

2020 Local Government Elections – Establishment of Special Polls (Hospitals and Personal Care Homes) and Homebound Voting

ISSUE

The Local Government Election Act, 2015 (LGEA) authorizes City Council to establish polling places in hospitals, personal care facilities, or similar institutions for voters receiving care in that institution, and also permits for homebound voting to occur any time between the first day of advance polling and the closing of polls on Election Day. Due to COVID-19 the traditional process for conducting voting in hospitals and personal care facilities is being adapted to mirror that of Elections Saskatchewan's protocol. Elections Saskatchewan's protocol has been approved by the Chief Medical Health Officer.

RECOMMENDATION

That City Council approve the following:

- That a special poll be established at each of Royal University Hospital, Saskatoon City Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital, and Parkridge Centre on Election Day between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm.
- That a special poll be established as an advance poll at each of the personal care facilities and similar institutions set out under Attachment 1, with dates and times to be coordinated with each special poll location throughout November 2, 3, and 4, 2020 between the hours of 9:00 am and 7:00 pm.
- That in lieu of a homebound voting system, use of the mail-in ballot process will be encouraged for the 2020 Saskatoon civic election.
- That the Returning Officer be authorized to make changes or additions to dates and times that may be necessary to accommodate adjustments due to COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

The Local Government Election Act, 2015 and *The Local Government Election Act Regulations, 2015* require City Council to make a number of decisions related to the holding of a municipal election, including whether polling places should be established in hospitals, personal care facilities, and similar institutions and whether homebound voting should be provided for. This report provides a recommendation with respect to conducting elections in hospitals, care homes, and similar institutions as well as voters' residences for the 2020 Local Government Election.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

COVID-19 has created challenges in planning and executing an election. Section 29 of *The Local Government Election Act* (LGEA) states that a council may establish a polling place in a hospital, personal care facility, or similar institution for a voter who is receiving care in that institution. The LGEA defines a personal care home as a licensed facility

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pursuant to *The Personal Care Homes Act*, a special-care home designated pursuant to *The Provincial Health Authority Act*, a residential-service facility licensed pursuant to *The Residential Services Act* or an approved home as defined in *The Mental Health Services Act*, but only if the home or facility accommodates or cares for at least five individuals.

Section 30 of the LGEA states that a council may provide for the attendance of election officials at a voter's residence at any time between the first day of advance polling and the closing of polls on election day to take the vote of a voter who is unable to attend at an established polling place because of a disability or limited mobility. In order to provide voting options at hospitals, care homes, and voters' residences, the Saskatoon Civic Election team has been working closely with Elections Saskatchewan to determine safe and appropriate protocol.

Elections Saskatchewan has requested that Saskatchewan municipalities implement the same protocol as the province for hospital, personal care facilities, and homebound voting so that the voting experience is the same between the provincial and municipal elections and since the province's protocol has been approved by the Chief Medical Health Officer. In this regard, voting protocol for each of those options is laid out as follows:

Hospital voting: Voting in hospitals will be conducted two ways:

1. Setting up a voting location in a common area(s) of the hospital as determined by the facility administrator. Eligible voters receiving care in the facility will visit the common voting location to register to vote, mark their ballot, and have it inserted into a ballot box.
2. Election officials will go room-to-room with a facility staff member and bring a ballot box to visit any patient who is an eligible voter and is not mobile enough to visit the common area. The facility staff member will act as a liaison between the election officials and the person receiving care in order to maintain distancing between the individuals.

Personal care home voting: Voting in personal care homes will be conducted two ways:

1. Setting up a voting location in a common area(s) of the facility as determined by the facility administrator. Eligible voters receiving care in the facility will visit the common voting location to register to vote, mark their ballot, and have it inserted into a ballot box.
2. Election officials will go room-to-room with a facility staff member and bring a ballot box to visit any eligible voter that is not able to visit the common area to vote. The facility staff member will act as a liaison between the election officials and the person receiving care in order to maintain distancing between the individuals.

Homebound voting: Homebound voting is provided in order to take the vote of a voter that has a disability or limited mobility and is unable to attend an established polling place to vote. Elections Saskatchewan has consulted the Chief Medical Health Officer

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with respect to homebound voting and it has been deemed unsafe for election officials to attend to voters' homes due to COVID-19 and the risk of increasing transmission of the virus. Elections Saskatchewan has adapted its homebound voting process to be conducted as mail-in ballot voting. Similarly, the Saskatoon Civic Election team will not be pursuing homebound voting in the traditional sense which would require election officials to attend voters' residences. Rather, the use of the mail-in ballot process recently approved by City Council will be encouraged.

NEXT STEPS

The Returning Officer will continue to work with the hospitals, personal care facilities, and similar institutions to facilitate special poll voting. The priority is to ensure a safe election for voters, election officials, candidates and their agents.

The communication plan has been updated to reflect voting at special polls and to indicate that the traditional homebound voting option is not being pursued for the 2020 Saskatoon civic election.

APPENDICES

1. Special Poll Care Home Facilities

Report Approval

Written by: Scott Bastian, Returning Officer
Reviewed by: Christine Bogad, Director of Legal Services
Approved by: Joanne Sproule, City Clerk

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