

**Recommendation:**

That the report Clerk's Office-2025-15, dated May 20, 2025, regarding alternative voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Election be received; and further  
That Council direct staff to prepare a by-law authorizing the alternative voting methods of internet and telephone voting for the 2026 Municipal Election for Council's approval, as required by Section 42(1b) of the Municipal Elections Act.

**Overview:**

The next Municipal and School Board Election will be held on October 26, 2026. In anticipation of this, and in order to proceed through the procurement process, staff are seeking direction on the preparation of a by-law in accordance with Section 42(1b) of the Municipal Elections Act for the alternative voting methods to be used in the 2026 Municipal Election.

Section 42(1) of the Municipal Elections Act sets out that Council may pass a by-law authorizing the use of voting and vote counting equipment and/or authorize an alternative voting method provided the by-law is passed before May 1 in the year of the election.

There are three main voting methods used in Ontario Municipal Elections:

- Electronic Voting (Internet and/or Telephone)
- Paper Ballot with Tabulators
- Vote by Mail

Since the 2006 election, the Township has seen voter turnout range from a high of 36.9% in 2022 to a low of 31.82% in 2014. Please see the chart below for a breakdown of voter turnout by year and by Ward for the past four elections.

Comparators	2022	2018	2014	2010	2006
Total number of Electors	7230	6878	6842	6,650	7,316
Elector turnout for municipality	36.91%	34.68%	31.82%	33.37%	34.81%
Elector turnout for Douro Ward	42.00%	42.68%	32.07%	38.66%	34.22%
Elector turnout for Dummer Ward	41.71%	28.38%	31.62%	29.16%	35.28%

The chart below provides a breakdown of the type of device used by electors to cast a ballot in both 2022:

Type of Device	Number of Votes	2022 Votes (%)
Internet	2167	81.2
Telephone	377	14.1
Kiosk	125	4.7

Below is a high level synopsis of each of the three voting methods with considerations for each method.

### **Electronic Voting**

With Electronic Voting, electors receive their voter information letter in the mail providing the date of the voting period, voting website/telephone number and their personal, unique voting PIN. Electors can visit the website or call the telephone number, anywhere or anytime, and enter their PIN and birthdate information, as an additional security feature, in order to cast their vote. At the close of voting on Election Day, the electronic voting system will produce cumulative totals of all votes cast and the totals will be compiled to produce the final election results.

#### *Considerations*

Electronic Voting, including the use of internet and/or telephone voting, has been increasingly implemented across Ontario municipalities. Electronic voting modernizes the election experience for voters. It offers a convenient, accessible and secure way to cast a vote without the need to attend a physical voting location and inherently offers flexible voting times. In addition to the ease of casting a vote, it is also easy, quick and secure for election administration staff to issue new PIN letters should voters not receive or misplace their original.

Electronic Voting offers benefits such as the integration of accessible technology and enables the voter to identify errors in the ballot selections prior to casting a ballot. This voting method also allows for automated election processes like online ballot processing, striking names off the voters' list, and an effective and rapid count of the votes at the close of voting. Douro-Dummer voters are familiar with the voting method as it was solely used in the 2018 Municipal Election and 2022 Municipal Election.

For voters that still prefer to attend a physical location to vote during the voting period, the Municipality will continue to set up a Help Centre in the Council Chambers during the advance voting period and Election Day with iPads and telephones for voters to electronically cast their vote and to assist voters that are unfamiliar with the technology.

There are cyber security risks with electronic voting that need to be mitigated. When choosing a vendor for electronic voting, it is an important part of the process to get information on the voting system's security features and to perform testing in advance of the Municipal Election.

Electronic voting has been a benefit to voters by offering increased accessibility, transparency and accountability. The Municipality has seen a significant increase in electronic participation in a variety of other municipal activities, including the viewing and participation in electronic Council meetings, the transition to electronic building permits and procurement submissions and other electronic interactions with staff

through the many adjusted methods of service delivery. The 2022 election was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and a key element of planning for a safe election that could continue despite COVID-19 restrictions was the use of electronic voting and not requiring voters to physically attend a polling station to vote. The use of electronic voting provides assurance that a safe and effective election can be planned with as little interruption as possible if other challenges similar to COVID-19 were to occur.

While there were no known challenges with electronic voting in the 2022 Municipal Election, some municipalities did experience issues in the 2018 Municipal Election due to unauthorized bandwidth restrictions. As a result of the highly public nature of this issue, and in response to overall global concerns surrounding cybersecurity, electronic voting system vendors altered their services or developed additional tools to improve security and reliability for the 2022 Municipal Election. These adjustments to their services proved to be beneficial as there were no known issues regarding cybersecurity in the 2022 Municipal Elections.

Electronic voting has been used by all lower tier municipalities in Peterborough County for the last two elections and it is anticipated that all will continue to use electronic voting, potentially in combination with other forms of voting, for the 2026 Municipal Election. Continuing with electronic voting will benefit the Municipality by being able to participate in a joint procurement for the voting system, shared advertisements leading up to and during the voting period, and support from colleagues on policy creation and throughout the election.

Staff recommend electronic voting as it would be the most cost effective and inclusive option for the Municipality. Electronic voting effectively serves a variety of voters, including persons with disabilities, seasonal residents, business travelers, snowbirds, and students away at school, in addition to our permanent residents.

### **Paper Ballots with Tabulators**

Paper Ballots with Tabulators is an in-person voting method that requires the voter to attend the voting station to vote. Ballots are marked by indicating the voters' choices and the ballot is then inserted into the tabulator. The tabulator reads and records how ballots are marked and stores that information in the unit. At the close of voting on Election Day, the tabulator will produce cumulative totals of all votes cast and the totals will be compiled to produce the final election results.

#### *Considerations*

The use of tabulators has become a generally accepted alternative vote counting method in Ontario Municipal Elections and has also been used for provincial elections, including the most recent provincial election. As a result, there are established and recognized best practices for municipalities to use for effective implementation with the

vendor providing step by step guides, troubleshooting and effective accuracy testing protocols.

The system is precise, easy to use for voters, and capable of generating final election results very quickly following the close of voting without the use of manual counting.

As a voting method, paper ballots with tabulators requires significant election staff resources. In speaking to neighbouring municipalities who used the hybrid voting method, paper ballots were only used on Election Day as managing two different voting methods through the entire voting period is cumbersome. Also, there was significant staff time dedicated to programming and getting trained on the tabulators, as well as coordinating the two voting methods to occur simultaneously. For the use of any voting and vote-counting equipment or alternative voting methods, the Clerk is required to establish procedures for their use. Updating the existing procedures to include tabulators required considerable time.

Additionally, there are limited suppliers of tabulators in Ontario. Dominion Voting is one of the largest suppliers and their equipment is reserved quickly with larger municipal clients having their order fulfilled first. The tabulators used for the 2022 Municipal Election were shipped from the United States which may be impacted by tariffs and possible issues with cross-border trade. When tabulators are used, it's important to have a back-up tabulator for each tabulator in use at a polling station.

The use of paper ballots does not allow the voter to vote anywhere at their leisure and therefore convenience is an issue with this voting method. This is especially important due to the high seasonal population of Douro-Dummer, specifically at the end of October when seasonal residents are not typically at their seasonal residence. Additionally, paper ballots do not provide the same level of accessibility as voters with visual and/or physical disabilities may find it difficult to vote if required to vote in-person with paper ballots.

The use of paper ballots and the tabulators in the 2022 Municipal Election had an additional cost of just over \$7,000.00 for a neighbouring Township who used this method as well as Internet and Telephone Voting.

If Council opts to proceed with the option of Paper Ballots with Tabulators, it is recommended that this not be the sole voting method and that it be combined with an electronic voting method.

## **Vote by Mail**

Vote by Mail is a voting method that allows voters to receive instructions and their ballots by mail, which are then completed without attending a physical voting location and returned by mail. There are deadlines to provide the ballots by mail to ensure they can be counted by the time of the election. After the deadline, voters would be required to attend a Help Centre or Polling Station in person to drop off their ballot. This voting method would be combined with the use of a tabulator in order to avoid the manual counting of votes.

### *Considerations*

Although this option would be similar to electronic voting insofar as voters may be able to vote without attending a physical location, there are some challenges associated with the Vote by Mail option. Mail processing times may impact when voters receive their vote by mail packages and when election administrators get the returned ballots to be counted. Also, over the past few elections, the expiry of the union contract term for Canada Post workers has coincided with the Municipal Election. When Canada Post workers went on strike at the end of 2024, many municipal services that rely on the postal service were impacted and delayed. This causes uncertainty for using a voting method that heavily relies on the postal service as there is always the possibility for workers to strike. Additionally, there is the potential for marked ballots to get lost in the mail or for ballots to be returned missing the appropriate signatures.

Furthermore, with Vote by Mail, there may be more opportunities for errors in ballot marking as voters do not have the assistance of election staff readily available like they would at a polling station for in-person paper ballots. The paper ballots provided in vote by mail do not provide the same level of accessibility as voters with visual and/or physical disabilities may find it difficult to vote if required to return a paper ballot by mail or vote in-person with paper ballots after the vote by mail period closes.

For the use of any voting and vote-counting equipment or alternative voting methods, the Clerk is required to establish procedures for their use. Updating the existing procedures to include procedures for vote by mail will require considerable staff time.

The use of the Vote by Mail method would be combined with the use of a tabulator and may require electors to vote in-person when the vote by mail period has closed. Many of the considerations outlined in the Paper Ballots with Tabulators section will also need to be taken into account for the Vote by Mail method.

There would be increased costs associated with the Vote by Mail option as the Municipality will need to send the voting instructions and ballots by mail, along with a prepaid return envelope. Additional staff resources will be used as election staff may see increased calls from residents calling to confirm their ballot has been received. Using the Vote by Mail option in combination with Electronic Voting may pose additional

issues related to crossing voters off the list resulting in a security gap between the time the mail-in ballot is received and the issuance of an electronic ballot.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, staff recommend the use of Electronic Voting as the sole voting method for the 2026 Municipal Election. Although there are benefits and drawbacks to all the Alternative Voting Methods outlined, Electronic Voting balances providing the most flexibility to the varying lifestyles of Douro-Dummers' residents, while also being the most effective and efficient method for the Municipality. The other methods outlined have been used by election staff in the past, but they have not proven to improve voter turnout or make the election process any smoother for staff, rather it increases the administrative time and resources required.

Electronic Voting is a safe and effective way to hold an election and is a widely used method across Ontario. Staff are meticulous in reviewing specifications and perform due diligence from the procurement process, to ensure the security requirements are met when choosing a vendor, through to logistic and accuracy testing leading up to the Municipal Election. Further, staff will continue to provide on-site services to assist voters in person or over the phone to guide them through casting their ballot electronically.

Staff are seeking direction on which voting and vote counting equipment and/or alternative voting methods to proceed with for the 2026 Municipal Election. Based on the direction, staff will prepare the necessary by-law for adoption at the next Council meeting.

**Financial Impact:**

In 2022, staff budgeted \$58,500 and spent \$24,701.06 due to savings found using in house staff during the election, various operational efficiencies and a joint RFP process with the other municipalities located in the County of Peterborough. Staff have budgeted \$56,000 for the 2026 election

## Township of Douro-Dummer Strategic Plan 2023-2027



### **Service Modernization and Innovation**

Modernizing, refining and innovating services for residents is essential to effectively meet the needs of our community, enhance our operational efficiency, and ensure we remain adaptable in a rapidly changing world.



### **Business Attraction, Expansion, and Retention**

Business attraction, expansion, and retention is vital for the economic health and sustainability of our Township, such as job creation, tax revenue, investing in innovation, maintaining our quality of life, and supporting community stability.



### **Infrastructure Renewal**

Infrastructure renewal is a critical investment for our Township as it will ensure our adherence to health and safety, economic development, investment attraction, environmental sustainability, quality of life, public confidence, and regional competitiveness.

### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Alternative Voting Methods for the 2026 Municipal Election - Clerk's Office-2025-15.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	May 13, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Todd Davis