



**SUBJECT:** 2022 post-election report  
**TO:** Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.  
**FROM:** Office of the City Clerk

Report Number: CL-07-23

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 165-16

Date to Committee: June 26, 2023

Date to Council: July 11, 2023

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### **Recommendation:**

Receive and file office of the city clerk report CL-07-23 regarding the 2022 Municipal Election review; and

Direct the Office of the City Clerk to prepare a report on a potential City of Burlington Ward Boundary Review for consideration, the report should include timelines, a proposed budget, and scope by Q1 2024.

### **PURPOSE:**

#### **Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

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### **Background and Discussion:**

The 2022 Burlington Municipal Election took place on October 24, 2022. The City offered both internet and in person voting opportunities. In January 2023, the City Clerk brought to Council the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Report, as legislated in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*. Whereas that report focused specifically on accessibility, this report features a broader, holistic review of the 2022 municipal election.

## **2022 Election Quick Facts**

- 52 nominations were certified by the Clerk on August 19<sup>th</sup>, and two French School Board trustees were acclaimed.
- 14,980 electors cast their ballots online during the 10 days of internet voting, from October 11 to October 20, with over 1,000 more voters choosing this method compared to 2018.
- Voter turnout for the 2022 election was 27.6% with 39,217 ballots cast out of 142,218 eligible. 14,980 electors cast their ballots online, 4,018 voted at in-person advance polls and 20,219 cast their vote on election day.

## **Strategy/process/risk**

### **Election Review**

Post-election, the team reviewed the election in the context of elector experience, candidate experience and election administration to determine what worked well and what opportunities for improvement exist for the 2026 municipal election. The election team gathered feedback via post-election surveys, debriefs and working groups to inform this report and propose recommendations for 2026. An elector survey was launched shortly after the election, which received over 400 responses (summary attached as Appendix A). This external survey is referenced throughout the next section “Enhanced Voter Experience” as it was used to validate 2026 enhancements.

### **Enhanced Voter Experience**

#### At the Voting Locations

To improve the elector experience for this election, the Election Team reviewed and streamlined election forms and processes at the polls. A bank-teller model was utilized to process electors, where the elector would be assisted by the next available poll official regardless of whether they required revisions to their voter information or not. New tabulators with faster scanning ability were utilized to ensure an efficient flow at the voting locations. Locations were staffed based on the 2018 turn out per location. For the 2026 election, the election team may consider a more flexible voting location staffing model.

#### Online Voting Service Increases

Online voting was successful and well received by residents. 14,980 electors voted online, up from 13,123 in 2018. That is a 12.5% increase in total votes cast by internet voting.

Survey results indicated that majority of respondents (64.4%) voted online and found the process to be convenient and easy to use. Most respondents indicated that the City should continue to offer online voting and consider the online option for election day as well.

Staff took time to journey map the elector experience resulting in an efficient and streamlined voting process. The mapping resulted in a change regarding the two-step authorization process, where if all required registration information matched, the voting pin was issued automatically. Due to the change, the formal separate registration period in advance of advance voting was eliminated, as an elector would be able to register and vote in one sitting.

New for this election, staff provided online voting support throughout the 10-day period from 8:45 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. via email and telephone. Based on the support calls received during the online voting period, and to further improve the online voting elector experience, for 2026 the election team will create online voting guides for electors to assist in the process. Additionally, the team will continue to work with the vendor to further refine the process, which may encourage additional voters to utilize this method to cast their ballot.

### Go Where the People Are

Another initiative aimed to meet the need of the customer, entailed a collaboration with Burlington Public Libraries for the revision of elector information. Using local libraries as revision centres, provided access and convenience to electors who need to update their voter information. In the past, the Voters' List with revision forms were available for review at all public libraries. However, the transaction (revision) had to be completed either at City Hall or a voting location, which resulted in long lines at City Hall or at the voting location. For 2022 key library staff were provided access to the Voters' List tool and sworn-in as Revision Officers. This allowed for potential electors to visit their local library, check the Voters' List, fill out the necessary paperwork, have it accepted and entered into the Voters' List system. Over 300 electors updated their information at a library revision centre. This program was a success, and the team hopes they can continue it in 2026 to ensure convenience and access for electors.

### Outreach

Staff from the Elections Team have worked with Corporate Communications to develop a comprehensive communications and engagement plan, implemented throughout the election period. This plan focused on achieving election project goals, an increase online and in-person voting, increasing engagement with younger voters (18-30), and increasing engagement with new Canadian voters (citizenship acquired between 2011-2021). The tag line for the election was My City. My Vote. The branding and messaging for the municipal election was reworked, with the creation of a new visual mark and image direction based on the comprehensive research and analysis.

The team launched a new and improved election microsite, at [myvoteburlington.ca](http://myvoteburlington.ca), it was promoted as “the” trusted source of election information. The website was organized and updated regularly to provide electors with the information required. A firm 67% of the election survey respondents found the new microsite informative and easy to navigate.

Additional communications tactics utilized in the 2022 election included an updated Voter Information Letter and a strategically timed release of a City Talk election edition. The special edition of City Talk provided a step-by-step guide to make a plan to vote, highlighted the election experience of two voters, and explained when and how to vote, key election dates.

The Voter Information Letter included information such as where to vote, how to vote and new, a listed the certified candidates running for each office. Almost 70% of survey respondents indicated that they received their election information from their VIL and almost 93% of respondents to the survey received their VIL prior to voting days.

### **Enhanced Candidate Experience**

There were a number of initiatives to enhance the candidate experience for the 2022 municipal election.

At the time of filing their nomination, each candidate received a revamped information packet that included candidate and voting guides, relevant policies and by-laws and preliminary certificates for campaign expenses. In addition to the province-issued guides, the Election Team provided a City of Burlington-specific candidate guide, which provided additional detail regarding campaigns and the election processes. The packet was streamlined to ensure that candidates received what they needed to be successful.

### **Policy Review**

Prior to the start of the election, the City Clerk undertook a review and update of the Use of Corporate Resources during an Election policy and the Election Signs By-law ensuring clarity and integrity of the process. The updated policy provided guidelines on the appropriate use of corporate resources during the election period in order to protect the Corporation and maintain integrity of the election. The new policy provided clarity, and staff worked to create FAQs and additional guides for staff, candidates and members of Council to ensure compliance.

The City Clerk and the Election team conducted four virtual information sessions for potential and eventually certified candidates in the lead up to the election. The sessions conducted prior to Nomination Day provided candidates and those considering running for office insight into the nomination processes and the overarching policy framework. A representative from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing attended two sessions and provided additional clarity to campaign financials, whereas staff focused on City of

Burlington-specific processes. Additionally, one of the four information sessions was dedicated to racialized residents considering running. The speaker for the session was MP Matthew Green.

The session for certified candidates focused on election day processes and procedures, conduct at the polls and campaign finances. These virtual information sessions allowed the Clerk and election team to be accessible to potential candidates and to provide up to date information.

For this election, candidates had access to a Candidate portal which provided a document library where staff could upload pertinent information, as well as access to the Voters' List. Additionally, the Candidate portal allowed candidates access to the live strike offs during the voting period. This decision gave candidates more up to date data, but it also freed up administrative time for staff, which would have been occupied in preparing various strike-off lists.

### **Election Administration and Process Review**

Post-election, the team undertook an election review to determine what worked well, what were the challenges, and what opportunities for improvement exist for the administration of the next election. Staff debriefs were conducted with key election team members over a couple of weeks. Additionally, surveys were sent out to both voting location supervisors as well as all election officials asking for feedback on processes, training, voting locations, and accessibility. Any recommendations were reviewed and categorized whether they can be implemented for future events. More recently, a debrief with other municipalities across the province allowed the team to verify some of the recommendations for 2026 and allow for prioritization of proposed administrative changes.

A thorough list of recommendations has been created as an internal document for the Election team and will be used to prioritize any improvements as election planning for 2026 begins. The planning and implementation cycle should begin 18 months ahead of an election so that there is ample time to improve, test and implement any changes for the 2026 electoral event. This will also allow the team to establish a clear scope for each core election activity and formalize processes and procedures for each.

Core election activities such as recruitment and training went relatively smoothly although there are opportunities for improvement. 124 internal staff worked the 2022 municipal election. Many have worked in previous elections and their experience and expertise were invaluable. The Election Team received many comments from external election workers commending City Staff on their knowledge and professionalism. In preparation for the next electoral event, the Election Team will use feedback received from Supervising DROs to further improve poll processes and incentives to encourage more internal staff to participate in working for the election. Additionally, the team will

conduct a jurisdictional scan prior to the election to ensure fees paid align with municipal partners for comparable roles, and review payment processes to streamline payments for external election staff.

### **Voting Locations**

For the 2022 municipal election, there were 3 in-person advance poll voting locations, 24 election day voting locations with 4 per ward, and additionally special polls were set up on polling day in 27 institutions such as long term care homes, nursing homes and the complex care unit at Joseph Brant hospital. The ability for electors to vote anywhere in their ward allowed electors flexibility and easy access to cast their ballot. The ability to use City Facilities as voting locations, is a huge benefit. Staff were very helpful and able to assist with whatever was needed, and the facilities are fully accessible. Using schools as voting locations posed many logistical and security challenges. Staff will continue to work to reduce the use of schools as voting locations where possible for the 2026 election and will continue to advocate for a P.D. day on election day for 2026.

One of the challenges in this municipal election was that due to Covid-19, some special voting locations were under lockdown. Special Voting Procedures had to be developed to allow the residents of these institutions to vote. One of the recommendations is to provide advance voting opportunities in special locations prior to voting day, but as close as possible to voting day. However, this will require legislative change. Additionally, the team will undertake a thorough review and recommend that an election policy regarding establishing special polls is developed to provide clarity for staff and stakeholders. The team will also conduct outreach with the institutions where the *Act* mandates polls are established to improve the voting experience and ease any challenges administering voting in institutions.

### **Results Reporting**

On election night, there was a delay in posting of unofficial results. Throughout election day vendor services experienced significant slowdowns, delaying critical election activities such as striking off electors from special polls. Official results were reported on October 27<sup>th</sup> after staff verified and reconciled results and ballot statements returned from voting locations. The Election Team debriefed with vendors and has indicated opportunities for improvement for the 2026 election, including process review and streamlining. For 2026 staff will conduct a review and work with stakeholders to improve reporting processes to ensure the timely posting of all unofficial results.

### **Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout for the 2022 municipal election was 27.6%. Although not unique to Burlington, it was lower than anticipated. In general, municipal election voter turnout is

lower than that at provincial or federal levels. Some possible factors may include voter fatigue, voter apathy, the ongoing pandemic, not enough information about candidates, lack of engagement outside of the election period and away from the ballot box. The team did receive feedback that electors found it frustrating that not all candidates provided contact information to be posted to the elections site, and that there was a lack of candidate debates or candidate engagement. It is important to note that due to Use of Corporate Resources during an Election policies, municipalities are not responsible for conducting or hosting candidate debates.

The Election team has made some recommendations to help improve awareness of municipal elections and the importance of local government, in addition to making the election even more accessible. Voter engagement doesn't start or stop at the ballot box. Recommendations to increase turnout involve creating additional awareness about civic and democratic inputs and information about being more involved at the local level.

### **By-election lessons learned**

In late February 2023, a by-election for the seat of Halton District School Board Trustee, Burlington, Wards 1 & 2 was called. Nomination day was on April 14, with 8 candidates being certified. Online voting took place May 15 to May 19, with in-person advance polls on May 24 and election day on May 29. Voter turnout for the by-election was 6.07% with 2,193 electors casting their ballot out of 36,119 eligible. For this by-election, 56% of voters cast their ballot online, with 1,226 choosing this method. The turnout was slightly higher compared to other municipalities that ran similar by-elections in the last couple of years. The by-election was a great opportunity to test some improvements informed through the lessons learned of the 2022 regular election. Working with the vendor, the team streamlined the online voting processes to ensure a more seamless experience for the end user. Additionally, the team had the opportunity to test some improved administrative processes that will help further improve for the 2026 regular election.

### **Ward Boundaries Review and Effective Representation**

The last ward boundary review for the City of Burlington took place in 2004/2005 with implementation for the 2006 municipal election. After review six ward boundaries were redrawn and seven-member council composition was maintained. Despite the growth and development in the City, ward boundaries have not changed since then.

Whereas there have been calls to redraw or change the boundaries of Wards 1 & 2 to include the neighbourhood of Mapleview in Ward 2, spot boundary changes are not feasible and require a wholesome approach of reviewing the boundaries of all wards. Key to the ward boundary review is ensuring extensive public consultation throughout the process leading up to passing of any by-laws to re-draw any existing wards in

Burlington. Any by-law establishing new boundaries must be in force before January 1 of the election year.

The by-law establishing new ward boundaries may be appealed to LPAT, and in order for the boundaries to be permanent, the notices of appeal must be withdrawn, or the Tribunal must have issued an order to affirm or amend the by-law before January 1 of the election year. Sufficient lead time is required to be factored into any ward boundary review timeline. Staff recommends a ward boundary review to ensure that the division of wards in the City reflects widely adopted principles of effective representation. Staff are recommending that committee/Council direct them to prepare a preliminary report. If there are additional items or aspects that need review, the direction should be amended to reflect these additions. Some municipalities have delayed undertaking their ward boundary review, due to the Regional reviews that are in progress by the Province.

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## **Financial Matters:**

### **Total Financial Impact**

The total cost of the 2022 Municipal Election was \$598,190, up from \$495,543 in 2018, but comparable or less than other similarly sized municipalities. Increased election administration costs were due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, higher material costs, wages, and inflation. In planning for the 2026 election, the team hopes to streamline processes and find efficiencies where possible, however, the planned budget must consider inflationary cost impacts and additional costs for any new initiatives undertaken, or by-elections (not school board) necessary.

Should the team receive direction to prepare the preliminary ward boundaries review report for Q1 2024, any costs associated will be covered by the current operating budget. Pending the approval of the proposed report in Q1 2024, staff will work with Finance to build a business case based on approved scope for the proposed ward boundary review, and municipal comparators.

### **Source of Funding**

The source of funding for the election is the reserve fund with an annual contribution of \$160,000. The Election Team will work with Finance and ensure due diligence to put forth a business case if it is determined that an increase in the contribution is required.

### **Climate Implications**

An increase in online voting, may help to reduce the carbon footprint for this project.

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## **Engagement Matters:**

In preparing the lessons learned for the 2022 municipal election, the election team conducted a number of debriefs with staff, vendors and other municipal partners. Additionally, a post-election survey was launched in November 2022 to gather feedback from the public on their 2022 election experience. The survey was live for 3 weeks and garnered 413 responses. 93.2% of those respondents voted in the election.

Because elector engagement is key, staff recommends additional civic engagement opportunities outside as well as during the election period. Additionally, to gather more feedback in future elections, it is recommended to use exit surveys at the polls and at the end of online voting to gauge voter experiences immediately, followed by in-depth post-event surveys. Additionally, engaging future voters is recommended to help increase voter turnout, Election awareness and the understanding of the importance of local government.

As stated above, if Council directs staff to undertake a ward boundary review, an extensive legislated public consultation will be required.

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## **Conclusion:**

The 2022 Municipal Election was a successful electoral event. Nonetheless, there are opportunities to improve the elector experience, streamline processes and further engage the community. Our review and enhancements are anticipated to augment the 2026 Municipal Election experience.

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Respectfully submitted,

Aleksandra Hutchison  
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## **Appendices:**

A. November 2022 Elector Survey – Summary Document

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.