COMMUNICATION – C5
Council – December 15, 2020
Committee of the Whole
Report No. 59, Item 2

DATE: DECEMBER 11, 2020

TO: MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: TODD COLES, CITY CLERK / RETURNING OFFICER

RE: COMMUNICATION
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (WORKING SESSION)
DECEMBER 2, 2020, ITEM #2,
CONSIDERATION OF INTERNET VOTING FOR THE 2022 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this communication is to respond to questions posed by Members of Council in respect to the report titled "Consideration of Internet Voting for the 2022 Municipal Election" as presented to Committee of the Whole (Working Session) on December 2, 2022.

2. ANALYSIS

Does internet voting increase voter turnout?

Voter turnout is a statistic driven by numerous factors such as electoral competitiveness, election type, demographics and accessibility just to name a few. While researchers are able to identify varying factors influencing voter turnout, there is no consensus on the proportion of each factor's influence. When isolating for the specific impact of internet voting on voter turnout, majority of studies have found minimal correlation. Preliminary data from a current study by Dr. Daniel Stockemer of the University of Ottawa, reveals that municipalities that adopt internet voting see slight increases in voter turnout. Adjusted for other factors, an Ontario municipality with online voting sees an average 2.8 percent higher voter turnout than a municipality that does not engage in online voting. However, when comparing year over year voter turnout for municipalities that have offered online voting for more than one election cycle, the data shows no significant fluctuations.

It is worth noting that although changes to voter turnout (directly attributed to online voting) are minimal, the method by which voters cast their ballots is very adaptive to the choices offered. The Town of Newmarket eliminated the use of all paper-ballots in 2018, offering online voting and telephone voting (through an automated attendant). The total voter turnout rate remained at 35%, in line with previous paper-based elections. The City of Markham is another example of how voter turnout can remain consistent regardless of the voting methods offered. Figure 1 shows the percentage of year over year voter turnout – this figure has remained fairly consistent. Figure 2 shows the percentage of total votes cast online as a percentage of total voter turnout. In 2018, Markham saw a spike in ballots cast online, as online voting was the sole

method offered on Voting Day for the first time. Despite this change, Markham did not see a drastic change in their overall voter turnout.

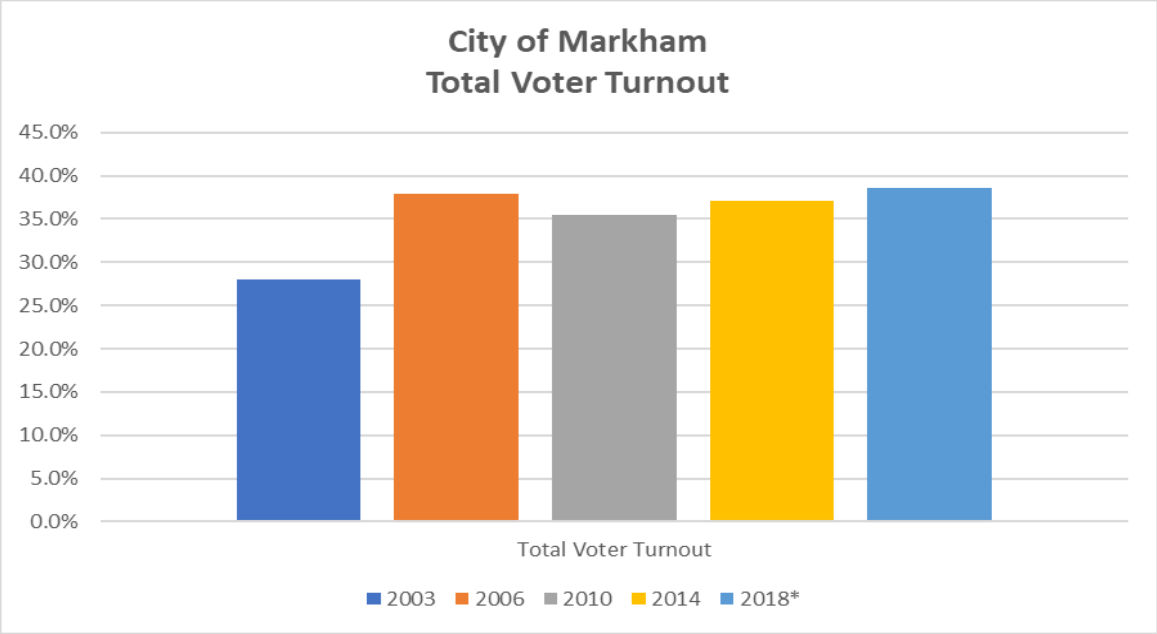


Figure 1: City of Markham Total Voter Turnout (2003 - 2018)

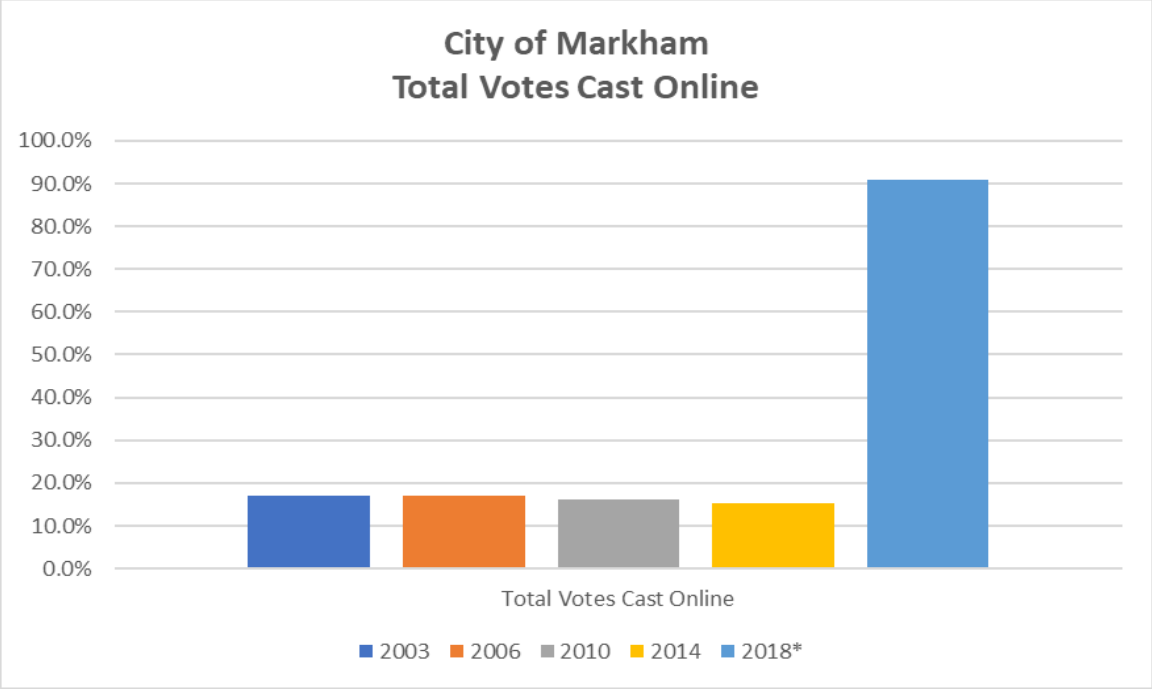


Figure 2: City of Markham Total Votes Cast Online (2003 - 2018)

Have there been reported incidents of fraud connected with internet voting?

There is no evidence of fraud connected with internet voting (as defined in the recommended model, remote online voting).

How do we address or mitigate coercion?

Voter coercion is a risk that exists in all elections, regardless of the delivery method. This risk may increase in a remote voting setting (online voting, telephone or vote by mail). There are three primary opportunities to address or mitigate coercion.

1. Before Voting Period - Voter and Candidate Education, Security Protocols

    - Extensive voter education campaigns can help inform voters of their rights, how to protect the secrecy of their ballot, how to identify potential coercion and where to seek assistance if needed.
    - Educate candidates on their role and responsibilities, what can be considered as coercion and the consequences and penalties associated with their actions.
    - Actively promote Voter Assist Centres as a safe place to cast a ballot for individuals that do not feel comfortable or have limited or no access to a secure computer or internet connection.
    - Establish security protocols to identify and flag IP addresses with high activity (casting or attempting to cast multiple ballots). Vendors offer IP blocking which can restrict connectivity from any suspicious IP addresses.

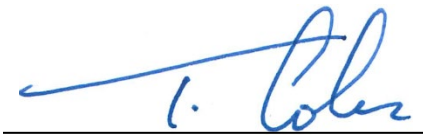
2. During Voting Period – Active Monitoring
    - 24/7 monitoring for compliance of established security protocols.
    - Monitoring of online voting system for any suspicious activity such as high number of failed login attempts, high activity from a single IP address, IP address spoofing, etc.
    - Maintain detailed call log to identify potential patterns.
    - Voters to be presented with a declaration of qualification to vote (which must be read and accepted) prior to accessing a ballot.

3. Post Voting Period – Review, Investigate and Report
    - Vendor must provide logs and reports of online voting system activity, including the identification of any flagged activity.
    - Any flagged or suspicious activity must be reported to authorities and thoroughly investigated as required.

How can we improve the accuracy of the Voters' List?

The accuracy of the municipal Voters' List is an ongoing problem for most jurisdictions in Ontario. With internet voting, where voters would receive credentials in the mail based on the Voters' List, inaccuracies and gaps would be magnified. To address this risk, an enumeration blitz is proposed to encourage residents to confirm and/or update their information or add themselves to the Voters' List. High traffic locations such as community centres, malls and transit hubs will be targeted. Trained election representatives will be strategically placed in these locations with mobile devices to enumerate residents on the spot and provide information on the process as well as information regarding the upcoming election. This will be supplemented with a robust online and social media enumeration campaign. Numerous municipalities such as Markham and Newmarket have had success with this community-based approach. This blitz is in addition to ongoing efforts encourage the use of MPAC's VoterLookup tool and the City's own tool for Voters' List revisions.

Respectfully submitted,



Todd Coles

City Clerk / Returning Officer