy to use.

- **85%** of respondents agreed that the overall Internet Voting experience was positive.

- **90%** of respondents would use Internet Voting again.

- Only one respondent disagreed with each of the above metrics.

9.1.4   Requests for PIN Reset Lower Than Expected

PIN reset requests were expected to be significant based on the experience of other municipalities. However, only 184 requests were received and processed during the 14-day Advance Vote period. That amounts to 0.5% of all online ballots cast. This discrepancy might be attributed to messaging done by the City reminding residents to safeguard their login credentials. Data also shows that in all but three instances, login was successful after one PIN reset.

The synchronization between the Internet Vote vendor and the Voters' List vendor was key to ensuring successful credential authentication.

9.1.5   Reduced Barriers to Vote

The introduction of internet voting reduced the barriers to vote for various groups.

- **Disabled.** The City's online voting platform was compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Individuals with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the ballot. Voters with vision and hearing were able to cast a ballot independently, providing them with a greater degree of anonymity and equality.

    Access to the ballot via internet also eliminated the need to physically attend a voting location. This further removed barriers for individuals with mobility challenges.

- **Parents with young children.** Internet voting offered the opportunity for parents with young children to vote at their convenience.

For a more comprehensive review on the impact of internet voting on accessibility please refer to the City's 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

9.1.6   Physical Internet Voting Locations Increased Accessibility

As part of the City's efforts to improve accessibility, physical internet voting locations were setup across the City during the Advance Vote period. Traffic at these locations were anecdotally consistent throughout the 14 days. Limitations on how these locations were configured in the vendor databases resulted in both types of locations being lumped into one category. As a result, data surrounding usage for each could not be retrieved.

- **Five Voter Assistance Centres (VAC).** Staffed locations offering access to devices and in-person assistance. These locations were staffed by City employees trained to help voters navigate the online voting platform. Voters who were not registered, did not receive login credentials, or needed changes were required to attend one of these locations if they wished to cast their ballot online. The same amendment services were available on Voting Day for paper-based voting. Each ward had one Voter Assistance Centre.

- **Twelve Self-Serve Kiosks.** Secured devices were made available at every single library across the City. These kiosks were not staffed. Voters could only cast a ballot online at these locations (no amendment services). It was targeted towards individuals who do not have access to a secure/trusted device or internet. Individuals who did not have a private space to cast a ballot were also encouraged to use the kiosks.

9.1.7   Duration of Advance Vote Too Long

The 2022 election offered the longest Advance Vote period in City history – 14 straight days with 24-hour availability to cast a ballot. This was the most hours (336) offered by any municipality in Ontario. Both administrators and staff assigned to the Voter Assistance Centres agreed that the duration was too long. This extended voting period created challenges for administrators in terms of staffing the VAC, redistributing hardware, staff availability to prepare for Voting Day and the costs associated with these tasks.

Recommendation 8

Shorten the Advance Vote period to 8 days or less – regardless of voting method. The selected days should remain consecutive.

10 Project Management

Project management is the application of knowledge and methodology to deliver project objectives within a set of constraints. This includes managing people, resources, and time. The relevant information is well defined in project documentation, created at the beginning of the project, and updated throughout. Multiple knowledge areas exists within project management including the management of scope, time, vendors, and quality.

10.1 Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

10.1.1 Better Planning to Avoid Scope Creep

Scope creep was a problem for the administrators of the 2022 election. Scope creep occurs when requirements and constraints are poorly defined at the onset of a project. It often occurs due to lack of stakeholder engagement, lack of management or project oversight, and inconsistencies in processes. When reviewing the implementation of the 2022 election, scope creep was observed in every knowledge area. As a result, delays in decision making, frequent requests for additional resources, last minute requests and confusion over task ownership were experienced.

Recommendation 9

Project management best practices should be implemented and overseen by a dedicated and certified project manager.

10.1.2 Project Documentation

One of the biggest areas for improvement coming out of the 2022 election is project documentation. Proper and complete documentation has been proven to improve collaboration, quality, communication, efficiency, in addition to facilitating knowledge transfer and lessons learned. The limited documentation from this project has caused challenges in multiple areas including data collection and review.

Recommendation 10

Project documentation should be incorporated into key deliverables throughout the project lifecycle.

Recommendation 11

Strictly enforce the transfer of relevant project documents from vendors throughout the project lifecycle.

10.1.3 Vendor Accountability

The administration of an election is complex. The City relies heavily on turnkey vendors to provide key services such as Voters' List management, internet voting platforms and print and mail services. The role of the City is to manage these vendors and hold them accountable for the delivery of their contractual obligations.

It is important to acknowledge the niche market for election services. This constraint puts the City in a precarious position to maintain courteous and professional relationships with these vendors to not jeopardize the delivery of election services.

Opportunities exists to improve vendor compliance, support, and performance.

Recommendation 12

In collaboration with Procurement Services, develop a process to evaluate vendors throughout the project lifecycle.

11 Voting Locations

The following section addresses paper-based locations on Voting Day.

11.1   Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

11.1.1 Condo Locations

As part of the 2018 Returning Officer's Report, reviewing the long-term sustainability of hosting stand-alone condo voting locations was recommended. Condos have unique challenges for administrators and require additional planning and execution. For 2022, steps were taken to reduce the condo location footprint.

11.1.1.1   ePoll Enabled

34 condo voting locations were hosted on Voting Day. These locations were enabled with ePoll technology allowing for live access to the Voters' List for the first time. Condos were paper-based locations in all prior elections. This change was made to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the Voters' List at these locations.

11.1.1.2   Challenges in Hosting Condo Locations

Condo locations are unique compared to other physical voting locations for a number of reasons. They are private properties that are selected to have standalone voting services on Voting Day for their residents only.

- **Condo Management.** The election team is required to work closely with condo management to secure an event space, facilitate site assessments and the delivery of furniture and equipment. As condos are not legislatively required to participate in this process, some management companies simply ignored or denied the City's requests. This impacts the planning and timelines of the project.

- **High Cost, Low Turnout**. As condo voting locations are accessible only to its residents, the total number of eligible voters is very low. However, they are still required to be equipped and staffed by a minimum of two people – a Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) and Tabulator Deputy Returning Officer (TDRO). In 2022, the average number of voters per condo location was 54. The lowest

turnout at one location was 9 voters. This pegs the average cost per voter at $24.23 for these locations (based on a two-person staffing model). The average cost per voter at a community-based location is $7.80.

11.1.1.3 *Reduction in Standalone Condo Locations*

Since the last election, 6 new condo towers have been occupied. To improve the efficiency and costs associated with hosting physical voting locations, a number of condo voting subdivisions were reassigned to either a nearby community centre or school or consolidated at the Promenade Mall voting place. Ward 5 was the ward most impacted by this reduction. Minimal negative feedback was received as a result of this change.

Accounting for the 6 new condo towers, a net reduction of three condo voting locations was achieved in 2022.

Recommendation 13

To improve the use of resources, condo voting locations should be eliminated. All impacted voters should be assigned to community-based voting locations.

11.1.2 Lower Wait Times on Voting Day

In prior elections, the final 2 hours in the evening on Voting Day are always hectic and consistently produce long lineups. This was not experienced in this election. There were no reports of long wait times anywhere in the City. This could be largely attributed to the introduction of Internet Voting, as majority of residents opted to vote in advance. As a result, polls were able to close on time, supplies and materials returned to the City in a timely manner and tabulator results made available before 10pm.

11.1.3 Widespread Connectivity Issues

11.1.3.1 *Internet Connectivity*

Internet connectivity issues continue be a problem across voting locations in the City. To combat the challenges observed in 2018, the City implemented a dual SIM card process by two different vendors to improve redundancy. The quality of internet coverage varies greatly by provider across the City. This had some positive impact in locations such as schools and community centres.

An unforeseen issue was the poor connectivity at condos. This election expanded the use of ePoll technology into condos and special voting locations. However, incorrect assumptions were made about the quality of internet available at these locations and therefore not tested as part of the voting location assessment. On Voting Day, majority of the internet connectivity issues (which affected the access to the live Voters' List) were reported from condos. Several locations opened late as a result.

11.1.3.2 Vendor Connectivity

The City installs a desktop version of the Voters' List in every ePoll notebook. This local application allows for offline access to the Voters' List (updated as of the day of installation). It prevents very large sets of data from being downloaded and installed on Voting Day – potentially slowing down the entire network at a voting location. The database is automatically updated in the background. It uploads and downloads Voter strike-off information as well revisions.

Connectivity issues were experienced twice on Voting Day affecting updates to the Voters' List. The first issue was observed between 9:00am and 10:30am and the second around 6:00pm. In both instances, connectivity to the Voters' List was interrupted due to an issue on the vendor's side. The interruption in the morning was significant – updates to the Voters' List was very slow - some voting locations deemed it unusable. Adding a new elector was impossible as the database connection was severed. The evening interruption resulted in only a slight slowdown of the search functionality. It was an inconvenience but voting locations were able to continue to process voters.

This is the first time since the introduction of ePoll technology (piloted in 2014) that the Voters' List vendor has experienced connectivity issues during any Voting period. All municipalities sharing the same vendor experienced the same issue. No official explanation has been provided by the vendor as to the root cause of the issue.

Recommendation 14

Voting location assessments need to be conducted no later than April in an election year. All potential voting locations should be assessed for the purposes of maintaining a roster.

12 Voter and Candidate Services

12.1 Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

12.1.1 High Uptake of Online Voter Services (OVS)

Online Voter Services (OVS) is a range of tools available to residents to verify their voting status and add themselves to the Voters' List. The service is first offered by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) from March to May of an election year. The City provides a direct link to their Voter lookup tool and any updates are made directly into the MPAC database. By June/July, the DataFix Voter Lookup replaces MPAC as the primary OVS provider. The City embeds the Lookup tool onto its election webpage. Resident queries are made directly into the Voters' List that the City received from MPAC and will use for the Voting period.

During the 2022 election, the DataFix Voter Lookup tool received 2,773 unique queries. These are searches by residents to verify if they're currently listed on the City's Voters' List. 1,414 voter registration requests were also received through OVS.

12.1.2 Challenges with Voter Information Letters

The design and printing of the Voter Information Letters (VILs) are part of the turnkey service provided by the Internet Voting vendor. The task was outsourced to a vendor who specializes in production and mailing of documents including VILs. The City worked directly with the vendor to finalize the VILs. This year, the VILs had online voting credentials as well as information regarding physical voting locations for Voting Day. While no issues were reported with the online voting credentials, numerous subdivisions in Ward 1 received VILs with misprinted information. This error caused a lot of confusion on Voting Day resulting in an overwhelming number of voters attending the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital special voting location by mistake.

Recommendation 15

All configurations and database setups should be reviewed for accuracy by at least one other administrator.

13 Contribution Rebate Program

The Contribution Rebate Program dates back to 2010. It was established as means to encourage financial contributions to candidates to spur greater elector involvement and better campaigns. The assumption was that this would drive higher elector participation and thus voter turnout. This is the fourth election cycle with the Contribution Rebate Program but the first time it's being reported as part of the Returning Officer's Report.

13.1 Detailed Observations and Lessons Learned

13.1.1 No Statistical Relationship Between Contributions and Voter Turnout

Table 5 shows the total amounts paid in contribution rebates versus the voter turnout for that election year starting 2014. Based on this data, there is no statistical relationship between the metrics. That is, a higher number of rebates did not result in higher voter turnout. From 2014 to 2018, the contribution rebate amount increased by 54.68% but voter turnout declined by 3.39%. Similarly, the contribution rebate paid decreased in 2022 from 2018 by almost 50% but there was a voter turnout increase of 0.14%.

Table 5: Contribution Rebates Issued vs Voter Turnout

Year	Total Contribution Rebates Issued	Voter Turnout
2014	$48,615	30.28%
2018	$75,199	26.89%
2022	$38,018	27.03%

13.1.2 Opportunities to Increase Public Awareness

Most inquiries received by the election team post-election concern the Contribution Rebate Program. These inquiries start as early as the day after Voting Day and continue well into the summer of the following year when the cheques are issued. There is a lack of understanding about eligibility, the application process, and the timelines. The responsibility to correctly inform contributing residents falls onto candidates. However, as the administrators of the Program, residents always contact the City for information first. There is a clear misalignment on who is responsible for informing residents.

Recommendation 16

Include information about the Contribution Rebate Program in post-election email reminders to all candidates.

Recommendation 17

Update the Contribution Rebate package to include the City's election webpage URL for up-to-date information regarding eligibility and timelines.

Recommendation 18

Evaluate the feasibility of developing an online form to allow residents to submit their applications electronically. This form should also have the function to retrieve application status.