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**Date** February 11, 2025 **Report No.** 2025-108

**To** Chair and Members  
Combined Committee of the Whole – Planning and  
Administration/Operations

**From** Chris Gauthier  
Director of Clerk’s Services/City Clerk

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### 1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item   
Item For Consideration

### 2.0 Topic 2026 Municipal Election – Alternate Voting Options [Financial Impact: None]

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### 3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report 2025-108 Municipal Election – Alternate Voting Options BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT City Council ENDORSE the use of online and voting tabulators for the 2026 Municipal Election.

### 4.0 Executive Summary

The next municipal and school board election is scheduled to take place on October 26, 2026. This report seeks Council’s endorsement to continue utilizing alternate voting methods including online voting and voting tabulators used in the past 3 election cycles. Staff conducted a fulsome review and investigation to determine what types of voting methods are most suitable for the City of Brantford. After consideration of benefits, accuracy, accessibility, convenience,

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and efficiencies as well as cyber security risks; staff continue to recommend online voting combined with traditional in-person voting as the voting options in the 2026 municipal elections.

## 5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to seek council input regarding alternate voting methods for the 2026 municipal and school board elections. Through this report staff have provided data used to determine alternative voting methods as well as details regarding the security of online voting.

## 6.0 Background

The next Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled to take place on October 26, 2026. As per Section 42 of the *Municipal Elections Act* (MEA), as amended, it states that by May 1 in the year of an Election, the Council of a local municipality must pass by-laws that authorize:

- the use of voting and vote-counting equipment
- the use of alternative voting methods that do not require electors to attend at a voting place in order to vote.

Municipal Code 169 – Voting – Machines – Recorders, enacted on April 22, 2014 through By-Law 54-2014, attached hereto as “Appendix A”, authorizes the City to utilize alternate voting methods including:

- Optical Scanning Vote Tabulators and other voting devices for the purpose of counting votes; and
- Use of online voting

The City has successfully offered alternative methods of voting for numerous elections through the use of tabulators with electronic/online voting being utilized in the past 3 elections (since 2014).

## 7.0 Corporate Policy Context

This report aligns with the following Council Priorities:

Priority #1 - “Develop strategies to build trust amongst Council, while evolving the corporate culture”;

Priority #6 – “Effectively and consistently engage with the community”.

## 8.0 Input From Other Sources

Clerks staff consulted with the Manager of Information Security in the Information Technology Department who reviewed and provided input on this report.

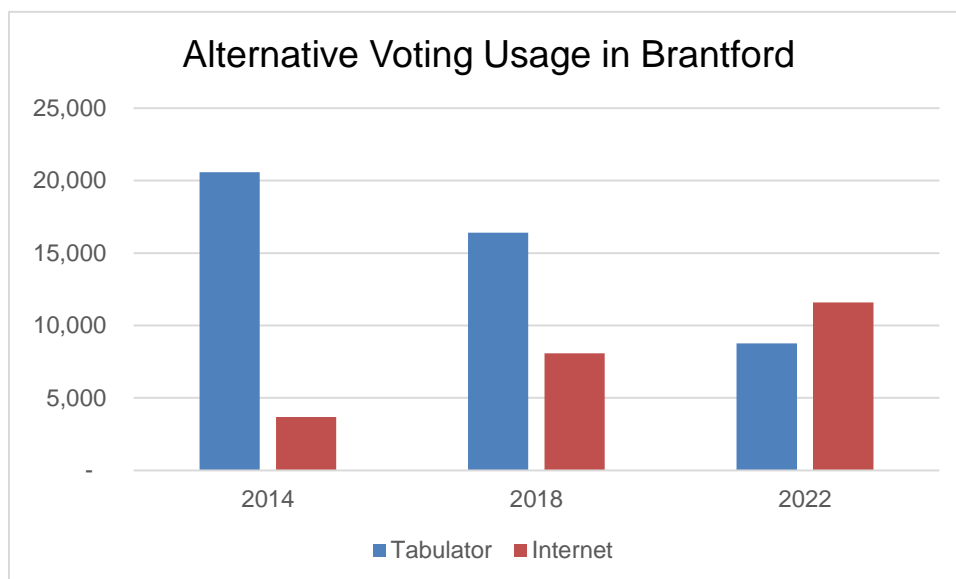
Clerks staff also attended numerous conferences, forums and open houses to gather data and information to make an informed decision regarding the use of online voting and vendors.

## 9.0 Analysis

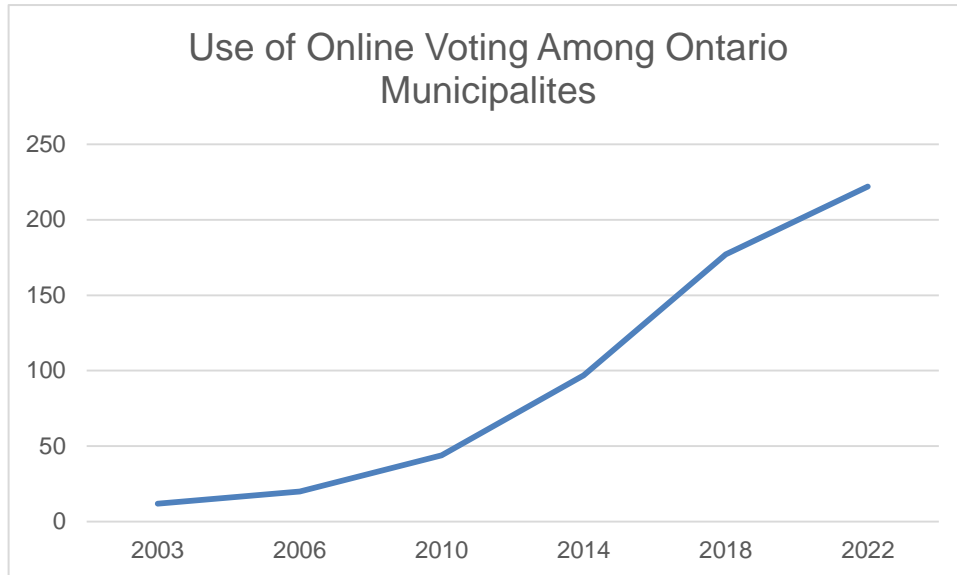
### Alternative Voting Methods 2014-2022

Online voting was first introduced as an alternative method in Brantford for the 2014 election and has remained a choice for electors since. In 2022 online voting emerged as the most utilized method of voting with 57% of the total ballots cast online. Evidence indicates a growing trend of Brantford electors increasingly choosing to vote online compared to in-person voting as indicated by the below chart:

	Tabulator	Online	Total	% Online
<b>2014</b>	20,588	3,683	24,271	15%
<b>2018</b>	16,404	8,073	24,477	33%
<b>2022</b>	8,756	11,584	20,340	57%



The use of online voting among Ontario municipal governments has also risen from 12 municipalities using online voting in 2003 to 222 municipalities in 2022 representing half of the 444 municipalities in Ontario. This trend represents a growing adoption of online voting.



While popularity of online voting has risen among Brantford residents and municipalities in Ontario, security of the technology has been a topic of discussion among the public, election administrators, election vendors, academic researchers and security experts. While some municipalities have opted not to implement online voting for the 2026 election, others have chosen to exclusively offer online and telephone voting.

### **Benefits of Online Voting**

*Accessibility and convenience:* Online voting significantly enhances accessibility and convenience allowing electors to utilize their own assistive technologies as needed. Voters can cast their ballots securely from any location, eliminating the need to visit physical polling stations which is particularly advantageous for individuals with mobility issues, working individuals, individuals out of town and young families. It also allows for flexible voting times, as online systems are available 24/7 during the voting period.

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*Efficiencies:* Online voting can streamline the voting process reducing time and resources needed for other voting methods such as reduction in printing of ballots, printing of forms and staff time for staffing additional voting locations.

*Improved Accuracy and Tabulation:* online voting utilizes automated electronic ballot counting reducing the possibility of human error and providing results immediately upon closing of polls.

*Cost effectiveness:* online voting has the potential to reduce costs due to less printing, staff time involved in staffing polling locations and other logistical expenses.

Although it is evident there are many benefits to online voting, it doesn't come without inherent risks as noted below.

## **Security**

The security of online voting in municipal elections has been a topic of concern, primarily due to the absence of standardized provincial regulations. Individual municipalities are responsible for selecting and managing their online voting systems, leading to variability in security measures. While online voting increases accessibility, there was a call for more uniform and robust standards to ensure election integrity.

The Digital Governance Standards Institute (DGSi), led by the Digital Governance Council, is a member driven, not-for-profit agency working to build Canadian confidence in digital technologies and cyber security. The DGSi established a technical committee to develop a series of standards to support the implementation of online electoral voting in Canada. The development of the standards was comprised of more than 100 thought leaders and experts in cybersecurity, political science, public policy, election administration and related subject matter experts. These standards comply with the Standards Council of Canada's accreditation requirements for standards development organizations.

Additionally, many vendors of digital voting technology have anticipated the standards being published and are communicating how their systems comply with the standards.

A few examples of the approved standards are listed below:

- The online voting provider shall provide documentation to the municipality on how they will detect and prevent or adequately mitigate each of the commonly cited classes of risks

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- The online voting provider shall adopt business continuity and data recovery plans that ensure the lowest recovery time objective
  - The online voting service shall include redundant firewalls, intrusion detection systems/intrusion prevention systems, verbose access logging with periodic backup, threat detection and prevention
  - Online voting providers shall provide a cyber-incident response plan outlining how various cyber incidents will be handled, who will be notified of the incident, and under what circumstance
  - The online voting providers shall provide end-to-end verifiability that ensures the voting process is secure, transparent, and auditable from start to finish. It allows voters to verify that their ballot was cast as intended, securely transmitted, and accurately included in the final tally without exposing their vote's secrecy. This is typically achieved through cryptographic techniques, enabling independent checks at every stage. Such systems enhance trust in online voting by providing evidence that the election results reflect the actual votes cast, even in the presence of potential vulnerabilities or adversarial attempts.

Online voting naturally comes with some level of risk. Therefore a comprehensive risk assessment was conducted including mitigation measures outlined in Appendix C. Taking into consideration of the approved standards from the Digital Governance Standards Institute (DGSi), the general threat risk assessment, certification against global industry security standards and frameworks (such as ISO 27001, NIST CSF, SOC2), experience running online voting in Canada and the presence of technical and non-technical controls; staff are confident that the identified measures will be able to effectively mitigate the identified potential risks involved in online voting.

## **10.0 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report as the costs of the 2026 Municipal Election have already been accounted for in the budget.

## **11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications**

As mentioned above, the use of online voting will reduce printing (ballots and forms) required to execute an election as well as reduce carbon emissions reducing travel to and from polling locations allowing residents to vote from home.

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## 12.0 Conclusion

While no voting method is completely without risk, considering the development of the standards from the DGSi, transparency of digital technologies, and the increasing percentages of Brantford voters who chose online voting to cast their ballot, staff support the use of online voting methods and traditional in-person voting for the 2026 Municipal Election.



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Jill Binkley, Supervisor of Elections, Licensing and Administrative Services

Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A – Municipal Code 169 – Voting – Machines – Recorders

Appendix B – Online Voting – Part 1: Implementation of Online Voting in Canadian  
Municipal Elections - Digital Governance Standards Institute

Appendix C – Risk Assessment

Copy to: None

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required  yes  no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk  yes  no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?  yes  no