

Local Government Elections - 2020 Civic Election Review

ISSUE

2020 was an election year for all municipalities in Saskatchewan, including the City of Saskatoon. Following an election, two reviews of the event are traditionally completed: one by the returning officer, one by the Saskatoon Municipal Review Commission (SMRC). These reviews are intended to provide Council with an outline of the election and to assist with action planning to improve experience in future elections.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on December 14, 2020, the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) was informed by the acting city clerk that the returning officer (RO) is preparing a report on the 2020 local government election, to be tabled at the end of Q1 2021.

At its March 15, 2021 meeting of the GPC the interim city clerk presented a deferral report recommending deferral of this item to the April 19, 2021 GPC meeting. GPC unanimously approved the deferral report.

At its March 22, 2021 Regular Business meeting, City Council announced the appointment of Mr. Adam Titemore as the new permanent city clerk.

At its April 19, 2021 meeting of the GPC, the interim city clerk presented a deferral report recommending deferral of this item to the second quarter of 2021 or such time that the Saskatoon Municipal Review Commission reports to Committee. GPC unanimously approved the deferral report.

CURRENT STATUS

The 2020 election was held under unique circumstances due to a global pandemic and a significant winter storm event. While this led to challenges, there are actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of future similar events, and lessons that have been learned to manage interruptions where they may occur.

The returning officer has been collecting information to inform recommendations to improve the efficiency and transparency of the election process for future elections. This includes researching election management systems to better support future elections and consulting with other jurisdictions to learn of emerging election practices that may be adopted. The City of Saskatoon is large enough that it could benefit from using election technology for items such as planning polling locations, managing election workers, permitting voter registration through electronic (online) means, and utilising a voters list. An election management system would enhance voter experience while improving the efficiency of the election team by reducing time spent on manual tasks.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

An election review report (Appendix 1) was prepared. The report identifies five main election activity areas that generated the most attention from voters, candidates, and election administrators. The five main points covered include:

1. Election dates
2. Mail-in ballots
3. Advance polls
4. Legislative flexibility
5. Candidate behaviour

The report offers an analysis of the 2020 election process and proposes potential actions on how to best address identified issues. The report is for information purposes at this time, with future action reports to be brought forward to City Council for consideration.

Following the 2020 election, the SMRC engaged the returning officer regarding the conduct of municipal elections. Information from that discussion was taken into consideration to inform the SMRC in creating its municipal election committee report.

NEXT STEPS

By way of Council policy, the SMRC prepares and submits a report to City Council containing its recommendations. The SMRC report will be forthcoming to the June 28, 2021 Regular Business meeting of City Council. City Council may then refer the report to an upcoming Governance and Priorities Committee meeting where it can be considered with administrative comment, along with the returning officer's report. For agenda management purposes a referral to the August GPC meeting is suggested.

APPENDICES

1. 2020 Local Government Election Review Report
2. Four-Year Election Cycle

Report Approval

Written by:

Scott Bastian, Returning Officer

Reviewed and approved by:

Adam Tittlemore, City Clerk