

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

whitby.ca/CouncilCalendar



Report Title: Review of the 2022 Municipal Election

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: May 8, 2023

Report Number: CLK 04-23

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Town Clerk

Submitted by:

Christopher Harris, Town Clerk

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief
Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

Natalie Pagana, Legislative Specialist,
x2833

1. Recommendation:

That Report CLK 04-23 be received for information.

2. Highlights:

- 45 candidates registered to run for office (including candidates for Regional Chair and School Boards).
- A voter exit survey (Attachment #1) indicated that 98% of voters were either very satisfied (87%) or fairly satisfied (11%) with the paper voting method, 99% indicated that they were very satisfied (92%) or fairly satisfied (7%) with support provided by election officials at voting locations, and 92% of voters reported having a very positive (79%) or fairly positive (13%) voting experience. Overall, satisfaction with the 2022 municipal election was up when compared to the results from the 2018 municipal election.
- Voter turnout for the 2022 municipal election in Whitby was 23.26%, which is down from 26.32% in 2018; however, voter turnout was seen declining across Ontario municipalities from an average of 38% in 2018 to 36.30% in 2022 according to the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO).

3. Background:

3.1 Vote Tabulators and Special Mail-in Ballots

The 2022 Municipal Election was held on Monday, October 24, 2022. The Office of the Town Clerk received Council approval through By-law #7241-17 and Council Resolution # 257-19 to use paper ballots with optical scan vote tabulators. Council also authorized the use of special mail-in ballots (SMB) through By-law #7561-19. Providing SMBs allowed electors an alternative method to vote if they were not able to attend a designated voting location for any reason.

3.2 Vote Anywhere

For the third consecutive general municipal election, voters were provided with the option to vote at any designated voting location. The vote anywhere method was first introduced during the 2014 municipal election. Staff used the data from the 2018 election and identified where population growth occurred in the last four years to inform the placement of voting locations and staffing for the 2022 municipal election.

3.4 Election Technology and Equipment

Further to Council Resolution # 257-19, the Clerk and Treasurer have the authority to procure goods and services and enter into contracts and agreements necessary for the conduct of elections, in order to ensure the timely conduct of elections.

For the 2022 Whitby Municipal Election, the Town leveraged the Elections Ontario (EO) Voting Technology Sharing Program (VTSP), which EO began offering following the 2018 Provincial general election. The VTSP allows municipalities to lease tabulators and ePollbook kits (laptops) from EO's owned supply of equipment, providing municipalities with added value versus procuring directly from manufacturers or other suppliers.

In addition to realizing cost savings through the VTSP, EO has undertaken an evaluation and procurement process that has confirmed the reliability, security and functionality of the technology and equipment.

4. Discussion:

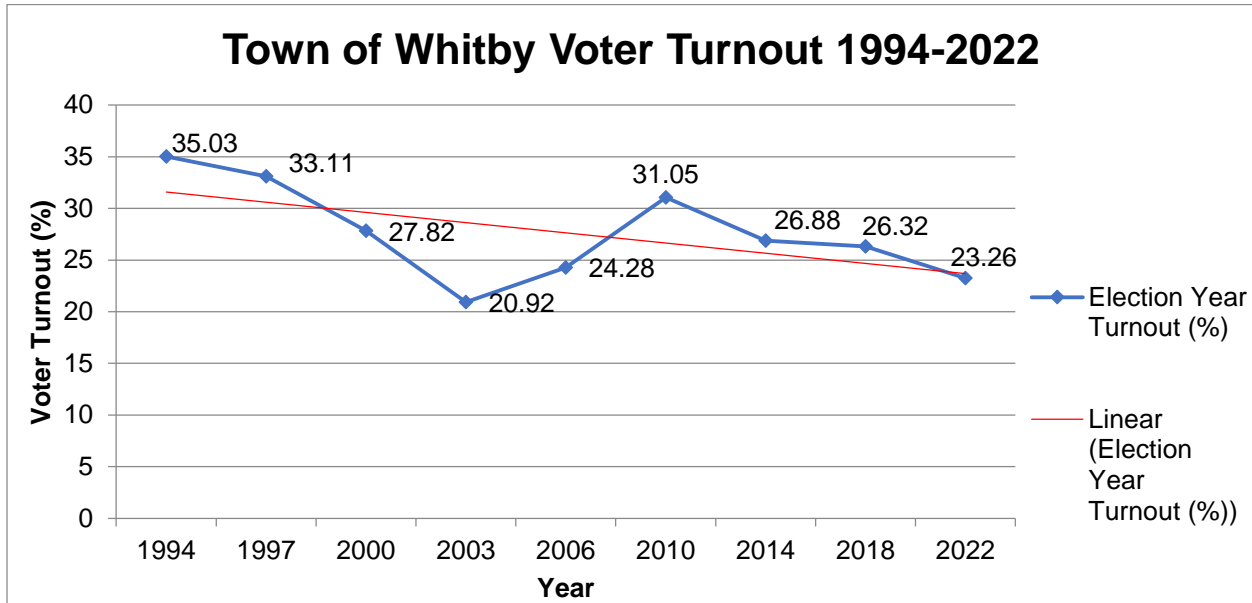
4.1 Voting Dates and Times

The advance voting period for the 2022 municipal election ran from October 20 to 23, 2022, followed by Voting Day on October 24. During the advance voting period, voting locations were open from 10:00 am to 7:00 p.m., and on Voting Day from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. In total, electors were provided with 46 hours to vote in-person, an increase from the 2018 election when 38 hours were available.

The idea to hold the advance voting period and Voting Day consecutively was as a result of feedback received following the 2016 North Ward 1 By-Election and the 2018 Municipal Election. The consecutive voting period provided clear messaging to electors about when to vote and allowed candidates to mobilize their campaigns and volunteers. Electors who couldn't vote during the continuous voting period had the opportunity to cast their vote by Special Mail-in Ballot as early as October 3, 2022.

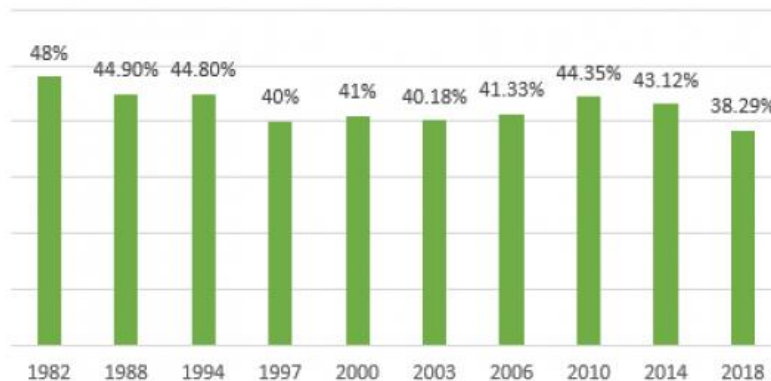
4.2 Whitby Voter Turnout

The Town’s voter turnout in 2022 declined slightly compared to the 2018 election, from 26.32% to 23.26% (-3.06%). The Town’s historical voter turnout rate, presented below, depicts a declining trend dating back to 1994.

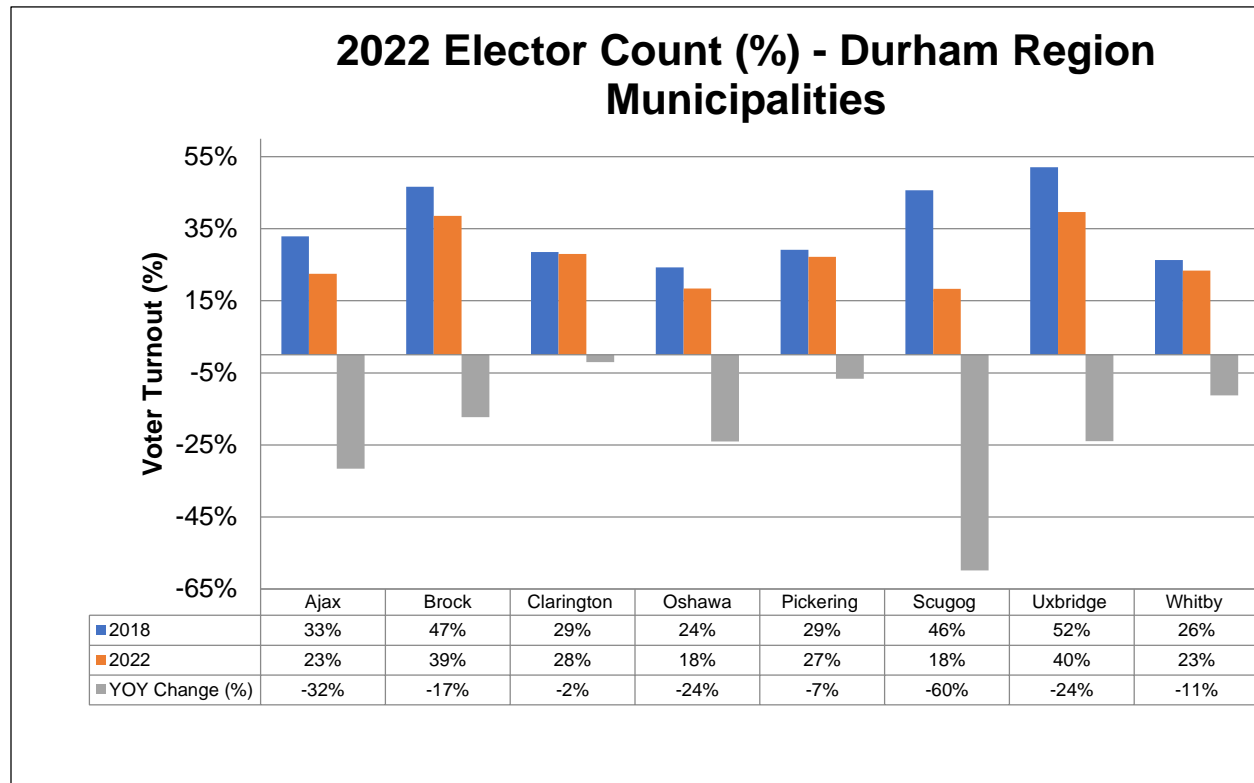


Although AMO reported a slight decline in the average voter turnout from 38% in 2018 to 36.30% in 2022, the percentage of turnout has not varied greatly in Ontario in 1982. However, 2018 and 2022 represent the lowest turnout for Ontario municipalities since 1982 (Source: [Association of Municipalities Ontario \(AMO\)](#)).

Voter Turnout for Municipal Elections in Ontario
1982 - 2018

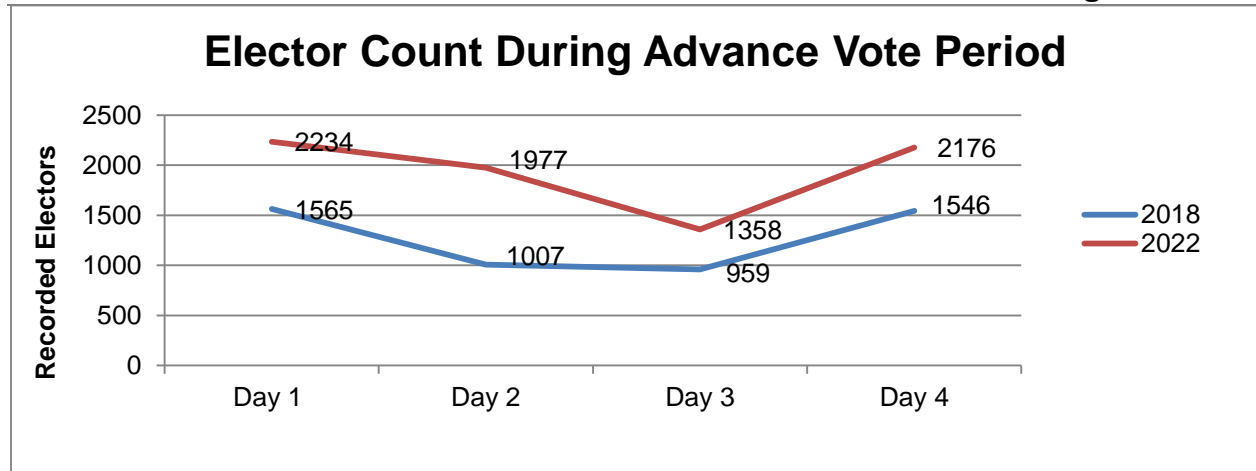


The graph below offers a comparison of voter turnout across the local municipalities in Durham Region:

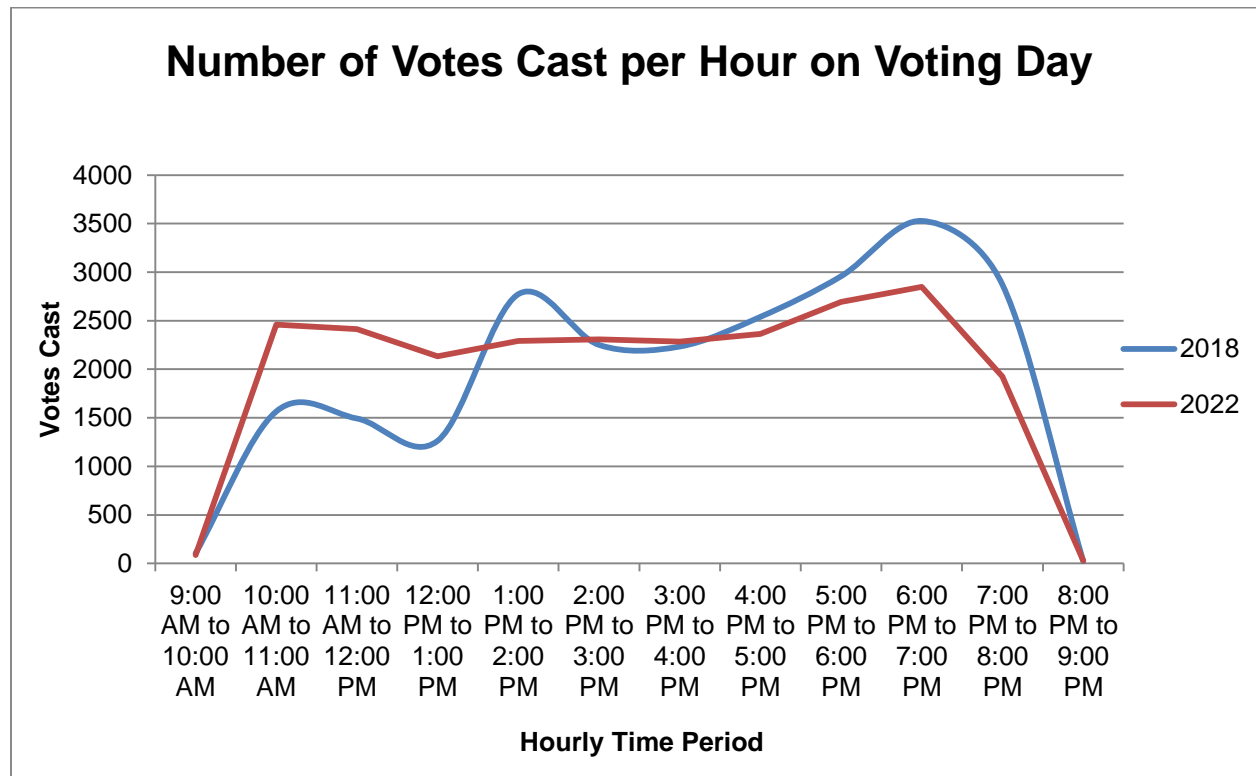


4.3 Advance Vote Turnout

Voter turnout during the advance vote period in Whitby increased significantly from 2018 to 2022, as shown in the graph below. As a percentage of total electors who voted, the total turnout during the advance vote in 2018 was 21.4% compared to 32.4% in 2022. It is likely that the main drivers of the higher advance vote turnout in 2022 was the continuous voting period mentioned earlier in this report, additional voting hours (total of 46 in 2022 versus 38 in 2018), a greater awareness due to learned experience and advertising, and a change in voter behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic due to greater number of residents working from home and electors seeking less crowded voting locations.



As seen within the hour-by-hour graph below, the voter turnout was very steady throughout Election Day in 2022.



4.4 Plan Your Vote

Plan Your Vote involved the creation of an online tool that enabled candidates in the 2022 Municipal Election to submit information about themselves and their platforms. Through the Town’s new online tool, electors could then quickly and easily access not only their status on the Voters’ List and find the most convenient voting location, but

obtain helpful, detailed information about Council and school board trustee candidates. Candidates were permitted to post a photo and contact information, along with a character limited biography and election platform. Of the 38 council and school board candidates who filed their nominations with the Town of Whitby, 35 submitted a candidate profile.

In previous elections, only the names and contact information of candidates could be found on the Town's website, and electors had to research candidates and their platforms independently. Meanwhile, reduced local media coverage made it increasingly difficult for candidates to share their platforms and for people to access information that would help inform their decisions.

To ensure the site was rich with helpful information from candidates and that electors were aware of the online tool, a multi-faceted outreach campaign was initiated to communicate with both candidates and electors and generate their engagement. The voter exit survey (Attachment #1) suggests 33% of survey participants used the tool. An overwhelming 96% of survey participants were satisfied with it, and 70% said that locating candidate information was the most helpful feature.

4.5 Voters' List

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is responsible for identifying and compiling the preliminary list of electors for municipal elections in Ontario. As with previous elections, the reliability and accuracy of the information provided by MPAC has proven to be challenging. Staff make best efforts to undertake a data quality review of the preliminary list prior to publishing the Voters' List, including address formatting corrections and the removal of duplicate persons. The Town then relied on voters to check and confirm their own information by inquiring with the Clerk's Office, visiting a front counter at any of the Town's library branches, or through the online Plan Your Vote tool.

The ability for voters to check their information on the Voters' List at Whitby Public Library branches was first offered in 2018. Despite offering revisions at all Whitby Public Library locations leading up to the 2022 election, this opportunity was not well-utilized by the public. Only 12 electors were assisted with Voters' List revisions by Whitby Public Library staff. The low utilization of this offering may indicate that a review of this opportunity is necessary for the 2026 election.

4.6 Special Voting Locations and Roving Polls

In accordance with section 45(7) of the Municipal Elections Act, the Town is required to establish voting places in institutions and/or retirement homes which meet the criteria in the Act. Staff identified these facilities as Special Voting Locations and election officials were on site at these locations on Voting Day to provide residents with the opportunity to vote. In preparing for the 2022 election, consultation with the Planning and Development Department and Municipal Property Assessment Corporation took place

to determine which facilities were classified as institutions and retirement homes. Having reviewed this data, Staff designated 8 Special Voting Locations throughout the Town.

It was further determined that an additional 10 facilities throughout the Town were to be designated as Roving Poll Locations so that residents at these facilities could benefit from having election officials on-site, despite a voting location at these facilities not being required per the Municipal Elections Act. Voting at the Roving Polls took place on either October 17th or 18th, 2022. Unfortunately, due to a COVID-19 outbreak at the Court at Brooklin, a roving poll could not be offered at that facility due to the facility's administration suspending all activities. Direct communication with all Court at Brooklin's residents was provided to notify them of the cancellation and alternative options to vote.

4.7 Advance Vote and Voting Day Voting Locations

Three voting locations for the advance vote period were selected to ensure even access across the Town. The advance vote was held at the Brooklin Community Centre and Library, Town Hall, and the Abilities Centre.

Suitable voting locations for Voting Day were identified by reviewing turnout data from 2018 along with identifying areas of the Town that experienced population growth over the last four years. The total number of voting locations was increased from 15 in 2018 to 17 for the 2022 election.

The election day turnout on Voting Day per location has been compiled in the table below:

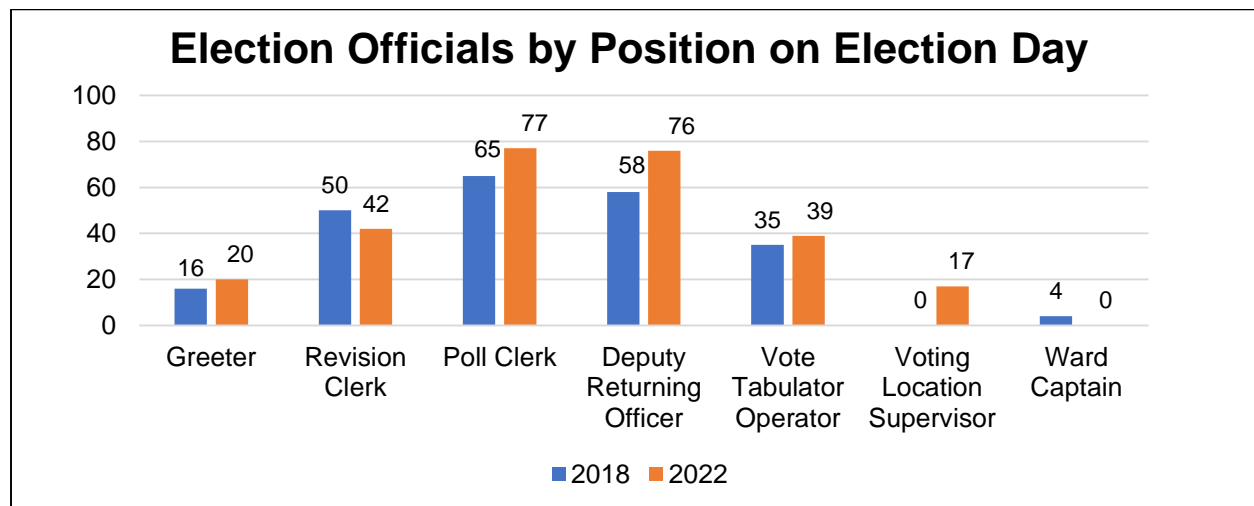
Voting Day Locations	Votes Cast Per Location
Brooklin Community Centre and Library	1679
Glen Dhu Public School	1331
Captain Michael Vandenbos Public School	1095
St. Paul Catholic School	1084
Abilities Centre	1069
Ormiston Public School	912
Donald A. Wilson Secondary School	887
Colonel J.E Farewell Public School	881
Julie Payette Public School	800
C.E. Broughton Public School	768
Sir Samuel Steele Public School	758
Bellwood Public School	749
West Lynde Public School	727
E.A. Fairman Public School	678
Whitby 55+ Recreation Centre	621
Hebron Christian Reformed Church	557
Blair Ridge Public School	516

Colonel J.E. Farewell Public School and E.A. Fairman Public School were new locations in 2022. Adding these two locations helped to relieve other locations in West Ward 2 and Centre Ward 3 from becoming too busy in consideration of the recent growth in West Whitby.

4.8 Staffing

When determining the staffing levels at voting locations for 2022, the turnout per location and the percentage turnout between the busier hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. from 2018 were examined to make accurate projections. Based on 2018 data, almost 40% of voter turnout occurred between these three evening hours, thus sufficient staffing levels were required to accommodate this rush period. While lines are inevitable during busy periods when managing a paper ballot election, the ability to identify appropriate staffing numbers was successful at keeping the process moving efficiently.

In total, 307 election officials were hired to work over the voting period in various positions, 72 more hires than in 2018. Of this total, 58 internal staff across the Corporation were utilized, thus providing a base pool of highly competent and customer focused officials. To provide a comparison, the chart below breaks down the total workers hired by position in 2018 and 2022:



There was an increase in election officials hired from the 2018 election in order to accommodate the two additional voting locations and to add coverage to locations that were projected to be busy based on their proximity to population growth and given 2018 turnout data. The number of Revision Clerks were reduced given the 2018 experience with the number of revisions required at the voting location, and the efforts made to have Voters' List revisions completed before Voting Day. Additionally, each location was staffed with a Voting Location Supervisor instead of having a Ward Captain oversee multiple locations.

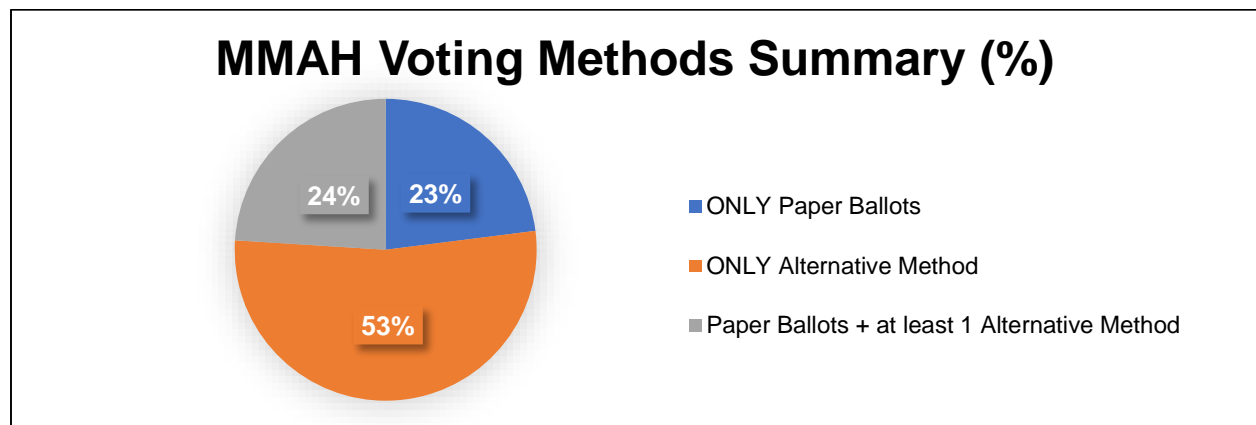
4.9 Special Mail-in Ballots

As noted earlier in this report, Council authorized the use of special mail-in ballots (SMBs) for the 2022 municipal election. Any elector unable to attend one of the designated in-person voting locations could request a Special Mail-in Ballot by way of application. Electors had up until October 3, 2022 to mail their completed application form, until October 7, 2022 to email it, or until 4:30 pm on October 19, 2022 to return them in-person. These dates were chosen to ensure that Staff would have enough time to review the application, send or provide the applicant with a SMB kit, and allow for the elector time to complete and return the kit to ensure its receipt by the Clerk prior to the close of vote on Voting Day.

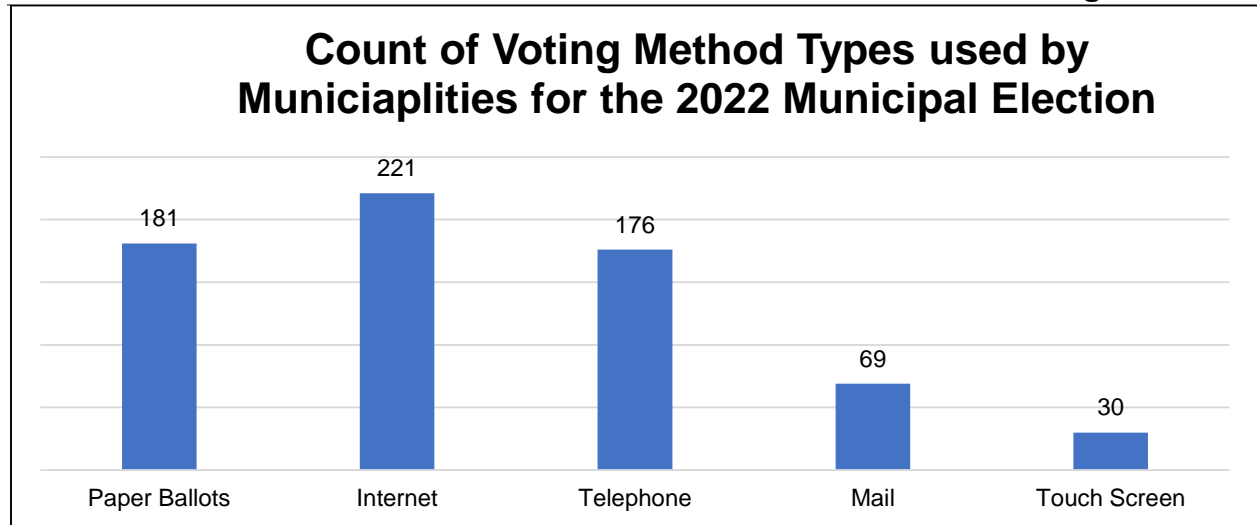
Overall, Staff felt that the SMB process was well received by electors. In total, 288 kits were provided in-person or mailed to applicants. Of the 288 kits sent out, 268 kits were returned prior to the close of vote on Voting Day. Staff followed-up with all applicants who had not returned their kits prior to the deadline to advise that the kit had not been received and the options to return the kit or cast their ballot in-person at a voting location. The 268 kits received was a significant increase from the 97 kits that were returned in 2018.

4.10 Voting Methods in Ontario

The following graph shows a breakdown of voting methods used by Ontario single and lower tier municipalities during the 2022 municipal election according to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH):



Per the chart above, “ONLY Alternative Method” of voting (Internet, Telephone, Mail, or Touchscreen only) was the most prevalent voting method offered by Ontario municipalities for the 2022 Municipal Election.



With respect to the data above, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing reports that although their data was inclusive of 382 municipalities that had voting, counts will be higher than the number of municipalities because many municipalities offered more than one voting method. For example, the Town offered a traditional paper ballot election, but the special mail-in ballot was also an option for electors and therefore would be counted as a municipality under both “Paper Ballots” and “Mail.”

4.11 Accessibility

Accessibility was a key consideration throughout the planning process and during the delivery of the 2022 municipal election. In accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, the Town Clerk was required to prepare an Accessible Election Plan to identify, prevent and remove barriers that could affect candidates or electors with disabilities during the municipal election. Following the election, the [Accessible Election Report](#) was prepared by the Town Clerk and published to the Town’s election website which addressed how the Accessible Election Plan was achieved.

4.12 Registered Third-Party Advertisers

In June of 2016, amendments to the Municipal Elections Act through Bill 181 introduced the regulation of registered third-party advertisers. The 2018 municipal election was the first in which any individual, corporation or trade union could register as a third-party advertiser with the Town, and in that election year one third party registration was received. For the 2022, no third-party advertiser registrations were received.

5. Financial Considerations:

The budget for the 2022 municipal election was \$449,097 based on funds set aside annually, into an election reserve, over a four (4) year period. The total expenses incurred to administer the 2022 municipal election totaled approximately \$508,096 (figures may change as election contribution rebates are finalized in 2023). The variance between actual and budget is due partially to high inflationary pressures experienced in recent years and the following factors:

- Higher election official pay rates to incentivize participation and attendance.
- An increase in the number of voting locations resulting in the need for additional election officials and supporting technology.
- An increase in the number of Special Mail-in Ballot kits procured due to uncertainty with COVID-19 impacts and restrictions.
- More electors due to population growth since 2018 so more Voter Notification Cards were sent to electors and an increase in postage costs.
- Incorporating new election management software and the launch of Plan Your Vote.
- Incorporating new online election management modules that were not previously available.
- Increased communications and advertising initiatives (see also Section 6).

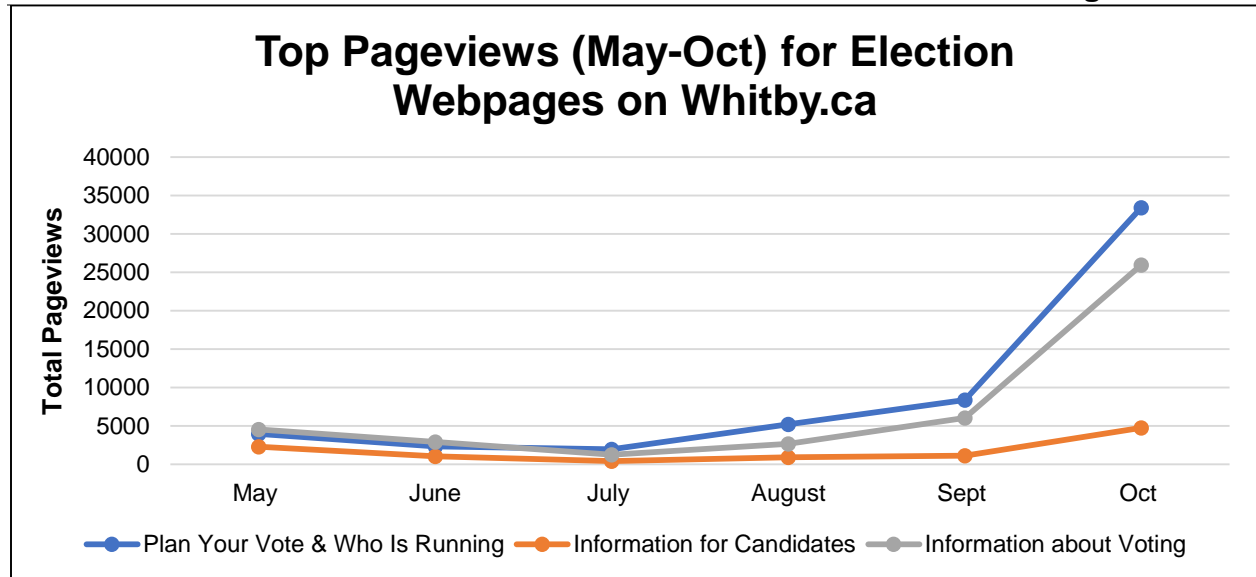
The 2023 budget includes an annual amount of \$160,000 to be transferred to an election reserve. This annual transfer will result in a budget for 2026 municipal election of \$640,000 (= \$160,000 x 4 years). The budget increase for the 2026 municipal election accounts for an increase in population (e.g., electors), inflationary increases on supplies, rentals, postage, and wage increases for election officials working at polling stations.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Communications & Creative Services played a key role in planning and developing communication materials for the 2022 election. Election communications were sent out over a variety of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Google, with 352,347 impressions and 3,623 clicks recorded. Staff also developed a number of advertising methods to promote the election through local newspapers, along with tax bill inserts, mobile signs, window decals, digital screens in Town facilities, posters, rack cards, and web banners. Staff also attended the Whitby Beer Fest at Celebration Square and the Harvest Festival in Brooklin in 2022 to promote the municipal election and distribute information cards to members of the public.

Dedicated elections webpage with a friendly URL, www.whitby.ca/vote, was developed and contained related information for candidates, third party advertisers, and voters. This webpage also hosted Plan Your Vote, the new online navigation tool designed to help electors easily check their status on the Voters' List, find their voting location, and obtain information on candidates.

The Town's webpages which received the highest number of pageviews leading up to the election are identified in the graph below:



7. Input from Departments/Sources:

The administration of municipal elections is the responsibility of the Office of the Town Clerk, however, the planning and execution of such a large project cannot be successful without assistance from Staff across the Corporation. In the year leading up to the election, all departments assisted in the preparation and conduct of the election. Most notably, the Communications & Creative Services Division and the Technology and Innovation Services Division were heavily relied upon within their areas of expertise.

Following the election, a debrief was held with internal stakeholders to identify successes and areas for improvement. The feedback from these sessions will inform the conduct of the 2026 election.

Staff contracted the assistance of Dr. Nicole Goodman to prepare and analyze a voter exit survey (Attachment 1). The survey was voluntarily completed on an iPad by electors exiting voting locations during the advance vote period and on Voting Day. Election Officials were responsible for administering the survey. In total, 1528 electors completed the survey, representing 6.4% of all voters.

8. Strategic Priorities:

The information contained within this report aligns with the Municipal Elections Act and the authority that is provided to the Clerk to conduct municipal elections. The procedures and processes used to administer the election were created to protect the integrity of the election, along with increasing voter enfranchisement and customer satisfaction for electors and candidates.

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Town of Whitby 2022 Municipal Election- Voter Exit Survey Results