



REQUEST FOR DECISION

MEETING DATE: February 26, 2024

TITLE: C-1277-23 - Elections Bylaw - Third Reading

DIVISION: Strategic and Communication Services

SUMMARY:

The Elections Bylaw underwent a review following the 2021 Municipal General Election and is being presented with a number of proposed process changes that would be enacted for the 2025 Municipal General Election. These proposed changes include amending the voting hours, coordinating the advance voting days and a number of clarifying and technical amendments.

The proposed bylaw received first and second reading at the February 12, 2024 Regular Council Meeting. It is now being presented for Council's consideration of third reading.

PROPOSED MOTION:

THAT third reading be given to C-1277-23 - Elections Bylaw.

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS:

The *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA) prescribes the conduct of local elections across Alberta. With the next municipal election occurring on October 20, 2025, the City's Elections Bylaw is under review for provisions to support the election process.

The LAEA includes mandatory provisions that all municipalities must comply with; as well as a number of discretionary provisions that municipal councils may enact. Proposed C-1277-23 - Elections Bylaw provides clarity on a few key provisions that will support the 2025 election process.

The Election Bylaw has been amended to remove sections already addressed in LAEA, revise wording that is not in alignment with requirements of the LAEA, add authorities to the

Returning Officer and add or revise sections to streamline processes. There are also minor technical and clarifying amendments. All amendments and the rationale for them are included in the attached Elections Bylaw - Amendments Tracking Sheet.

The amendment that has significant policy implications applies to changing voting hours.

Voting Hours on Election Day (Section 11)

Section 11.1 - Proposing to change the opening time of voting stations on Election Day from 6:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. The LAEA provides for municipalities to set the voting station opening hours any time before 10 a.m. but no later.

There are three main reasons to change the voting station opening time:

1. To align with the voting station opening times in the Tri-Region:
A jurisdictional scan (see attached) was completed of municipalities over 20,000 in population. Although the largest group of municipalities opens at 10 a.m., given that Stony Plain and Parkland County open at 9 a.m. there is a benefit to align the City's voting hours with our regional neighbours. The proposed 9 a.m. start time provides electors within the Tri-Region consistent messaging. Although voters must vote in their municipality, having a common start time with Stony Plain and Parkland County is convenient when an elector goes to the wrong municipalities' voting station (which does occasionally occur). The election workers are able to send them to the correct municipalities' location which will be open.
2. Percentage of voting between 6:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. has historically been relatively low.
Voter turnout from 2021 and 2017 elections saw the following numbers during the early morning opening hours.

Voting Station Hours	Percentage of total votes	
	2021 (5,078 total votes)	2017 (5,889 total votes)
6:30 - 7:30 a.m.	1.5%	1.1%
7:30 - 8:30 a.m.	3.8%	1.6%
8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	5%	4.2%

3. Fewer election workers resulting in significant cost savings.
In 2021, four voting stations were utilized. Anticipating a similar number of voting stations for 2025, it is estimated a cost savings of approximately \$21,000 with 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. voting hours. A 9 a.m. voting station start time would need 76 election workers to fill all positions; 48 fewer individuals than 2021 as one shift of election workers would be required. In 2021, due to the 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. voting hours and *Employment Standards Code*, shifts had to be split into two eight hour shifts to meet the 12 hour

daily maximum allowance. For 2025, one shift would be sufficient to work the full day and remain within the 12 hour daily maximum. Having one election worker for the full day will also lessen the potential for errors as there would be no transfer of duties between different people.

The position of Returning Officer, Substitute Returning Officer, and Presiding Deputy Returning Officers require an exemption as the roles are expected to work over the 12 hour daily maximum. In 2021, the variance to the *Employment Standards Code* (the “Code”) was granted through the Director of Employment Standards under the authority of Section 74 of the Code and Section 43.86(1)(a) of the *Employment Standards Regulation* without concern.

As the population increases, the potential for an additional voting station may be considered. If an additional voting station were added, the number of election workers needed would be 90, still 30 fewer than in 2021. By increasing the voting stations to five from four, the cost savings in election workers would be approximately \$14,000.

It is important to note that there will also be five advance vote dates and times, which will also be aligned with Stony Plain and Parkland County, so if any electors are unable to vote on Election Day due to the changing voting station hours, they will have five opportunities in the preceding two weeks of Election Day to vote. There will be a strong emphasis on communication of these advance vote dates and times.

Feedback from Governance and Priorities Committee, January 15, 2024

Committee provided feedback on the need to have greater clarity on the role of a Scrutineer by election workers, specifically the ability for the Scrutineer to watch the counting of votes. Although the LAEA is prescriptive on the allowances of a Scrutineer and the access allowed to a voting station, Administration will enhance the materials in this area for the candidate information session and election worker training. As well, the election website will include a dedicated section to highlight the role and the abilities of the position. Along with the Scrutineer, information on the role of the Official Agent will also be included as they play a similar part for a candidate.

OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES:

Council may choose to provide feedback and direction on further amendments to the proposed bylaw, or Council may choose to defeat the bylaw at third reading.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT:

Further to the jurisdictional scan, municipalities whose voting hours are 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. were contacted to inquire whether they are considering amending their voting hours to be earlier or

if any concerns had ever been received on later voting hours. All responded with no amendments are planned and no concerns have been reported on the voting hours.

IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATION:

If the bylaw is approved, the City's bylaw webpage will be updated, and the bylaw will be communicated through the 2025 General Municipal Election planning process.

IMPACTS:

The proposed Elections Bylaw will result in updated processes to help ensure more efficient and effective election procedures are in place for the City of Spruce Grove.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

In 2021, the total cost for election workers was \$50,130.

2025 Savings Based on Later Opening Hours of Voting Stations

Four voting stations: \$21,000

Five voting stations: \$14,000