



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: General Purposes Committee

Date: October 16, 2025

From: Claudia Jesson
Director, City Clerk's Office

File: 12-8125-80-01/Vol 01

Re: **Advance Planning for the 2026 Election**

Staff Recommendations

1. That the proposed election program for the 2026 General Local and School Election, as described in the report, "Advance Planning for the 2026 Election," dated October 16, 2025, from the Director, City Clerk's Office, be endorsed; and
2. That one-time funding of \$1,113,000 to support the planning and implementation of the 2026 Election be submitted for consideration in the 2026 budget process.

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

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Corporate Communications and Marketing	☒	
Information Technology	☒	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

With the General Local and School Election in Richmond less than a year away, it is appropriate to bring forward a report that provides a detailed overview of the proposed election program for the 2026 election and the commensurate costs for Council's consideration.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Strategy #1 Proactive in Stakeholder and Civic Engagement:

1.4 Leverage a variety of approaches to make civic engagement and participation easy and accessible.

Findings of Fact

The next General Local and School Election will be held in all local jurisdictions across BC on October 17, 2026. The General Local and School Election in Richmond is 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.

The election is partially funded through an Election Reserve to which an annual transfer of \$118,000 is made. The balance in the Election Reserve as at September 30, 2025 is \$369,841. These annual transfers are set aside and kept in the Reserve for use during the election year. Funds from the Election Reserve and a one-time additional level request were utilized to fund both the 2022 Election that was held on October 15, 2022 and the By-Election that was held on May 29, 2021. Funding for the 2026 General Local and School Election will come from the Election Reserve and a recommended one-time additional level request that will be submitted for Council consideration in a separate report as part of the 2026 budget process.

Analysis

Voting Model – Voting Divisions and Vote Anywhere

Elections in Richmond represent a combined model of "vote anywhere" and divisional voting. The "vote anywhere" approach is applied to Advance Voting allowing residents to vote at any of the advance voting locations. The divisional voting model is applied to voting on General Voting Day where residents are required to vote at their designated voting location.

An analysis of the current voting divisions and the number of voters in the 2022 election will be undertaken along with a review of the population growth to ensure that there will be sufficient voting locations to manage the number of voters in 2026. Should changes to the current 38 voting divisions be warranted, recommendations will be brought to Council for consideration since voting divisions and their boundaries must be established by bylaw. Based on a preliminary review of population statistics, it is anticipated that the 2026 election will again have 38 voting divisions on General Voting Day.

In addition to voting on General Voting Day, opportunities to vote in advance will also be available. In 2022, the City held 10 advance voting opportunities over five days, applying the “vote anywhere” model giving residents the flexibility of voting at any location. Advance Voting has always been received well by voters, in the 2022 election, 23% of all votes were cast during the advance voting opportunities.

In general, when incumbent election officials do not seek re-election, there is an increased public interest in the upcoming election, especially for the Office of Mayor. Accordingly, voter turnout is anticipated to be higher in 2026 and staff will be considering adding additional advance voting opportunities to ensure that residents have even more options to vote prior to General Voting Day. The locations for the additional voting opportunities have not been determined at this time.

The Election Program

Following are the main components of the election program:

1. 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 supported by a staff team in the Election Office in order to deliver a well-organized and legislatively compliant election.

The scale and commensurate resourcing of elections has increased with each election. In 2018, 485 temporary staff were hired to support the process. In 2022, approximately 600 temporary voting place staff were hired and trained to work at the 38 voting places on General Voting Day, at the 10 advance voting opportunities, and at the Mail Ballot Office. With an anticipated higher voter turnout in 2026, additional temporary staff will need to be hired to ensure that the additional Advance Voting opportunities and General Voting Day locations will be well staffed to ensure for a smooth and positive voting experience. It is estimated that 100 additional staff will need to be hired, bringing the total to approximately 700 temporary staff required for the 2026 election.

Election Office positions are often filled by regular City staff whose regular positions are subsequently backfilled by auxiliary or temporary staff. Assignments vary from approximately 4 to 10 months in duration. The work undertaken by the Election Office staff team is further supplemented and supported by the Clerk’s Office and IT staff who are assigned to support the election in addition to their usual duties. In all cases, wages have increased since the 2022 election resulting in a required budget increase.

Included in the staffing component is the Youth at the Booth program, which is a youth outreach program. In 2022, 89 youth were hired to work and support the 2022 Election during Advance Voting and General Voting Day. For the 2026 Election, it is anticipated that this program will continue and 100 youth will be hired to participate in this successful initiative.

The primary activities of staff delivering the election include the following:

Election Office Staff Team

- Recruit approximately 700 temporary voting place staff
- Plan and conduct training for voting place staff using a combination of in-person sessions and workshops, printed training materials and online video resources
- Respond to inquiries and requests from the public, the media and candidates
- Coordinate and prepare all forms of public communication materials, both printed and electronic
- Manage and update the Voters List
- Coordinate ballot production and prepare vote counting machines
- Administer the Mail Ballot Office and manage the distribution of mail-in ballots
- Make arrangements for voting place locations and source, organize and deliver all necessary supplies, equipment, signage, instructional materials, voters lists, voting booths, ballot boxes, ballots, etc. required at the various voting places

Voting Place Staff

- Interact directly with the voting public on General Election Day, at advance voting and at special voting opportunities at care facilities
- Set-up the voting places in the morning, administer the vote for the full 12 hours, take down the voting place and report out on the results of the vote
- Ensure that all aspects of the voting process are conducted in strict adherence with legislative requirements

2. Advertising, Public Awareness and Engagement

Along with core advertising initiatives such as statutory notices and individual Voter Cards which are mailed to each registered elector, public awareness is a key component of the election program. In 2022, significant work was undertaken to ensure that the public was aware of the election and the various voting opportunities. In addition, assistance was offered to prospective candidates by regularly fielding queries and receiving/compiling submissions for the Voter's Guide.

At the appropriate time, staff will be exploring engagement opportunities aimed to raise voter awareness and public engagement. As in past elections, the City's Website will be used to promote the election and the separate Election microsite will be activated to house election-specific information. In addition, a mobile election app will be re-launched to provide voters with election information in an accessible manner. Advertising will be undertaken to meet the statutory requirements, with additional supplemental ads placed in various publications and digital ads to reach a wide audience.

Primary Activities related to Advertising, Public Awareness and Engagement include the following:

- Prepare and coordinate legislatively-compliant advertising
- Manage the preparation and distribution of Voter Cards to registered voters

- Prepare all content for the Voters Guide, including candidate profiles, and arrange for printing and distribution of the Guide to all Richmond households
- Prepare content and (along with IT) coordinate upgrade of the Richmond Election “app”
- Manage the social media campaign
- Prepare and update website content relating to the election as the process unfolds
- Liaise with members of the media; prepare and issue news releases as appropriate
- Coordinate all other forms of advertising and public awareness (for example, bus shelter ads, poster campaign, and inter-municipal regional radio campaign).

3. Equipment and Technology

Automated vote counting machines have been in use locally for over 25 years. In 2022, the vote counting equipment provider was changed, as the prior vendor no longer had tabulating units available for lease to the City. The change of the vote counting provider had significant hardware and software implications for the 2022 election, as the entire election program had to be rewritten and new software had to be learned by Election Staff. Overall, the vote counting units worked extremely well at all the voting opportunities. In 2022, a decision was made to deploy additional vote counting units for the first time to busier locations to ensure for the efficient processing of voters. Based on the success of that initiative, the enhanced deployment will be repeated and expanded in 2026. In addition, Richmond will continue to utilize a voters list software system and will work with IT staff to continue to utilize the Richmond Election “app”, a downloadable smartphone application that includes candidate profiles, broadcasts real-time election results, provides voting place location look-ups and general election-related information.

With regards to other critical election equipment, 120 laptops were leased to support election training and actual voting opportunities in 2022. 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. For 2026, approximately 140 laptops will need to be leased.

In terms of equipment and technology, the primary activities include the following:

- Prepare and coordinate vote counting machines and electronic tabulation of results
- Update, refresh and launch the Richmond Election “app”
- Manage the Voters List using electronic voters list software system
- Engage the public through social media and website content, including tools such as voters registration confirmation look-up, and “find my voting place” look-up

4. Supplies, Printing, Postage, and Miscellaneous

There are many miscellaneous administrative and hard-costs associated with staging an election, including ballot production and printing, postage, office supplies and equipment, moving and deliveries, and general printing. For the 2022 Election, global supply chain challenges significantly impacted the availability and cost of all categories of election supplies. There was an increase in costs of all supplies required to stage the election, most notably paper products. In

2022, 142,992 voter cards were produced and mailed via addressed mail to residents to communicate their voting location on General Voting Day. A comprehensive Voter's Guide, was mailed to all residential and farm addresses via neighborhood mail to 87,000 households. For the 2026 election, it is anticipated that more voter cards will need to be mailed out due to increased voter registration. With each election, the cost of general supplies has increased and staff anticipate increased costs in 2026 for ballot printing, general printing (training material), courier, moving and delivery expenses; the most notable increase from 2022 to 2026 will be postage costs.

5. Mail Ballot Voting

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. While mail ballot voting has always been available in past elections, the 2021 By-Election enabled all voters to vote by mail as the Province issued a ministerial order due to the pandemic. While the vote by mail option for all electors was a Covid-19 safety measure that helped to reduce the number of voters physically attending voting places, the vote by mail option also introduced a flexible and accessible means of voting to all Richmond residents. Both the 2021 By-Election and 2022 Election had an established Mail Ballot Office and an online mail ballot application process. In 2022, 926 mail ballots were cast out of a total of 35,093 ballots, representing 2.6% of the votes.

While the undertaking of the Mail Ballot program that incorporates the online mail ballot application process is resource intensive, the opportunity for residents to apply online and receive a mail ballot still represents the most accessible means of voting. In 2022, Mail Ballot Office staff worked with various local care facilities to provide voting opportunities via mail ballot voting. This approach is intended to continue in 2026.

Financial Implications

The Election Reserve is the main funding source for elections. The purpose behind the reserve is to spread out the cost and budget impact of the election evenly over the Council term. Currently, the reserve receives an annual transfer of \$118,000. There is currently \$369,841 in the Election Reserve. There will be an additional \$118,000 transferred at the beginning of 2026 fiscal year. At this time, staff is targeting an elections budget of \$1,600,000. The future Finance Committee report will be recommending a one-time additional level budget request of \$1,113,000 to make up the difference. The primary drivers for the proposed increase to the 2026 election budget are expansion to advance voting opportunities, increased staffing requirements, leasing additional voting equipment and laptops, and overall inflation costs. Outlined below is a high-level breakdown of the key components of the 2026 Election program with the proposed costs, and along with the 2022 Election Budget actual costs.

Election Program Components	2022 Election (Actual Costs)	2026 Election (Proposed Costs)
Salaries (Elections Office, Voting Locations, Mail Ballot Office, IT)*	\$586,607	\$750,000
Marketing (Advertising, Voter Guide, Voter Card)		
Advertising	\$22,188	\$30,000
Voter Guide	\$32,164	\$40,000
Voter Card	\$38,747	\$50,000
Equipment		
Vote Counting Machines	\$177,410	\$225,000
Software	\$1,066	\$5,000
Other Equipment (Laptops, Photocopier, Plexiglass Screens)	\$130,094	\$175,000
Voter's List Software (Datafix)	\$91,067	\$110,000
Supplies		
Postage	\$77,277	\$100,000
Printing	\$23,178	\$30,000
General Supplies	\$10,701	\$15,000
Meeting Expenses	\$1,944	\$5,000
Covid Safety Plan	\$5,817	N/A
Office Equipment and Miscellaneous (Carpentry/Locksmith)	\$10,470	\$15,000
Contingency	N/A	\$50,000
Project Cost	\$1,208,730	\$1,600,000

*Note: Staffing cost breakdown is approximately 79% of salary costs are for External staff (Voting Location staff) and 21% of salary costs are for Internal staff (Election Office, IT, Mail Ballot Office)

If Council wishes to consider reducing the proposed election budget, a scaled-down election program option could include the following:

- Reduced Advance Voting (Approximate saving of \$15,000 per Advance Voting Opportunity)– The legislation only requires two days of advance voting opportunities. For 2026, staff is proposing additional advance voting to match the 10 advance voting days that were offered in 2022. Reducing Advance Voting opportunities will directly reduce staffing and equipment costs.
- Reduced Mail Ballot Voting (Approximate saving of \$100,000) – The online mail ballot application process is resource intensive to undertake and manage and could be eliminated. Mail ballot voting would still be available for all voters but the application process to receive a mail ballot would become a manual process, requiring voters to submit an application only in person.
- Elimination of Election Mobile App (Approximate saving of \$40,000) – While unanticipated, there was low utilization of the Richmond Election App in 2022 which

provided voters with election-related information. As only 300 users downloaded the election app, the app could be eliminated from the 2026 election program.

The above suggested reductions to the proposed election program could result in savings of approximately \$155,000. However, the estimated savings would depend on the number of Advance Voting opportunities being reduced.

The proposed 2026 election budget has been built with the consideration of all factors, staff do not foresee any unexpected components that have not been accounted for in the proposed budget. To ensure for adequate funding to plan for and undertake the election, staff recommend that the proposed 2026 election program be endorsed.

Next Steps

The additional level budget request relating to the election will be considered by Council in a separate future Finance Committee report. Some consequential matters will require further Council approval in due course, if required, such as the consideration of possible changes to voting division boundaries, the appointment of election officers, and other necessary housekeeping amendments to bylaws that may arise following further analysis by staff. Other updates on the progress of the election program will be provided over the course of next year.

Financial Impact

A one time additional level request for the election program will be submitted for consideration in the 2026 budget process.

Conclusion

The proposed 2026 election program is based on the successes and lessons learned from past election programs. In anticipation of a higher voter turnout for the 2026 election, the proposed election program will ensure election staff are in the best position to undertake the election that is both legislatively compliant and a positive voting experience for residents.



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