



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: General Purposes Committee

Date: March 2, 2023

From: Claudia Jesson
Director, City Clerk's Office

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Re: 2022 General Local and School Election: Summary of Highlights

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled "2022 General Local and School Election: Summary of Highlights", dated March 2, 2023 be received for information.

Claudia Jesson
Director, City Clerk's Office
(604-276-4006)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS:	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

The 2022 General Local and School Election in Richmond took place on October 15, 2022. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the highlights of the 2022 General Local and School Election and the various election program components.

For the 2022 Local General and School Election, the main components of the election program fall under the following categories: Voting Opportunities; Advertising, Public Awareness & Engagement; Equipment & Technology; Election Supplies; Staffing; and Communicable Disease Plan. In addition to an overview of the key program components, an overview of the Election Budget will be provided.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #8 An Engaged and Informed Community:

Ensure that the citizenry of Richmond is well-informed and engaged about City business and decision-making.

Findings of Fact

The General Local and School Election was held in all local jurisdictions across BC on October 15, 2022. The General Local and School Election in Richmond was coordinated and administered through the City Clerk's Office in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act*, the *Community Charter* and the City's Bylaws.

General Local and School Elections are funded through the Election Reserve to which an annual transfer of \$117,800 is made. These annual transfers are set aside and kept in the Reserve for use during the election year. In addition, one-time additional level requests, when required, are approved by Council. Funding for the 2022 Election was approved by Council for the amount of \$900,000, with \$538,000 coming from the Election Reserve and \$362,000 being approved as a one-time additional level top-up to ensure for adequate funding. It should be noted that funds from a one-time additional level request were also utilized to fund the 2021 By-Election that was held on May 29, 2021, of which \$140,916 was unspent.

Analysis

Voting Opportunities:

Advance and General Voting Day

The 2022 General Local and School Election was based on Voting Divisions, meaning that voting places were located within designated neighborhoods and that residents were required to vote at their designated neighborhood voting place, in accordance with the Civic Election Administration and Procedure Bylaw No. 7244.

On General Voting Day, the City utilized the 38 Voting Divisions for the 2022 General Election. In addition to the voting opportunities on General Voting Day, opportunities to vote in advance were also provided. In 2022, 10 advance voting opportunities over 5 days were provided. In terms of statistics, a total of 35,093 ballots were cast in the 2022 Election representing a 24.4% voter turnout. It should be noted that historically Advance Voting has always been well received by voters and in the 2022 Election this pattern was evident, as 23% of all votes were cast during the advance voting opportunities.

For the 2022 Local Election, great effort was undertaken to provide special voting opportunities to local care facilities. Staff undertook extensive outreach to various local care facilities in order to offer residents the opportunity to vote. Out of 9 facilities that staff reached out to, a total of 6 expressed interest in offering their care home residents the opportunity to vote via a mobile poll and 2 facilities requested that voting be offered via Mail Ballots.

Overall, the in-person voting at the 10 Advance Voting opportunities and at the 38 locations on General Voting Day proceeded very well, in accordance with City's Civic Election Administration and Procedure Bylaw No. 7244 and provincial legislation. In addition to the election being legislatively compliant, great effort was expended to protect the health and safety of all voters and voting location staff through the development and strict adherence to the Communicable Disease Plan. The conduct of the 2021 By-Election during the pandemic provided staff with invaluable experience in terms of public health measures that were implemented in the 2022 General Local and School Election that were very well received by the voters.

Mail Ballot Voting

At the May 24, 2022 Council Meeting, the Civic Election Administration and Procedure Bylaw No. 7244, Amendment Bylaw No. 10349 was adopted, which expanded the eligibility for all electors to vote by mail. For the 2022 General Local and School Election, extensive work was undertaken to develop and implement the Mail Ballot Program in order to enable all voters the opportunity to vote by mail.

The Mail Ballot Program consisted of the following components:

- Development of the Mail Ballot package, Voter Instruction Guides and public messaging material;
- Development of an online web application system to enable voters to request mail ballot packages online (voters also had the option to apply via call centre);
- Establishment of Mail Ballot Office to assist electors with their mail ballot package requests, assembling mail ballot packages, delivering mail ballot packages to Canada Post, adjudicating mail ballot packages and assisting with the processing of completed mail ballot packages; and,
- Establishment of Call Centre to assist electors over the phone with their mail ballot application questions and serve as a back-up call centre for the Election Office.

In the 2018 Election, mail ballot voting was offered to persons who had a physical disability, illness or injury that affected their ability to vote at an advance voting opportunity and General Voting Day, or persons who expected to be absent from the municipality on the designated voting days. In 2018, a total of 360 mail ballots were cast, representing less than 1% of the overall ballots cast. For the 2021 By-Election, the Province of BC issued Ministerial Order M148 to Richmond providing special provisions to enable all voters to “vote by mail” due to the pandemic. For the 2021 By-Election, a total of 1,895 mail ballots were cast out of a total of 12,984 votes, representing 14.5% of all ballots cast.

Based on the 2021 By-Election figures, staff estimated that between 7,000 to 8,000 mail ballots could be requested for processing. For the 2022 General Local and School Election, 998 mail ballots were requested and a total of 926 mail ballots were cast, representing a 92% return rate. It should be noted that extensive effort was undertaken to ensure that as many completed mail ballots as possible were returned by the required deadline of 8:00 pm on General Voting Day. A significant amount of work, including human and financial resources, is required to establish and run the mail ballot program. While extensive public messaging via many mediums was undertaken to promote mail ballot voting, the vast majority of Richmond’s voters opted to vote in person in 2022. Despite the lower than anticipated interest in 2022, mail ballot voting represents an important accessible voting option for voters.

Advertising, Public Awareness and Engagement

At the core of this component is the statutory election advertising that is required to appear in local newspapers and the Voter Cards which are mailed to registered electors to advise them about voting locations, dates and times relative to their neighbourhood voting place.

In addition to these core advertising initiatives, public awareness of the election was enhanced through a variety of print, electronic and social media communications. For the 2022 Election, a significant amount of work was undertaken to ensure that the public was aware of the election and the various voting opportunities, and assistance was offered to prospective candidates.

Detailed election work aimed at raising voter awareness and voting accessibility included the following:

- Website - Usage of City’s website to promote election and a separate Election microsite was developed to house election-specific information;
- News Releases - News Releases were issued regularly (9 in total);
- Election App - Election App was developed and provided voters with election information at their fingertips;
- Advertising - Print Advertising was undertaken to meet the statutory requirements with the placement of 8 statutory ads that were supplemented with 12 additional discretionary ads in various publications and digital ads were also booked with the aim of reaching a wider audience;

- Social Media - Social Media was used extensively to share election messaging, news and information via the City's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts to keep voters informed and engaged;
- Posters - Posters and Signage was used to promote different aspects of the election and election services, including both print and digital Transit Shelter advertising;
- Voter Cards – the 2022 Election was a divisional voting election, as such 142,992 voter cards were produced and mailed via addressed mail to residents to communicate their voting location for General Voting Day;
- Voter's Guide – a comprehensive Voter's Guide was created and mailed to all residential and farm addresses in Richmond via neighborhood mail to 87,000 households, and 2000 additional copies were printed and distributed to all City Facilities, Richmond Public Library locations and outreach organizations. The guide was also translated into other languages and posted on the Election Website;
- Candidate Profiles – as part of the nomination package and process, Candidates were encouraged to provide a photograph and brief profile which was posted on the City's website and published in the Voter's Guide;
- Mail Ballots – Mail Ballot Voting is an important tool in ensuring those who cannot or do not feel comfortable voting in person have an opportunity to vote. All residents of Richmond could vote by mail. A detailed communication plan was developed and implemented to promote and provide information about Mail Ballot voting;
- Youth at the Booth – The Richmond Election Office ran the 2022 Youth at the Booth Program, which was a youth outreach program, by providing marketing opportunities and materials, and hired 89 youth to work and support the 2022 Election during Advance Voting and General Voting Day; and,
- Outreach – In an effort to reach as many eligible voters as possible, extensive outreach was undertaken with various organizations (Accessibility partners, Community Services, Richmond Public Library, Richmond Multicultural Community Society, Richmond School District and Richmond District Parents' Association).

Equipment and Technology

In Richmond, automated vote counting machines have been in use for close to 30 years and have been leased from one vendor, Election Systems and Software (ES&S). In January 2022, election staff were notified by ES&S that the vote tabulator units that were utilized in past elections had been discontinued and sold off and as such were no longer available. ES&S representatives further advised that they could not provide any assurance in regards to the availability of other units in time for the 2022 Local General and School Election. There are only two eligible providers of automated vote counting hardware and software: ES&S and Dominion Voting.

Accordingly, staff sought approval via a single source process and proceeded with Dominion Voting, an established organization providing advanced full-service election solutions with a proven track record with a number of municipal clients, including the City of Vancouver. The change of the vote counting unit provider had significant hardware and software implications for the 2022 Election. The entire election training program had to be re-written and new software had to be learned by election staff. In reviewing past election voter statistics by voting location, a decision was made for the 2022 Election to deploy multiple vote counting machines, for the first time, to busier locations to ensure for the efficient processing of voters. Accordingly, more vote counting machines were leased in total than in any previous election. The vote counting units worked exceptionally well at all 10 Advance Voting and 38 GVD voting locations, and all 5 mail ballot advance tabulation sessions.

In addition to the vote counting units, the voter's list software system provided by DataFix was utilized, which is integral and critical to the City's election processes. The software enables staff to fulfill many statutory obligations relating to the administration of the 2022 Election, including the management of the voters list, taking voter registrations, taking Vote By Mail applications, and assisting to ensure voters only vote once. The system provided by DataFix also provides essential self-serve tools on the City website so that the public can check their voter registration status and determine the location of their assigned voting place. DataFix software has greatly supported the 2011, 2014, 2018 General Elections and the 2021 By-Election.

With regards to other critical election equipment, 120 laptops were leased to support election training and voting opportunities. For the 10 Advance Voting opportunities, a "vote anywhere" model was applied and all laptops were programmed to enable voters to be processed and struck off as having voted. On General Voting Day, the laptops were then deployed to all 38 voting locations and utilized by key election staff to assist in processing voters. The laptops were also utilized to train voting location staff on the voter list management software that was integral to processing voters during advance voting.

Election Supplies

The planning for and undertaking of the 2022 Election required an extensive amount of supplies. Each of the 10 Advance Voting locations and 38 voting locations had to be equipped with a detailed set of supplies to enable the election process. With each election cycle, election staff build on the previous lessons learned which facilitates the conduct of an efficient, effective and legislatively compliant election. In accordance with the 2022 Communicable Disease Plan, specialized supplies were purchased to ensure that adherence to any public health measures that may be in place would be possible. In the end, staff adopted a cautious approach with public health safety being at the forefront of all election activities. The planning for the 2022 Election commenced early in 2022, as staff were aware of the delays and complications related to supply-chain issues brought about by the pandemic. Despite early planning and ordering supplies in advance as much as possible, the challenges of the global supply-chain issues had real implications, specifically in the cost of virtually all supplies and services.

In addition to the physical ordered supplies, there were many other administrative related tasks that were critical to the election. The production of all the training materials, election forms, posters, and other resource material was extensive, and greatly supported by City's Production Centre. The receipt of incoming supply deliveries, the transfer of equipment to other areas and general assistance with movement of equipment was made possible through the Public Works staff. Furthermore, the setup of the Election Office and Mail Ballot Office required various supplies and assistance which was provided by Facilities and Information Technology staff.

Staffing

Staffing levels at voting places and staff training programs are established with a view to providing a positive, orderly and efficient experience for the voting public. Voting place staff (those that work at the polling places at the time of voting) are also supported by a staff team in the Election Office in order to deliver a well-organized and legislatively-compliant election.

In 2022, approximately 600 temporary voting place staff were hired and trained to work at the 38 voting locations on General Voting Day and at the 10 advance voting opportunities. Select staff were also trained for the special voting opportunities at local care facilities. An extensive training program was developed and implemented to ensure all voting location staff received both technical and procedural training. Due to the requirement to utilize new vote counting units, the entire training program, specifically the rewrite of all procedural manuals, had to be completely revamped. As already noted, the Youth at the Booth program was implemented yet again, with 89 youth being hired to provide invaluable assistance to the voting process.

In addition to the staff who worked at the voting places, an Election Office team was assembled and hired to work on a temporary basis in the months leading up to the election. The Election Office positions were often filled by regular City staff whose regular positions were subsequently backfilled by auxiliary or temporary staff. The work undertaken by the Election Office staff team was further supplemented and supported by the Clerk's Office and IT staff who were specifically assigned to support the election in addition to their usual duties. In addition to the invaluable role of IT staff, it should be noted that staff support was received from various areas throughout the City, such as Public Works, Facilities, Community Bylaws, Human Resources and Communications.

Communicable Disease Plan

The 2021 By-Election was the first time that an election was undertaken during a pandemic. The conduct of an election during that time required the adherence to public health orders that impacted virtually every component of the By-Election. Staff gained great insight into the planning for and execution of an election during a pandemic. As the planning for the 2022 Election commenced in January 2022, staff engaged the consultant that had previously developed the detailed Safety Plan for the By-Election to assist with planning for the 2022 Election. Given the challenge of predicting what potential Covid-19 requirements could be in place for the 2022 Election, staff applied a proactive and cautious approach that would ensure for the safety of all voters, voting location staff and candidates.

Accordingly, the Communicable Disease Safety Plan was developed and all election processes were then guided by this Plan, especially the arrangement of all advance voting and General Voting Day voting locations. The Communicable Disease Safety Plan included a detailed safety plan for all voting locations. Because election staff took the Covid-related measures seriously and public safety was at the forefront of all election planning, critical Covid-related supplies were purchased, such as plexiglass barriers, masks, and sanitizing wipes/lotion for all voting locations.

Election Budget

As noted earlier, funding for the 2022 Election was approved by Council for the amount of \$900,000, with \$538,000 coming from the Election Reserve and \$362,000 being approved as a one-time additional level top-up for adequate funding. The 2022 Election actual cost was \$1,185,997. The unspent funds from the 2021 By-Election of \$140,916 were utilized to fund the additional costs for the 2022 Election. The increased budget was due to the following:

- New Vote Counting Machines: Leasing vote counting machines through Dominion Voting was an unexpected yet necessary decision in order to conduct the election. The leasing cost was significantly more than budgeted simply due to the vendor's pricing and the fact that more machines were leased to support the election than ever before. In addition to leasing vote tabulators, Dominion Voting provided training, software for managing elections results, and customized ballots.
- Voter's List Software Costs: Due to a review of pricing, the Datafix contract that provides the critical software to manage the voter's list increased in pricing beyond what was budgeted.
- Mobile App: In 2018, the cost of the Mobile App was covered by Information Technology via the Digital Strategy budget. For the 2022 Election, the cost of the Mobile App was funded from the Election Budget.
- Covid-19 Items: For the 2021 By-Election, plexiglass barriers were borrowed from Elections BC at no cost. For the 2022 Election, Elections BC implemented leasing costs for the plexi-glass barriers. Following a review of the costs, a decision was made to purchase the plexi-glass barriers despite not having budgeted for this purchase. In addition, protective storage supplies were purchased to enable the plexi-glass barriers to be properly stored and protected for future election uses.
- Increased Staffing: To support all advance voting and General Voting Day voting locations and to adhere to the detailed Communicable Disease Safety Plan, approximately 100 more voting location staff had to be hired, when compared with the 2018 election, to work at the voting locations. In addition to voting location staff, additional Election Office staff time was required due to supporting the new vote counting units, specifically developing and conducting the detailed and critical process of testing and validating each of the 76 leased vote counting units, referred to as Logic and Accuracy Testing. In past elections, the Logic and Accuracy Testing was undertaken by the vendor and not election staff.

- Overall Cost Increases in Supplies: The global supply chain challenges in 2022 impacted the 2022 Election, especially in the availability and cost of all categories of election supplies. With the increase in transportation/freight costs combined with a shortage of supplies, staff observed an increase in costs of all supplies required to stage the election, most notably paper and paper products.

Staff always have the objective of keeping costs down and not surpassing approved funding. Despite the supply-chain issues, staff were diligent to attempt to obtain the best costing for all services and supplies purchased to stage the 2022 Election. In looking ahead, there are some potential savings that could be realized with the next Election in 2026. In terms of Covid related supplies, as already noted, plexi-glass barriers were purchased in 2022 and will be available for re-use in 2026 and subsequent Elections. Should there be no pandemic related concerns leading up to the 2026 Election and no need to adhere to a Communicable Disease Plan, fewer voting location staff could potentially be hired. As lower than anticipated voters took advantage of both Mail Ballot Voting and the Mobile App, staff will undertake a review of these two components to determine if savings could be realized and will report back to Council at the appropriate time.

Key Takeaways

With regards to voter turnout, the voter turnout of 24.4% was significantly lower than the 36% turnout in 2018. With all of the work undertaken to plan for, promote and conduct the election, the 2022 voter turnout was quite surprising, but all lower mainland municipalities exhibited a decline in voter turnout when compared with 2018 figures, with the exception of Surrey. Voter turnout is multi-faceted and complex and encompasses many variables such as: age/gender; education; family status; immigration status; economic well-being; and, employment status. Similarly, there are many variables that have been connected to low voter turnout figures, such as: lack of choice of candidates; too many candidates; satisfaction with status quo; voter fatigue due to other past elections; and impact of the recent global pandemic.

In terms of mail ballot voting, only 926 mail ballots were cast out of a total of 35,093 ballots cast, representing only 2.6% of all votes. As noted earlier, election staff were anticipating at least 7,000 mail ballot requests when considering the 2021 By-Election figures. The undertaking of the Mail Ballot program is extremely resource intensive and it was surprising that fewer Richmond voters took advantage of this accessible means of voting.

Also unanticipated in the 2022 Election was the low utilization by Richmond residents of the Election Mobile App. The 2022 Richmond Election App provided voters with election information at their fingertips. A total of 300 users downloaded the Richmond Election App.

As already noted as a key variable in increased election costs, the global supply-chain issues posed unpredictable challenges in the planning and undertaking of the election. While staff expected and planned for delays in receiving supplies, the real surprise was the increase in the cost of all supplies, especially the cost of basic paper which is required virtually for all election activities.

With the 2021 By-Election, conducting an election during a global pandemic was uncharted territory for staff and Covid-19 related public health measures were an absolute requirement at

all voting locations. Although there were no required public health measures that had to be implemented for 2022, staff took a cautious approach and developed the Communicable Disease Plan that guided all election activities. Had the pandemic or any other public health situation shifted, staff were prepared to respond to all scenarios. The use of plexi-glass barriers, availability of sanitizing lotion/wipes, and restricting capacity (i.e. number of voters inside voting place) at all voting locations was well-received by the Richmond voters. Despite the pandemic more or less being over and everything opening up, voters were appreciative of the measures that had to be followed in order to vote, and there was a continued risk that public health measures could be reinstated.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts from this report.

Conclusion

The Local Government and School Election was last held on October 15, 2022. This report provides a summary of the key components of the election program to be received as information by Council.



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