



TOWNSHIP OF
Hornepayne

Clerk Report 2026-01

2026 Municipal Election

Council Meeting March 4, 2026

Council Report: 2026 Municipal Election

Prepared for: Council

Prepared by: Clerk

Date: 2026.03.04

1. Recommendations

That Council:

1. Confirms that the Township of Hornepayne will conduct the 2026 Municipal Election using paper ballots and will not use vote tabulators;
2. Authorizes staff to finalize participation in a Joint Compliance Audit Committee, consistent with previous years, and to return to Council with any required appointment By-Law and/or resolutions once finalized; and
3. Directs staff to bring forward updates to the Township's election-related By-Laws and policies in advance of the 2026 Municipal Election.

2. Background

The 2026 Municipal and School Board Election ("2026 Election") will take place on October 26, 2026. The Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (the "MEA") governs the administration of municipal elections in Ontario. Per the MEA, the Clerk has independent legislative authority to administer all municipal and school board elections as the Returning Officer and is tasked with planning and conducting municipal elections in line with the principles of the MEA, which are premised on the importance of free and fair elections, and are generally recognized as follows:

- The secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount;
- The election shall be fair and non-biased;
- The election shall be accessible to all voters;
- The integrity of the voting process shall be maintained throughout the election;
- There is to be certainty that the results of the election reflect the votes cast; and,
- Voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently.

Selecting a vote method is the only decision Council must make in advance of the 2026 Election. In making its recommendation, staff have considered both the legislative framework and the community's expectation of a secure and transparent election and has taken into consideration factors such as cost, accessibility, security and integrity, and public confidence.

3. Analysis

1) Voting Method

After evaluating all available options, staff recommend that the 2026 Election be conducted using the traditional in-person method with manual vote counting. This approach aligns with the principles of the MEA, promotes transparency, and provides opportunity for post-election auditing if necessary.

Council direction is required to confirm this approach (or direct consideration of alternatives) so that detailed procedures, training, and materials can be finalized.

Traditional paper ballots are familiar to electors and can support public confidence through a transparent process that relies on:

- A physical ballot marked by the elector in secret and deposited into a secured ballot box; and
- Documented controls and procedures that demonstrate integrity from ballot printing through to final results and records retention.

Advance Voting

The Clerk is exploring two (2) Advance Vote days in order to provide Hornepayne voters with sufficient opportunities to vote prior to Voting Day.

2) 2022 Election Experience (Online Voting Procurement and Lessons Learned)

For the 2022 Municipal Election, the Township procured online voting at a cost of approximately \$14,700, despite feedback indicating that a majority of residents preferred a paper ballot election. Ultimately, the 2022 election was fully acclaimed, and the online voting service was not used.

This experience supports the proposed approach for 2026: confirming a paper ballot election (without tabulators) that reflects resident preference and avoids unnecessary costs where the voting method may not be required due to acclamations.

3) Joint Compliance Audit Committee (CAC)

A Joint Compliance Audit Committee is being finalized with partner municipalities, consistent with previous election years. Once the joint arrangement is confirmed, staff will return to Council as required with:

- Final participating municipalities;
- Member appointment details and term;
- Cost-sharing/administrative arrangements; and
- Any required appointment by-law and/or resolutions.

4) Election Policies and Procedures Requiring Update

Most, if not all, election-related policies and procedures will require review and updating prior to the 2026 election to ensure procedures are current, clear, and aligned with Township practice and legislative requirements.

Election Procedures / Voting Procedures

Typically includes, as applicable:

- Voting places, dates/hours (including any advance vote approach, if used);
- Ballot format and instructions;
- Voter assistance and accessibility supports;
- Scrutineers: rights, restrictions, identification, and conduct;
- Ballot box security, sealing, and chain-of-custody;
- Manual count procedures (who counts, where, when, how results are recorded);
- Handling of defective/rejected/disputed ballots;
- Recount preparedness; and
- Retention of election documents and materials.

Candidate and Third Party Advertiser Information / Filing Procedures

Typically addresses:

- Filing requirements, deadlines, and submission processes;
- Candidate/third party information package contents and consistent service standards;
- Agent appointments; and
- Process for withdrawals, acclamations, and certifications.

Use of Corporate Resources During an Election

Typically addresses:

- Use of municipal facilities, equipment, staff time, and communication channels;
- Staff neutrality expectations; and
- Handling candidate requests and inquiries fairly and consistently.

Election Sign Rules

Typically addresses:

- Timing for placement/removal;
- Location restrictions (roads, boulevards, municipal property);
- Safety/visibility restrictions;
- Enforcement/removal authority and approach; and
- Complaint-handling process.

Election Accessibility Plan / Procedure

Updates typically cover:

- Accessible voting place requirements and set-up;
- Voter assistance procedures that protect secrecy of the vote;
- Staff training; and
- How accessibility feedback is received and addressed.

Delegation of Authority By-Law for the Restricted Acts Period

Overview of the Restricted Acts Period (commonly referred to as the “Lame Duck” period):

- Is set out in the Municipal Act, 2001 (separate from the MEA);
- May apply after Nomination Day and before the new term begins;
- Is triggered if it can be determined that fewer than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the current Council will form part of the incoming Council; and
- If triggered, Council may be restricted from taking certain actions during this period (subject to legislated exceptions).

A Delegation of Authority By-Law for the Restricted Acts Period:

- Identifies the staff positions authorized to act;
- Specifies the types of time-sensitive operational decisions that may proceed (commonly staffing, contracts/purchasing, and property/asset matters – within legislated limits);
- Sets any conditions, thresholds, and required consultation; and
- Requires documentation and reporting back to Council during/after the period.

4. Options (Vote Method):

Option 1 (Recommended): Paper Ballots with Manual Counting

Authorize the Clerk to conduct the 2026 Municipal Election using traditional in-person voting with paper ballots and manual vote counting.

Considerations:

- Aligns with resident preference as previously expressed;
- Avoids costs associated with tabulators or online voting platforms;
- Relies on strong procedural controls and adequate staffing due to manual count requirements; and
- Supports a straightforward voting process for a small rural municipality.

Option 2: Further Report on Alternative Vote Methods

Direct staff to return with a report on alternative vote methods permitted under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (e.g., vote by mail and/or internet/telephone voting), including costs, risks, staffing impacts, procurement requirements, and a recommended approach for Council consideration.

Considerations:

- May improve convenience for some electors;
- May introduce additional costs and reliance on external service providers;
- Would require additional time to assess, procure (if applicable), and implement; and
- May be less aligned with resident preference previously expressed.

5. Financial Implications:

The 2022 experience noted above will be considered as part of a value-for-money approach to 2026 election planning. Election-related costs (staffing, printing/supplies, voting place costs, and any Joint Compliance Audit Committee cost-sharing) will be addressed through the election planning process and the 2026 budget.

Submitted by:

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Clerk

Township of Hornepayne