



LEGISLATIVE AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

TO: Council
DATE: June 28, 2022 **DIVISION:** All
FILE: N/A
SUBJECT: 2021 Municipal Election Debrief

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Along with other municipalities in Alberta, Rocky View County's municipal election was held on October 18, 2021. In addition to election day, the County offered advance voting days on October 7-9, 2021, homebound and institutional voting on election day, and special ballots for those unable to vote on election day or the advance voting days.

There were many firsts in the 2021 municipal election for the County. It had the highest voter turnout in the past four municipal elections. It was the first to be held under the County's new electoral boundaries, which were established by the *Electoral Boundaries and Council Composition Bylaw* in October 2020. It was also the first time the County offered special ballots in a municipal election.

Significant amendments were made to the *Local Authorities Election Act* in 2018 and 2020, with notable changes to campaign financing rules, third party advertising, and nomination periods. The 2021 municipal election was the first to be conducted by municipalities under these new rules.

On top of conducting a municipal election under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, which is administered by Municipal Affairs, municipalities across Alberta were also required to conduct a senate and referendum vote on behalf of the provincial government. These are usually conducted by Elections Alberta under the *Election Act*. Municipalities have not been required to conduct votes on behalf of the provincial government since 1998. The referendum votes were the first to be called by the provincial government since 1971.

In previous municipal elections, the County was responsible only for the election of its own councillors and the election of school board trustees on behalf of Rocky View Schools. School board trustee elections also fall under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. For the 2021 municipal election, however, the County was also requested by Municipal Affairs to conduct the senate and referendum vote on behalf of Tsuut'ina Nation and Redwood Meadows.

Despite these challenges, the County held a successful municipal election in 2021. This report will highlight those successes as well as feedback received and lessons learned for future elections.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

Administration recommends receiving this report as information in accordance with Option #1.

Administration Resources

Tyler Andreasen, Legislative and Intergovernmental Services
 Amy Zaluski, Legislative and Intergovernmental Services



DISCUSSION:

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout was higher in the 2021 municipal election than in the previous three. It is difficult to attribute the higher voter turnout to a single factor, but a combination of local political dynamics, the senate and referendum vote, and the County using additional voting methods can be attributed to some degree.

The table below shows the overall voter turnout for the County’s municipal elections from 2010 through 2021, as well as a breakdown of voter turnout for each of the County’s electoral divisions in 2021. The table does not include the senate and referendum vote numbers.

Voter Turnout Overall (2010 – 2021)			
Election Year	Eligible Voters (Estimate)	Total Number of Ballots Cast	Voter Turnout (%)
2010	25,534	7,769	30.4%
2013	27,898	8,953	32.1%
2017	30,235	9,192	30.4%
2021	34,269	12,006	35.0%
2021 Voter Turnout by Division			
Division	Eligible Voters (Estimate)	Total Number of Ballots Cast	Voter Turnout (%)
Division 1	5,821	1,753	30.1%
Division 2	4,500	1,810	40.2%
Division 3	4,443	1,551	34.9%
Division 4	5,619	1,898	33.8%
Division 5	5,892	1,729	39.3%
Division 6	3,767	1,980	52.6%
Division 7	4,227	1,137	26.9%
Total	34,269	12,006	35.0%

For comparison, the voter turnout for the senate vote was an estimated 39.6%, while the voter turnout for the referendum votes were each an estimated 38.7%.

Advance Vote and Special Ballots

Advance votes are required by the *Local Authorities Election Act* for municipalities with populations over 5,000. One advance vote date was offered at multiple voting stations by the County in the 2017 municipal election, while three advance vote dates were offered in 2021 at a single location.

Special ballots are optional for municipalities under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. The 2021 municipal election was the County’s first to offer special ballots as a voting method. The process for issuing and receiving special ballots are regulated through the *Local Authorities Election Act*.



The table below shows the types of ballots that voters used in the 2021 municipal election. The table does not include the senate and referendum vote numbers.

2021 Types of Ballots Cast		
Type of Ballot	Total Number of Ballots Cast	Type of Ballot (%)
Election Day	10,509	87.5%
Advance Vote	1,220	10.2%
Special Ballots	129	1.1%
Blank / Rejected Ballots	148	1.2%
Total	12,006	100%

Estimated Cost of the 2021 Municipal Election

Municipal elections are a fundamental part of Canadian democracy. Although municipal elections do not receive the attention that provincial or federal elections receive, they are logistically challenging to coordinate and require extensive resources.

The total estimated cost of the County’s 2021 municipal election was \$191,419.00. Expenses included hiring election staff, booking voting stations, purchasing supplies, advertising, and general administrative costs such as signage, printing, and postage.

There were considerable additional expenses required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 at voting stations for this municipal election. Additional supplies needed to be purchased for personal protective equipment, sanitization supplies, and single use materials.

As with previous municipal elections, the County also administered the election of school board trustees on behalf of Rocky View Schools. This is a common arrangement between municipalities and school boards across the province, as both municipal and school board elections fall under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. The County received a contribution of \$22,141.00 from Rocky View Schools for administering their school board trustee election on their behalf.

The provincial government provided per-capita funding for municipalities as compensation for conducting the senate and referendum vote on their behalf. The County received a contribution of \$78,814.00 for the cost of administering the provincial votes for County residents, as well as \$8,884.00 for administering them on behalf of residents of Tsuut’ina Nation and Redwood Meadows. Voters from these jurisdictions were accommodated at the Elbow Springs Golf Club and the Pinebrook Golf & Country Club voting stations.

The table below shows the expenses, revenues, and estimated total cost of the 2021 municipal election, senate nominee election, and referendum votes, as well as for the 2017 municipal election for comparison. The estimated cost of the 2021 municipal election was much higher than in 2017 due to booking and staffing additional voting stations as well as purchasing additional supplies needed to mitigate risks from the COVID-19 pandemic.



2021 Municipal Election Expenses and Revenues	
Line Item	2021 Actual
Total Estimated Expenses	\$183,869.00
Total Revenue	\$110,689.00
Rocky View Schools Contribution	\$22,141.00
Provincial Contribution (Rocky View County Portion)	\$78,814.00
Provincial Contribution (Tsuut'ina Nation and Redwood Meadows Portion)	\$8,884.00
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$850.00
2021 Municipal Election Net Estimated Cost	\$73,180.00
2017 Municipal Election Expenses and Revenues	
Line Item	2017 Actual
Total Estimated Expenses	\$79,726.00
Total Revenue	\$19,041.00
Rocky View Schools Contribution	\$19,041.00
2017 Municipal Election Net Estimated Cost	\$60,685.00

Municipal elections are not only *intergovernmental* events that require coordination between the provincial government and municipalities, especially given the additional provincial involvement in the 2021 municipal election, but they are also *intragovernmental* events that require coordination between many internal departments.

Hundreds of staff hours were dedicated to coordinating and supporting the 2021 municipal election, which involved extensive coordination between Human Resources, Information and Technology Services, Enforcement Services, Marketing and Communications, Operational Services, Customer Care and Support, and Legislative and Intergovernmental Services.

The remainder of this report will detail the successes and lessons learned from the 2021 municipal election in preparation for the 2025 municipal election.

SUCCESSSES OF THE 2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTION:

Despite the challenges and lessons learned outlined in the next section of this report, the County conducted a successful municipal election in 2021. There were no legal challenges filed against the County's processes or official results, and only one recount was conducted which confirmed the declared winning candidate. There were two recounts conducted in the 2017 municipal election for comparison.

Although this municipal election was uniquely complicated and challenging for municipalities across the province, the County had many successes worth acknowledging. Two more advance vote days were offered to voters than in the 2017 municipal election. 79% more voters used advance vote opportunities than in the previous municipal election. Six more voting stations were available to voters on election day than in 2017.

The County relied primarily on external election workers to run voting stations in this municipal election. The County used more staff as election workers in 2021, mainly in supervisory positions at



voting stations. This helped to reduce the number of external election workers that needed to be hired, which was a challenge for this municipal election due to concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provided staff with exposure to the election process which helped to build capacity at an organizational level for future elections, as well as provided an opportunity for staff to grow their leadership abilities by taking on a supervisory role.

The County offered special ballots for the first time in a municipal election. Special ballots are not required under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, but they may be offered by municipalities if authorized by Council, which was granted in June 2021. Under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, voters may request a special ballot if they have a physical disability, if they are absent from the municipality, or if they are an election worker and cannot attend a voting station on election day or at an advance vote.

As mentioned earlier in this report, this municipal election saw higher voter turnout than previous municipal elections. Although there are many factors that contribute to voter turnout, access to voting stations and alternate methods of voting are key factors in voter turnout, whether in municipal, provincial, or federal elections.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTION:

While reviewing election practices, it is important for municipalities to highlight their success and note lessons learned for future elections. Following the 2021 municipal election, Administration collected feedback to identify areas for improvement ahead of the next municipal election.

Administration used several different methods to gather feedback, including debrief surveys and meetings with councillors, candidates, and election staff. Administration also received and compiled complaints received from the public over the course of the municipal election.

New Electoral Boundaries and Voting Stations

The 2021 municipal election was the first to use the County's new electoral boundaries established by the *Electoral Boundaries and Council Composition Bylaw*. The new electoral boundaries were another unique challenge in this municipal election.

Some voters found navigating the new electoral boundaries challenging. Although more communication methods were used in this municipal election, including an interactive map that voters could use to find their correct voting station, some voters arrived at incorrect voting stations. Election workers were able to use the same interactive map to guide them to the correct voting station.

Although there were six more voting stations available to voters on election day in 2021 than in 2017, several voting stations used in previous municipal elections were unavailable for booking due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some voting stations, such as Goldenrod Hall, were located within a different electoral division which caused some confusion among voters. Moreover, Administration was unable to rely on historical data to predict turnout and the need for voting stations due to the new electoral boundaries.

Administration anticipates fewer issues with booking voting stations in future municipal elections with fewer COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and better familiarity with the County's new electoral boundaries.

Voting Station Lines and Wait Times

One of the biggest challenges in the 2021 municipal election was the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing and sanitization requirements that were in effect at the time. These requirements led, in part, to longer lines and wait times for voters on election day.



The senate and referendum vote also contributed to longer lines and wait times, as voters had the option of completing two additional ballots. Due to the additional senate and referendum ballots, additional time was required for election workers to distribute and explain each ballot and for voters to complete their ballots.

Administration used GIS and population mapping to determine suitable locations for voting stations, while balancing the number of voting stations across the entire municipality, the costs of those stations, and the availability of election workers to staff voting stations.

Some additional voting stations were added to accommodate dispersed populations over large areas in Division 5 and to accommodate access issues on Highway 8 in Division 1. Administration attempted to add more voting stations in Division 2 but no suitable locations could be found.

After conducting a municipal election for the first time under new electoral boundaries, and without the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and senate and referendum vote, Administration will be better able to address lines and wait times at voting stations in future municipal elections.

Election Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic and senate and referendum vote were challenging for those working the 2021 municipal election. Many potential and confirmed election workers declined their positions or cancelled ahead of election day due to health concerns and rising COVID-19 caseloads at the time. 132 election workers were assigned to voting stations on election day.

While election workers were provided with the requisite training sessions and materials in advance of election day, many expressed that the training offered was insufficient, particularly with those in polling station supervisor roles and those who had never worked an election before.

If the senate and referendum ballots were complicated for voters to complete, they were also challenging for election workers to count after voting stations closed. On the senate nominee ballot, for example, voters could select up to three of 13 possible candidates. Election workers then needed to count up to three votes per ballot. Most other ballots only require voters to select one candidate.

Moreover, the reporting requirements for the municipal ballots and provincial ballots were different, which meant that polling station supervisors needed to report their ballot counts on two different sets of forms with different requirements. Municipal ballot counts were reported to Municipal Affairs using their forms, while provincial ballot counts were reported to Elections Alberta using their forms.

Many election workers expressed that they found their experience stressful and frustrating and would not be interested in being an election worker in the future. Administration will look at options to better train, support, and schedule election workers in the future to mitigate these experiences.

Scrutineers

There were challenges with the scrutineering process at voting stations in the 2021 municipal election. It is important to note that the *Local Authorities Election Act* does not provide guidance on the role of scrutineers and only outlines their authority. Scrutineers were provided with detailed information regarding their authority and what would be acceptable within voting stations. There were no concerns with the behaviour of individual scrutineers overall in this municipal election.

However, there was a challenge by one candidate on the standard practice of disallowing the use of cameras within voting stations. This practice is used to ensure the secrecy of the vote. The *Local Authorities Election Act* does not provide specific guidance on the use of cameras within voting stations, but it does have provisions protecting the secrecy of the vote.

As a result, the use of cameras was permitted within voting stations in this municipal election for the specific purpose of allowing scrutineers to record information found on elector register forms. While scrutineers usually record this information by hand to help ensure that voters are not voting at multiple



stations, cameras were permitted to be used for this purpose while still ensuring the secrecy of the vote as elector register forms are completed prior to voters being issued their ballots.

Some voters expressed concerns with scrutineers using cameras to record the information on their elector register forms. The provincial government will be undertaking a review of the *Local Authorities Election Act* and is aware of several different privacy concerns from voters across the province in this municipal election. One of the issues targeted in their review is the protection of voter privacy.

Objections to Elector Register Forms

All voters are required to complete an elector register form prior to being issued their ballots, and each elector register form must be signed by an election worker. Under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, scrutineers are allowed to witness this process and object to elector register forms if they believe the voter is not eligible to vote.

Scrutineers were present at most voting stations during the 2021 municipal election and objected to many elector register forms. The main reasons for objections were:

- the use of identification with a post office box number as the address instead of a residential or legal address;
- the use of identification without a photograph; and
- County residents using identification with Calgary addresses issued by Canada Post.

It is worth noting that post office box numbers can be used to verify a voter's eligibility if it is within a reasonable distance to the voting jurisdiction, that photo identification is not required to verify a voter's eligibility, and that many residents of the County have identification that lists Calgary in their address even though it is located within the County. Administration reviewed randomized samples of elector register forms with scrutineer objections after the municipal election and no irregularities were found and no allegations were substantiated on the reviewed forms.

Election Signage

One of the most frequent complaints received in this municipal election were concerning election signage, which is regulated and enforced under the County's *Election Sign Bylaw*. There were over 30 complaints received in the four-week period between nomination day (September 20, 2021) and election day (October 18, 2021). Another five complaints were received after election day.

Over the course of this municipal election, approximately 97 election signs were removed and impounded for contraventions of the *Election Sign Bylaw*. Administration will be reviewing the *Election Sign Bylaw* for improvements ahead of the 2025 municipal election.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS:

The 2021 municipal election was challenging for municipalities across Alberta with the additional senate and referendum vote required by the provincial government. Despite these challenges, the County conducted a successful municipal election in 2021.

It was the first using the County's new electoral boundaries and the recently amended *Local Authorities Election Act*, but more voting opportunities were offered to voters and voter turnout was higher than in previous municipal elections.

There were many lessons learned with the 2021 municipal election. The County received feedback on areas of improvement, including the location and number of voting stations, the training of election workers, and the regulations for election signage.



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

Administration will be working to improve these areas ahead of the 2025 municipal election, including a review of the County's *Election Bylaw*, *Election Sign Bylaw*, and training materials based on the feedback received from the 2021 municipal election and the best practices of municipalities around the province.

OPTIONS:

Option #1: THAT the 2021 Municipal Election Debrief report be received as information.

Option #2: THAT alternative direction be provided.

Respectfully submitted,

Concurrence,

"Amy Zaluski"

"Dorian Wandzura"

Director,
Legislative and Intergovernmental Services

Chief Administrative Officer

TA/AZ