

Staff Report

Report To: City Council

Report From: Briana Bloomfield, City Clerk

Meeting Date: January 16, 2023

Report Code: CR-23-004

Subject: 2022 Election Report – Accessibility and General Overview

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CR-23-004 respecting the 2022 Election Report – Accessibility and General Overview, City Council receives the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- This report outlines the steps that were taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for the election.
- Staff used a variety of means to reach out to the public about the election.
- Statistics from the election are included in the report.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

This report supports the delivery of Core Service.

Previous Report/Authority:

Municipal Elections Act, 1996

[2018 Election Report – Accessibility and General Overview](#)

Background:

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* requires that within 90 days after voting day (October 24, 2022), the clerk must prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and that the report will be available to the public.

The purpose of this report is to meet the above requirement and provide an overview of the 2022 municipal election.

A report will come forward to Council in 2024 to determine the method of voting for the 2026 municipal election.

Analysis:

Accessibility

Accessibility, in relation to the 2022 election, was taken to encompass accessibility for persons with disabilities and general accessibility to information, voting opportunities, and assistance for all voters. The following steps were taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility:

1. Voting Method – Internet and telephone voting methods were used to improve accessibility during the election:
 - a. Voters had the option to vote without leaving their home.
 - b. Persons with accessible needs had the option to use their own assistive tools.
 - c. The internet voting method was compatible with screen readers.
 - d. Persons travelling outside the municipality and non-residents could vote anywhere as long as they had access to the internet or a phone.
 - e. In extenuating circumstances, the Clerk was able to provide voter credentials to voters unable to attend at City Hall or an Election Help Centre.
2. Voting Period:
 - a. A 10-day voting period was established to allow voters more flexibility in accessing the voting system.

3. Training – All election staff received:
 - a. Accessible Customer Service Training from the Human Resources Division.
 - b. Election specific training from Clerk’s staff with a focus on accessibility including assisting electors upon request and enabling service persons to assist voters.
4. Accessibility Plan – A plan specific to the election was created and formed part of the formal election documentation:
 - a. The plan was reviewed by the City’s Accessibility Advisory Committee.
 - b. The plan was posted on the City’s website.
5. Election Website:
 - a. The City’s election webpages provided all voting information including: a video on how to vote using the internet and telephone; the date, time and location of Election Help Centres; and details on the voting period.
 - b. The website linked to VoterView enabling voters to search the Voter’s List from personal computers or handheld devices.
 - c. The website is compliant for web content accessibility standards.
6. Election Help Centres (EHCs):
 - a. Voters could attend an EHC to receive assistance with voting.
 - b. EHCs were available on a daily basis throughout the voting period at accessible locations within the City.
 - c. EHCs were provided at all of the long term care facilities in the City as well as at Grey Bruce Health Services and the Grey Bruce Hospice.
 - d. Each EHC had one raised table to facilitate voting for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
 - e. At EHCs, lanes for line management and table placement were arranged with widths meeting accessibility standards.
 - f. Magnifying sheets were available at each EHC.
 - g. Chairs were available at each EHC for persons needing to rest in line or sit while accessing the voting system.

7. Election Helpline:

- a. A dedicated phone line and extension was created to allow voters remote access to assistance with voting issues.
- b. The helpline was available during regular office hours and had both an automated menu to answer frequently asked questions and a voicemail box.

8. Communication:

- a. Election information was communicated through various channels and alternative formats including email, social media, print media, newspaper, and radio.

Community Outreach

Staff used a variety of means to reach out to the public including:

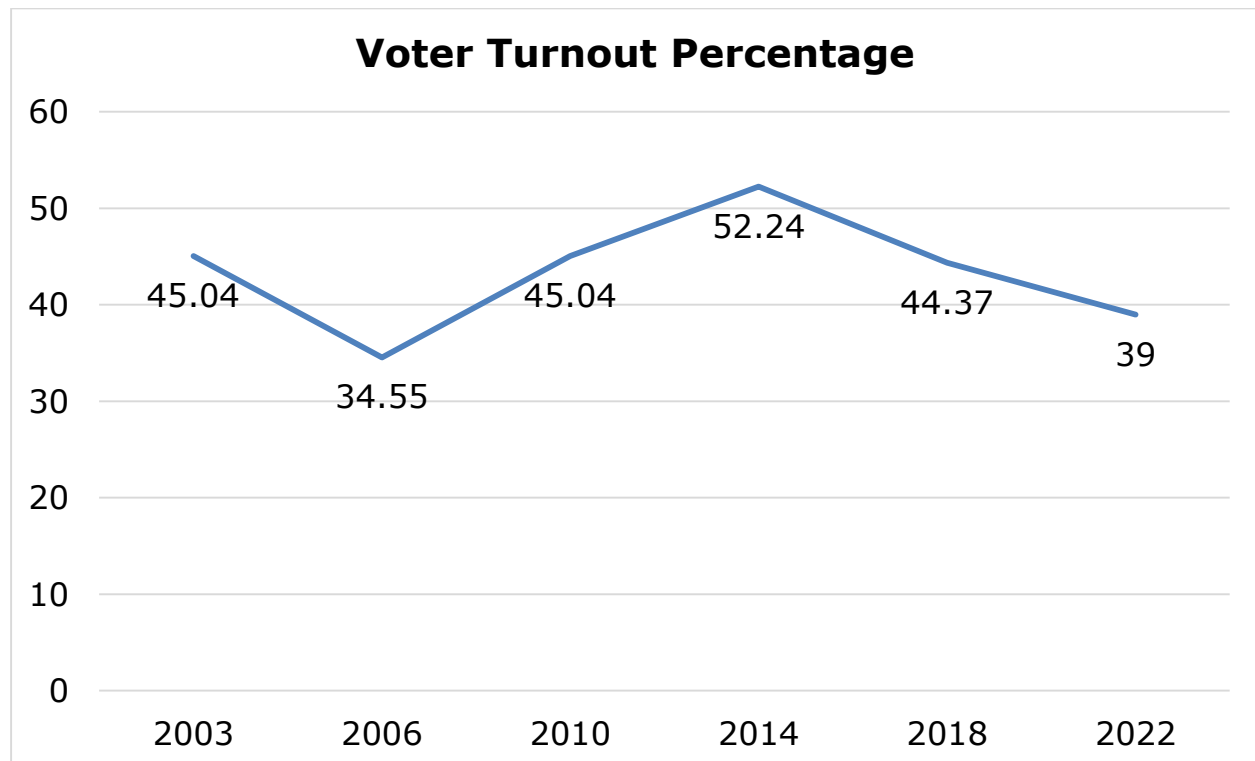
- Public notices in the Sun Times newspaper;
- Scoreboard advertisements at the Bayshore Community Centre;
- Electronic billboard advertisements at the Julie McArthur Regional Recreation Centre;
- Radio advertisements;
- Website, media releases, and social media posts;
- Advertisements on the City Hall television screen;
- Presentation at a City Council meeting;
- Participation in a “Politically Speaking” episode on Rogers TV;
- Buck slips in the tax and water bills with information about getting on the voters’ list;
- Election brochures that were placed in City buildings, provided to candidates for distribution and sent by mail to all residences in the City;
- Election vests to identify election staff;
- Bus and transit shelter advertisements to highlight the voting period;
- Posters at Election Help Centre locations;
- Election information booth at Grey County’s supportive outreach service at the Farmers Market; and
- A voting information session at the Library, with invitations sent to: Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Living, Library staff, Grey Bruce Alzheimer Society, Grey Bruce Local Immigration Group, Leads Employment Services, M’Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre, REACH Centre Grey Bruce, Safe and Sound Grey

Bruce, United Way Bruce Grey, Welcoming Communities Grey
Bruce, and YMCA Settlement Services.

Statistics

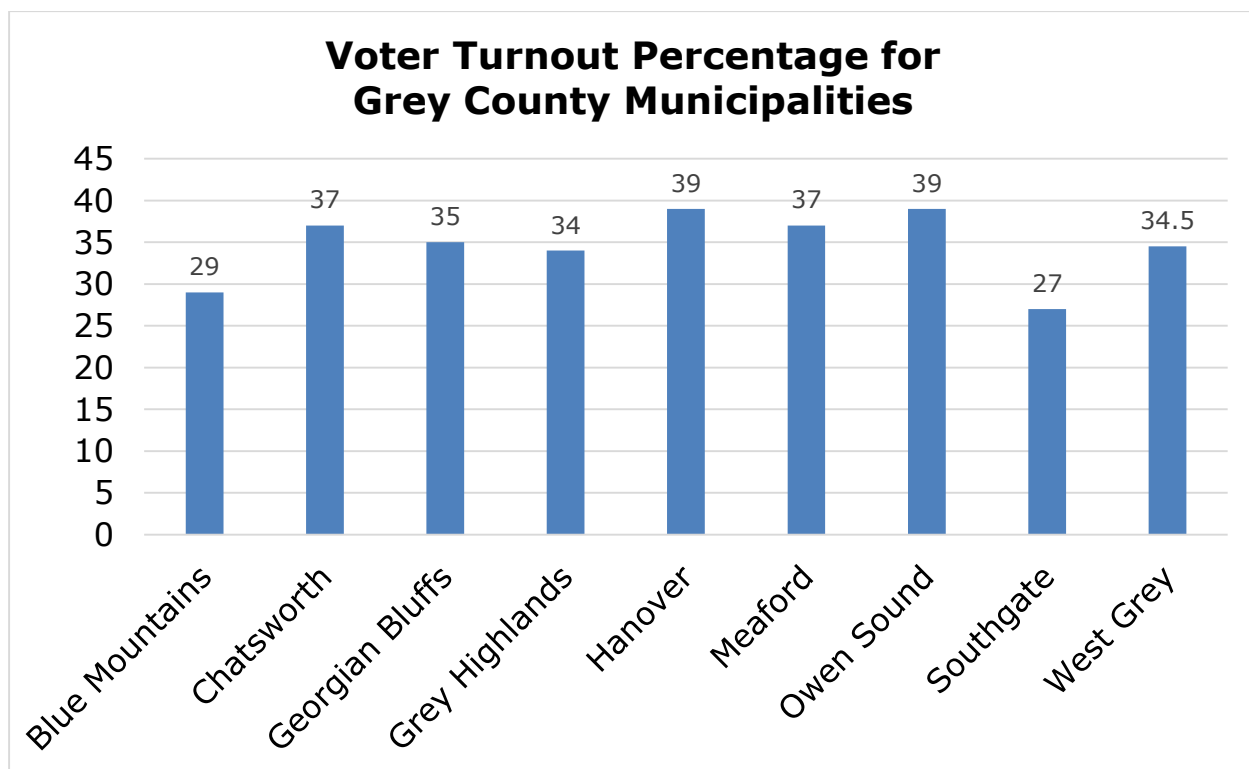
1. Voter Turnout:

In the 2022 municipal election, 15,960 electors were eligible to vote and 6,230 electors voted, resulting in a voter turnout of 39%. Owen Sound's voter turnout was higher than the provincial average which was 34%. Below is a chart outlining voter turnout in the last six elections for Owen Sound.



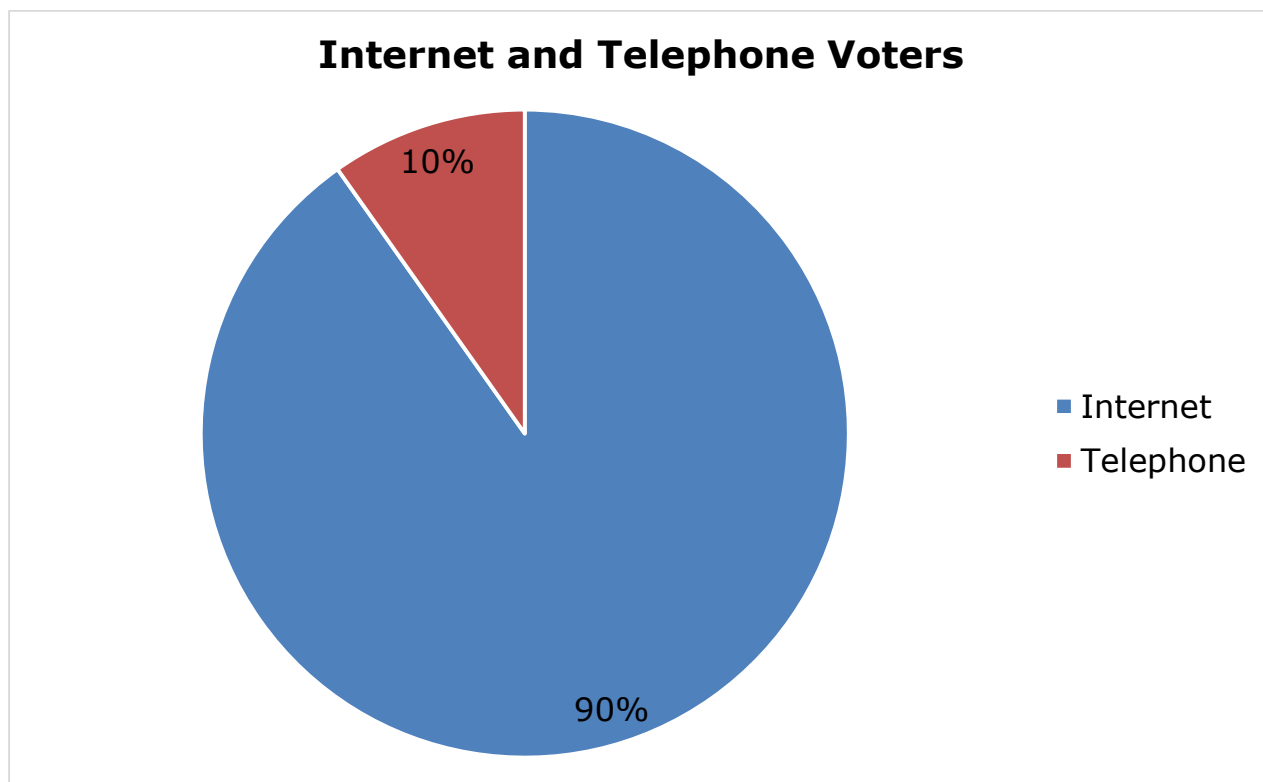
It is important to note that voter turnout is based on a variety of factors including council stability, the public's appetite for change, hotly contested races, the amount of campaigning candidates do and questions on the ballot.

Below is a chart outlining 2022 voter turnout for Grey County municipalities.

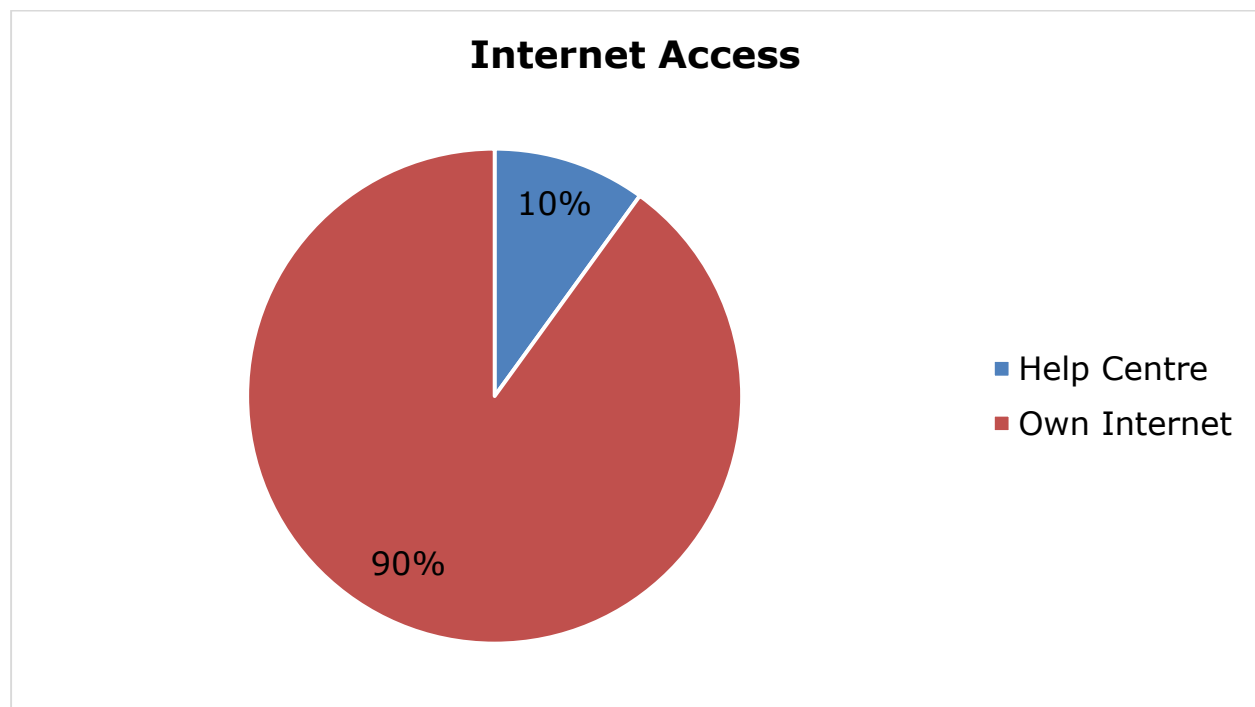


2. Voting Method:

There were 5,619 internet voters and 611 telephone voters.

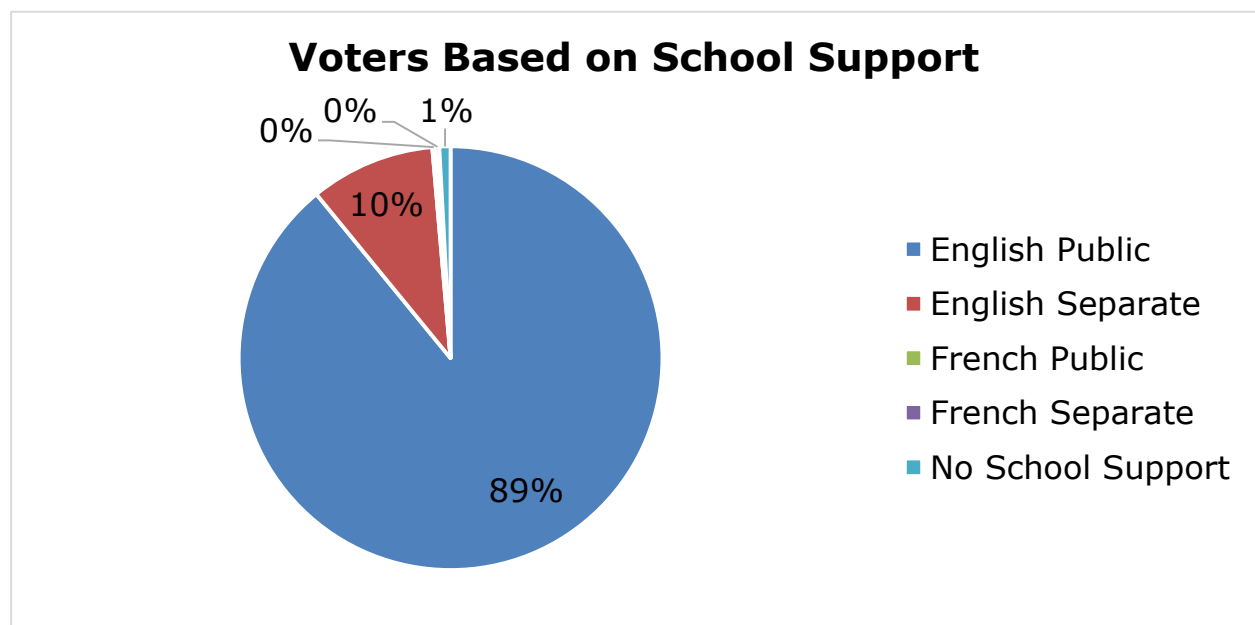


Of the internet voters, 561 voted at an Election Help Centre or Long Term Care Facility; leaving 5,058 individuals voting with internet to which they obtained their own access.



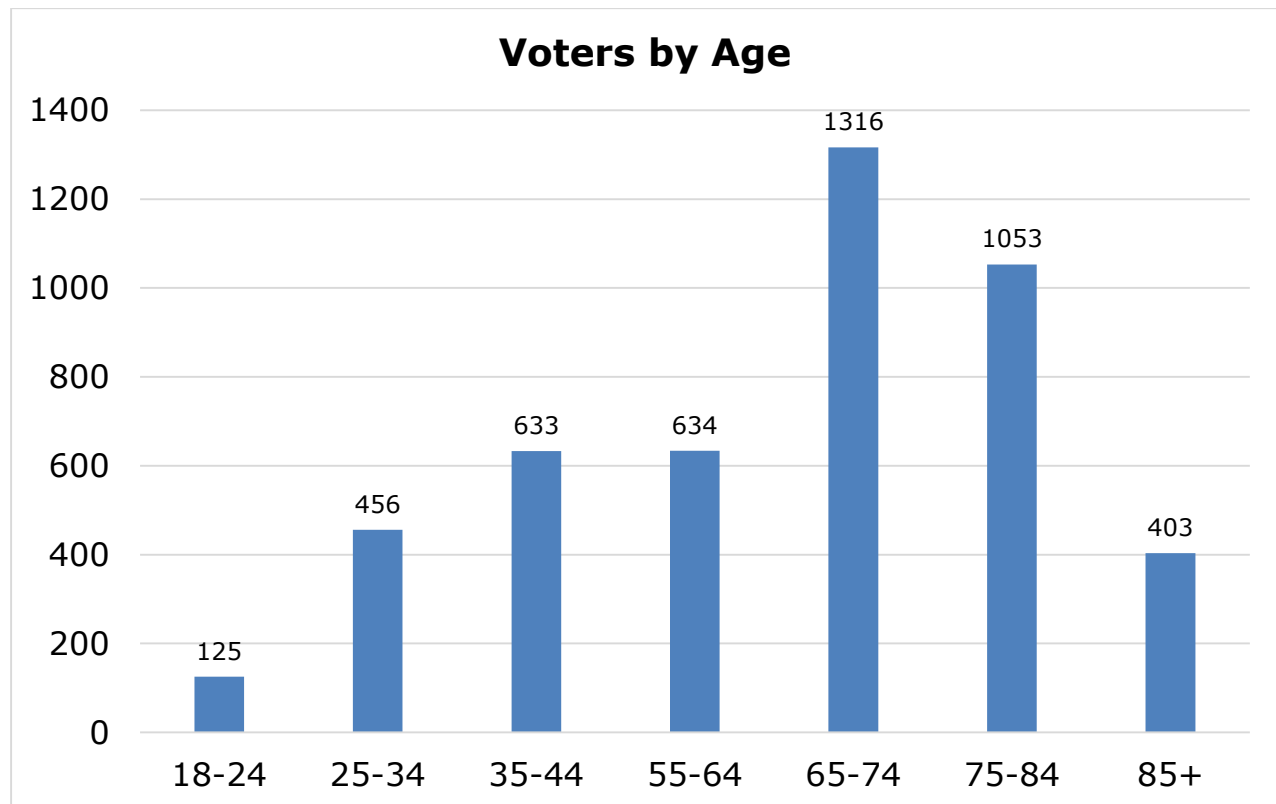
3. School Support:

Below is a chart that provides the percentage of voters based on school support: 5,550 English Public, 594 English Separate, 14 French Public, 19 French Separate, and 53 No School Support.



4. Voting Age:

Below is a chart outlining the voters by age.



A couple of other age statistics to highlight are:

- the highest number of voters by age was from those age 69; and
- half of the voters were under the age of 63 (18-62) and the other half were 63 and older. Interestingly, this is the exact same statistic from the 2018 election.

5. International Voters:

There were 30 voters who voted outside of Canada.

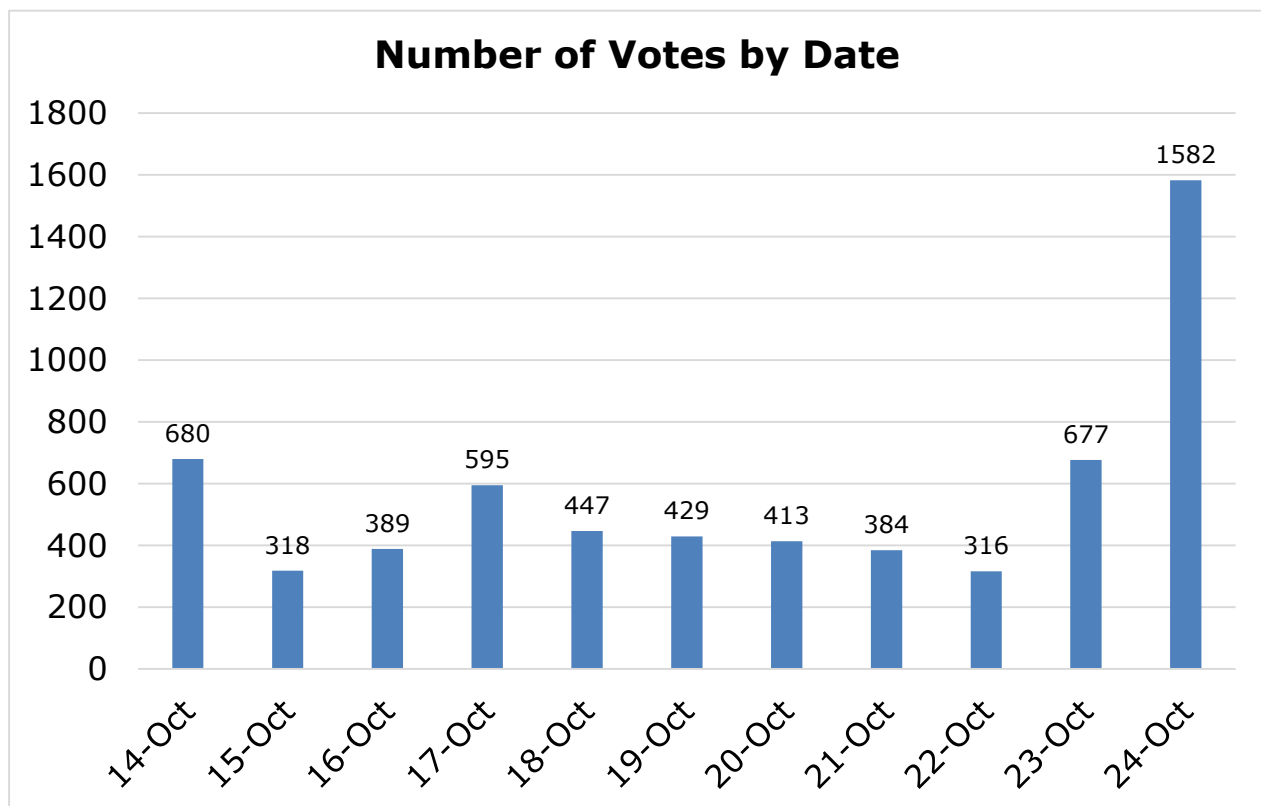
6. Voting Session Length:

The average voting session length was:

- 3 minutes for the internet;
- 2 minutes at election help centres; and
- 3.5 minutes on the telephone.

7. Voting Days:

Below is a chart outlining the number of votes by date. The first and last day of voting had the highest number of votes.



8. Ontario Statistics:

For information on Ontario election statistics, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has a [webpage](#) that has some interesting statistics.

Closing Remarks

The voters' list continues to be a concern for voters and election officials, regardless of the voting method. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is currently required to provide municipalities with the voters' list as per the *Assessment Act*. Beginning in 2024, Elections Ontario will assume responsibility for the voters' list. For the 2026 municipal election, there will be a single register of electors for municipal and provincial elections. Staff are cautiously optimistic that the voters' list for the 2026 election will be more accurate.

The election officials hired to assist at the Election Help Centres and Long Term Care Facilities were ambassadors for the City. Because only a

temporary staff of nine was required, the City was able to hire 'the best of the best'. They provided excellent customer service and helped as little or as much as was required by the voter.

City staff thoroughly enjoyed working with the election service provider, Simply Voting. They were well organized, extremely responsive and had excellent training material, both on video and in print. The RFP that was issued to select a service provider for the 2022 municipal election includes the option to contract again in 2026 if staff were satisfied and if internet and telephone voting is the chosen voting method for 2026. Staff would very much like to work with Simply Voting again.

Should internet and telephone voting be the method used in 2026, staff intend to adjust messaging around the services provided at Election Help Centres. It is important that voters know an Election Help Centre is similar to a polling location. While voters can obtain assistance at an Election Help Centre, it is also a place where those who wish to exercise their democratic right to vote in person can do so, regardless of whether help is needed or not.

Financial Implications:

The budget for the 2022 election was \$100,000 and the amount spent was \$65,000. Savings were realized due to a number of reasons, including that no legal fees were incurred, and that staff were able to leverage existing contracts to achieve reduced advertising costs. There are also funds being held should any compliance audits need to be undertaken.

Any remaining funds will be used for future elections and may ultimately reduce the tax burden for rate payers should Council continue to use this method of voting.

Communication Strategy:

This report will be available on the City's website for review by the public.

Consultation:

Manager of Legislative Services

Attachments:

None

Recommended by:

Briana Bloomfield, City Clerk

Kate Allan, Director of Corporate Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Briana Bloomfield, City Clerk at bbloomfield@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1247.