



CORPORATE SERVICES

Staff Report

REPORT NO: COR-2025-18
TO: Council
SUBMITTED BY: Kaitlin Bos, Manager of Legislative Services / Municipal Clerk
PREPARED BY: Kaitlin Bos, Manager of Legislative Services / Municipal Clerk
REVIEWED BY: Harold O’Krafka, Acting Chief Administrative Officer
DATE: June 2, 2025
SUBJECT: 2026 Municipal Election – Alternative Voting Methods

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report COR-2025-18 2026 Municipal Election – Alternative Voting Methods be received for information; and,

THAT Council adopts Option #____as the voting method for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election; and,

FURTHER THAT the Municipal Clerk be directed to bring forward a by-law to authorize the alternative voting method supported by Council to the next regular council meeting.

SUMMARY:

This Report is to provide information to Council on the methods available to conduct the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election and seeks a recommendation from the Committee of the Whole on the voting method(s) to be used in the 2026 Municipal Elections.

BACKGROUND:

The 2026 Municipal Election will take place on Monday, October 26, 2026.

The Municipal Clerk, as Returning Officer under the Municipal Elections Act (hereafter “MEA”), is responsible for the delivery of a democratic, fair, accessible and legally binding election. Like elections across Ontario, the Township of Wilmot’s 2026 Municipal Election will be guided by the generally accepted principles of the MEA:

- The secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount;
- The election shall be fair and non-biased;
- The election shall be accessible to the 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;
- Voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently; and,
- The proper majority vote governs by ensuring that valid votes are counted and invalid votes are rejected so far as reasonably possible.

The Municipal Elections Act (MEA) indicates that the Clerk of the local municipality is responsible for conducting elections within the municipality. The MEA also requires that a bylaw be passed regarding the use of alternative voting methods by May 1st in an Election year:

“42 (1) The council of a local municipality may pass by-laws,

(a) authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators;

(b) authorizing electors to use an alternative voting method, such as voting by mail or by telephone, that does not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote.”

Section 42(1) of the MEA also requires that the Clerk establish procedures and forms related to voting and vote counting equipment and alternative voting methods no later than June 1st of the election year. The Clerk is also required to make the procedures available to candidates when they file their nomination papers beginning May 1, 2026.

The 2022 Municipal Election was administered by the Township utilizing a hybrid approach including Internet, Telephone and Paper Ballots. The 2018, 2014, 2010 and 2006 Municipal Election was administered by the Township utilizing Paper Ballots with Tabulators being used from 2014 forward.

Table 1: Summary of Municipal Elections

Year	Method(s)	Eligible Electors	Turnout
2022	Online (October 14-24) Paper Ballot (October 15, 16, 22 and 23 rd) Telephone (October 14-24)	17,352	40.4% (7,002)
2018	Paper Ballot with Tabulators (October 6, 10 and 22 nd)	15,919	37.8% (6,021)
2014	Paper Ballot with Tabulators (October 4, 8 and 27 th)	15,095	40.5% (6,115)

2010	Paper Ballot (October 2, 13, 16 and 25 th)	14,384	47.1% (6,782)
2006	Paper Ballot (October 28 th and November 1, and 13 th)	13,403	24.8% (3,317)

Further Details relating to the previous Township of Wilmot Municipal Elections

2022 Municipal Election

Turnout:	40.4%		
Eligible Electors:	17,352		
Ballots Cast:	7,002		
Methods:	Online (October 14-24)	65%	(4552)
	Paper Ballot (October 15, 16, 22 and 23rd)	32.8%	(2296)
	Telephone (October 14-24)	2.2%	(154)

Total Cost:	\$ 147,155
Staffing (F/T)	\$ 41,445
Staffing (Casual P/T)	\$ 12,350
Contracted Services	\$ 77,035
Supplies	\$ 16,325

On March 28, 2022, the Township of Wilmot Council adopted By-law 2022-12 being a By-law to Authorize the use of Alternate Voting Methods including internet and telephone voting for the 2022 Municipal Election.

A joint Request for Proposal with the Townships of Wellesley and Woolwich was issued in March 2022 for the supply of alternate voting method (Internet and Phone, or Internet alone) and/or vote counting equipment for the 2022 Municipal Election. Contracted Services costs included payment to the Township of Woolwich who managed the contract with ScytI (internet and telephone voting system provider) and handled voter notice letters.

Full-time Staff costs include portions of a salary of an Elections Co-ordinator who was brought in to conduct the 2022 Municipal Election this individual was brought in part-way through the 2022 year. Casual part-time staffing costs include poll workers for the advance voting polls.

Internet and Telephone voting was available 11 consecutive days up to and including Election Day from Friday, October 14, 2022, until Monday, October 24, 2022.

In-person voting was conducted at 8 polling locations on two consecutive weekends October 15,16,22, and 23rd leading up to Election Day. There was no in-person voting on Election Day, and paper ballots were hand counted by election workers.

2018 Municipal Election

Turnout: 37.8%
 Eligible Electors: 15,919
 Ballots Cast: 6,021
 Methods: Paper Ballot with Tabulators
 Total Cost: \$70,630

Staffing (Casual P/T)	\$17,550
Advertising	\$2,970
Training	\$315
Contracted Services	\$31,135
Supplies	\$5,480
Postage	\$13,180

2014 Municipal Election

Turnout: 40.5%
 Eligible Electors: 15,095
 Ballots Cast: 6,115
 Methods: Paper Ballot with Tabulators
 Total Cost: \$54,350

Staffing (Casual P/T)	\$15,240
Advertising	\$6,355
Training	\$645
Contracted Services	\$25,615
Supplies	\$6,495

Staff have also consolidated information on the voting methods of the neighbouring municipalities. Those are consolidated in the table below.

Table 2: Neighbouring Municipalities 2026 Voting Methods (if available)

Township	Voting Method
Township of Woolwich	Paper Ballot with Tabulators and Internet

Township of North Dumfries	Paper Ballot with Tabulators and Internet
Township of Wellesley	Internet
City of Waterloo	Paper Ballot with Tabulators
City of Kitchener	Paper Ballot with Tabulators
City of Cambridge	Paper Ballot with Tabulators (2022)
Township of Blanford-Blenheim	Staff Recommendation: Internet and Telephone Voting (decision deferred by Council)
Township of East-Zorra Tavistock	Internet and Telephone Voting (2022)
Township of Perth East	Internet and Telephone Voting (2022)

REPORT:

Despite Council still having ample time to make a decision on whether to introduce any alternative voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Election, Council making a decision in the present time period is beneficial for several reasons, namely:

- i) provides additional time to make public aware of the voting method and prepare a targeted communication plan;
- ii) limits perception that any sitting member of Council is making an election decision so close to the opening of nomination period;
- iii) provides sufficient lead time for staff to plan and make any required arrangements that may be necessary to support the election;
- iv) provides ample time to conduct request for proposal, evaluate contracts and award, secure any necessary equipment, rooms, etc. before they become unavailable.

Given the procurement requirements for election equipment, staff is requesting Council's direction to allow enough time for the Request for Proposals (RFP) process, contract evaluation

and award, as well as the development of necessary procedures, forms, and a targeted communication plan.

The balance of this report will provide Council with additional information regarding the implementation of the voting options recommended by Staff.

Option #1 Paper Ballot with Tabulators

Paper Ballots with tabulators is an in-person voting method that requires the voter to attend the voting station during advance votes and or Election Day. A vote tabulator (optical scan unit) reads and records how ballots are marked. A ballot is marked by indicating the voter's choice(s). The ballot is then inserted into the vote tabulating unit. The tabulator reads and stores the information in the unit. At the close of voting on Election Day the vote tabulator will produce cumulative totals of all votes cast and the totals will be compiled to produce the final election results.

In-person voting would take place at polling locations throughout the Township, while advanced polling may take place at a central location. On Voting Day polls would be available in all four wards. In-person voting may also be conducted at the Long-Term Care facilities, and retirement communities within the Township of Wilmot. Township Staff are also investigating Vote from Home, to increase the accessibility of a paper ballot election.

The use of vote tabulators has become a generally accepted vote counting method in Ontario municipal elections over the last several years and has been used at the provincial level of government. As a result, there are established and recognized best practices for municipalities to use for effective implementation with the vendor providing step by step guides, troubleshooting and effective accuracy testing protocol.

The use of vote-counting equipment, such as vote tabulators, allows for:

- efficient vote counting - making it possible to report unofficial election results on election night (as opposed to hand count)
- secret and confidential voting process - ballots and voters cannot be connected
- accurate and non-biased vote count - automated counting processes ensure that determination of voter intent and what is counted is consistent
- the integration of accessible technology, which allows for independent marking of a ballot which is indistinguishable from any other ballot once cast in the tabulator
- certainty and integrity of the process - results reflect votes cast

The system is precise, easy to use for voters, and capable of generating final election results very quickly following the close of voting. Moreover, manual counting of ballots is not required.

Advantages:

- Members of the public are marking a physical ballot and dropping in the ballot box;
- Staff or poll clerks can verify voters' identification;
- Familiarity with this voting method, less public education required;

- Sense of anonymity when voting; and,
- Election fraud is a consideration no matter what voting method is used; however, it is generally acknowledged as the most effective means of mitigating against the risk of fraud.

Disadvantages:

- Cost and recruitment of temporary staff;
- Cost of vote-counting equipment;
- Accessibility;
- Convenience;
- More advance polls would be required to ensure multiple windows of time for individuals to Vote leading up to Election Day; and,
- More financially and administratively demanding.

Option #2 Internet

Simply put, online voting enables eligible electors to cast their vote on a smart device such as a cell phone, tablet, computer, etc., that has an internet connection. Online voting is accessible and provides electors with greater access to the democratic process by eliminating barriers that might reduce an elector's opportunity to vote.

Eligible electors are mailed a Voter Information Package a few weeks before the start of the Advance Voting period. The Package provides general election information, instructions on how and when to vote, and unique login credentials to access the online voting system, including a voter ID number and password/pin combination for authentication.

During the advance voting period and on Voting Day, Voter Help Centers would be open at various locations within the Township to assist electors with casting their electronic ballot. For electors who do not have access to the internet or electronic equipment (such as a tablet, personal computer, or phone), the Voter Help Centers would be equipped with voter kiosks that would enable them to cast their digital ballot. Moreover, the Voter Help Centers would provide electors with the nostalgic and familiar experience of voting at a physical polling location which they are accustomed to as part of the traditional democratic process. As such, to soften the amount of change faced by electors, staff recommend maintaining four physical voting locations for the first online election (referred to as Voter Help Centers).

In addition, a dedicated phone line and email account would be established to provide electors with quick and easy access to support during the polling period.

With respect to online voting at institutions, such as retirement or long-term care homes, an iPad or similar technology would be brought to the facility for use by eligible electors. In cases where the technology may be difficult for the electors to use, sworn election workers would be present to assist the elector in casting their vote in accordance with the provisions of the *MEA*.

Following the close of polling, the votes cast will be tallied electronically and made available on the Township's website. Anecdotally, results from an exclusively online election are generally made available efficiently and quickly after polls close, barring any technical issues.

Advantages

- Increased accessibility and voter participation as electors will have the ability to cast their ballot from anywhere at any time throughout the voting period.
- Online security measures, such as multifactor authentication and encryption help support a legitimate and secure voting process.
- Lower costs given the elimination of costs associated with printing ballots, additional temporary election workers, and operational costs (supplies, etc.).
- Quicker turnaround for election results as ballots will not need to be tabulated manually or by vote counting equipment.
- Reduced environmental footprint.

Disadvantages

- Cyber security risks, including the risk of hacking the election system or attempting to interfere with the voting process.
- Technical issues including website crashes or bandwidth limitations, voter authentication and verification challenges.
- Lack of trust may exist among voters due to past municipal experiences, misinformation or disinformation.
- Digital divide exists as not all electors including those living in rural areas, older adults, or those who have lower incomes, have equal access to technology (such as a computer, tablet or phone) or the internet.
- Reliance on postal system for the delivery of Voter Information Letters.

Additional Considerations for Internet Voting:

Like all voting processes, there are inherent risks associated with voting technology. The risks associated with online voting include, but are not limited to:

- Cyber Risks
 - Phishing Attempt with Online Registration Emails
 - Unprotected / Infected Endpoint Computers
 - Fake Websites Posing as Election Pages
 - Flaws in the Voting Application (Website)
- System Overload
- Digital Marginalization
- Voter Fraud

Township Staff would deploy risk mitigation strategies for the above, should the Township of Wilmot Council choose to proceed with Internet voting as an alternative voting method for the 2026 Municipal Election.

Option #3 Hybrid (Paper Ballot with Tabulators and Internet)

A hybrid election model provides electors with a choice between voting using a traditional paper ballot at a physical polling location or casting their ballot online.

Much like the online voting model, a hybrid model would see eligible electors mailed a Voter Information Package that would contain:

- Information relating to the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election,
- A Unique Voter ID and Voting PIN,
- Instructions on how to confirm voter identification and how to cast votes electronically, and,
- The location, dates, and operating hours of physical polling locations where electors could attend to cast a traditional paper ballot.

As outlined under the Online Voting Model, electors may cast their ballot online at the start of the advance voting period.

Following the close of polling, online ballots cast would be tallied electronically through the voting software. The paper ballot vote tabulators would be closed, and results generated. Both result tallies would be merged, and the results would be made available on the Township's website.

A hybrid election model would require significantly more resources than an exclusively online or in-person election. In addition to securing an online voting platform, the Township would need to procure all the necessary equipment, supplies, and materials required for a traditional paper-based voting process. This includes purchasing enough paper ballots to ensure that any eligible voter who wishes to vote in person can do so. While the Township may explore vendors that offer pre-registration for online voting, municipal competition, the potential for delays in ballot printing across Ontario, and the risk of disenfranchising electors who change their minds from voting online to voting in person, make it crucial to ensure an adequate supply of resources, including ballots, on Voting Day.

The advantages and disadvantages of Paper Ballot with Tabulators and Internet voting methods carry-over to the Hybrid Model.

Consideration:

An additional concern that arises with hybrid elections is whether there is a chance that an elector could vote twice, once online and then again in person. Using live-time voter strike-off technology, the municipality will know when an elector has cast their ballot either in person or online the moment the ballot is handed to the elector (in the case of in-person voting), or the electronic ballot is submitted (for online voting). This eliminates the risk that an elector could stand in line at a physical polling location and attempt to cast a physical ballot.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

Trustworthy Leadership

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no financial implications on the 2025 Budget associated with this Report.

The Township has been allocating \$27,000 per year to off set costs associated with the 2026 Municipal Election. The reserve balance as of December 2024 is \$54,000 and is expected to be \$81,000 come 2026.

Additional funding to deliver the 2026 Municipal Election will form an expenditure attributed to the 2026 Operating Budget.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: 2022 Municipal Election - All Vote Methods by Municipality

Attachment B: Historical Voter Turnout, Methods and Costs