

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Use of mailout cards to promote the 2020 HRM and CSAP election and the completion date for the revisions period.

ORIGIN

This report originates from staff. Halifax Regional Council is required by resolution to address administrative matters under the *Municipal Elections Act* in order to conduct any election, including mailing cards to voters to promote the election and setting the final date of revisions to the list of electors.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Municipal Elections Act, R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 300 (“*MEA*”), Subsections 34 (1) and 38(1), as follows:

34 (4) In addition to the notice referred to in subsection (1), the returning officer or the registrar of voters shall, **if directed by the council**, give additional notification that the preliminary lists of electors have been prepared by

- (a) distributing flyers to households;
- (b) mailing cards to voters;
- (c) providing for advertisements, as directed by the council.

38 (1) On or before the date chosen by the council on the advice of the returning officer, the revising officers shall furnish the returning officer or registrar of voters with a list of electors consisting of the preliminary lists of electors together with the amendments that they have made to the lists as a result of their sittings.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct the Returning Officer to provide additional notification to voters in the Municipality by mailing them postcards which notifies them that the preliminary list of electors has been prepared, and such notification may include promoting the 2020 municipal and CSAP election.
2. Based on the advice of the Returning Officer, set the date that the revising officers must furnish the Returning Officer with the preliminary list of electors, together with the amendments they have made to the lists, to be Friday August 21, 2020.

BACKGROUND

HRM has used postcards to notify and promote the municipal and school board elections during previous years, and the Elections Office would like to continue this practice for the 2020 municipal and CSAP election. Postcards are mailed to residents to remind them of the upcoming election and to watch for their voter letters.

The revisions period traditionally lasts one month and will begin on July 20, 2020. The Elections Office is recommending the revisions period to wrap-up on Friday, August 21, 2020.

DISCUSSION

With a reduction in opportunities to connect with community due to COVID-19, the Elections Office feels it is more important than ever to rely on mail-outs to communicate elections information. The postcards used in the past have also been handed out at libraries and recreation facilities. These are a cost-effective means of communicating directly with residents.

The revisions period will allow residents to contact the Voter Help Centre to ensure their information is correct in the voter information system. July 20 to August 21, 2020 gives time for people to call into the Call Centre and confirm their information. It also allows for enough time for the official list of electors to be prepared for use during the election.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

These are no additional costs as all costs associated with these recommendations have been considered in the elections budget.

The mail out will cost \$30,000 for printing and mailing of them. The municipal election operating budget (A125) will have a withdrawal of \$2.3 million from Q511, the Election Reserve. An additional \$391,500 has been approved in the 2019/20 capital budget, also funded by Reserve. Funding has been confirmed by Finance.

The set-up of the Voter Help Centre to receive calls was already scheduled for July 20, 2020 so there are no additional financial implications for ending the revisions period on August 21, 2020.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Municipality completed a citizen engagement initiative in 2015 with respect to elections. Where possible, input from the public will be referenced and incorporated in the planning process. Engaging with

residents during the COVID-19 pandemic requires the Elections Office to rely on traditional means of communication, such as advertising and mailouts.

ALTERNATIVES

Council may decide to not do mailouts for notification and the promotion of the election. This is not recommended as it would reduce communication with residents about the election.

Council may decide to shorten or lengthen the revisions period, but this is not recommended as it would affect the amount of time people have to call in and confirm their information and would delay the Elections Office in having the list ready for voter letters to be prepared.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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