

AN ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE VOTING METHODS

July 16, 2013

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Preamble

There are several voting models available with respect to conducting municipal elections. The most common model is based on the use of decentralized voting places designed to process ballots for a particular subset of the electorate. That said, the use of alternative voting methods is now on the rise. Vote-by-mail, telephone and Internet voting have all been used by municipalities for various reasons. These "unsupervised" voting methods have traditionally been employed by jurisdictions in Ontario which are predominantly rural in nature and where the electorate is geographically detached. Municipalities such as these tend to favour alternative methods in lieu of physical voting places because these jurisdictions can experience challenges locating facilities which are both accessible to the electorate and feasible for processing voters. Within the global context, this trend seems to be changing somewhat as now more urbanized municipalities are implementing alternative methods as complementary voting channels in elections.¹

In theory, unsupervised voting enhances voter accessibility at the expense of relinquishing some oversight with respect to the verification of voter identity and behaviour. It has been argued that some of the principles of the Act cannot be fully upheld by a voting method whereby direct supervision of electors does not occur. It is important to note, however, that [Section 89](#) of the Act clearly bestows certain responsibilities on the voter such as ensuring that one is entitled to vote prior to doing so as well as ensuring that one does not vote more times than allowable. To some, unsupervised voting facilitates the potentiality of these offences, but to others it simply highlights the fact that pursuant to the Act the overall accountability of voting rests with each individual voter. Voter impersonation, coercion and fraud are concerns which are mitigated through the design of any voting system, regardless of whether it is a supervised or unsupervised model.

In order to encourage greater voter participation and to make voting easier and more convenient for Guelph electors, consideration was given to three alternative voting methods for the 2014 Municipal Election. The review considered such voting channels as complementary to the use of paper ballots and physical voting locations. The methods reviewed were vote-by-mail, telephone, and remote Internet voting. Consideration of these channels was based on the risks and advantages each had to offer.

Vote-by-Mail

A vote-by-mail solution² has the ability to enhance the convenience of voting for both resident and non-resident electors. It can also eliminate or reduce the cost of voting places and temporary election officials depending on whether it is employed as a primary channel or as part of a multi-channel approach along with physical voting places. As paper ballots are used, it also most closely resembles a traditional

¹ In a [report](#) published by the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) in response to a voluntary survey of Returning Officers, roughly 20% of municipalities in Ontario used some form of alternative voting method in 2010 and approximately 10% implemented a multi-channel approach using more than one method. This use represents an 18% increase in the use of alternative voting methods from 2006 to 2010.

² A non-electronic based alternative voting method which retains use of a paper ballot. The voting method has been in use for many years, most commonly by rural and/or sparsely-populated jurisdictions with larger geographic areas (ex. cottage communities). The voting process within such a scenario begins with a package being mailed to every qualified elector on the voters' list containing instructions, a ballot and a voter declaration form. Within the defined voting period, voters are asked to return mail their completed ballot and declaration form to the municipality each within a separate prepaid postage envelope. The declaration forms are reviewed in an independent manner in order to cross voters off the voters' list. At the end of the day on voting day, a Returning Office will then either hand count the returned ballots or tabulate them using a central count scanner/tabulator (they can be scanned prior to election day, just not tabulated). Results are then transferred to an election reporting system or declared by some other means.

precinct-based model which provides for a good audit trail. The majority of jurisdictions who used a vote-by-mail solution implemented it as the sole method of voting. In some municipalities, there is an option extended to the electorate to either vote-by-mail or attend one of the few voting places set up to process ballots, however, in many cases only "Town Hall" is equipped to do this.

Some concerns with vote-by-mail solutions have been expressed with respect to errors that can occur as a result of the mail distribution process. Inexact voters' list data can lead to challenges further exacerbated by vote-by-mail since there is a prospect for electors to not only mistakenly receive voter packages intended for other individuals, but also ballots as well. There is also room for error in relation to method of returning voters packages to the Returning Office. There are documented examples within vote-by-mail elections where voters have returned their ballots improperly marked and/or inadvertently disclosed their identity by returning their declaration form and ballot in the same envelope. Furthermore, unlike electronic solutions, there can be no automatic controls established in order to prevent a spoiled ballot (ex. by over-voting). Although a central count scanner/tabulator can assist in deciphering voter intent as part of a vote-by-mail solution, it would still be required to automatically spoil votes for an office that is improperly marked as the voter would not be present at the time of tabulation. Depending on the size of the electorate, there can be significant postage costs related to supporting a vote-by-mail solution. Some also argue that a full reliance on the postal system to not only disseminate blank ballots but also process completed ballots exposes the overall voting system to considerable risk.

Based on a general evaluation of the overall costs to implement and the elevated exposure to risk, a vote-by-mail method is not seen to be a good compliment to a physical voting place-based election system and is not recommended.

Telephone Voting

Telephone voting³ is most commonly employed as part of a multi-channel voting solution in conjunction with remote Internet voting. To the best of staff's knowledge, the largest municipality to use telephone voting in Canada is the Regional Municipality of Halifax which used a [combination of remote Internet and telephone voting](#). Telephone voting provides for an enhanced level of convenience as it allows voters to cast their ballot remotely from anywhere they have access to a phone line at any time within a defined voting period. A telephone-based system is also better able to fully qualify voter intent through use of automatic controls. In other words, the system could be programmed to disallow a voter from proceeding to the next office if their current selection resulted in an over-vote. This all but eliminates unintentional spoiled ballots, a control which can also be engaged on vote scanners/tabulators. Certain voting systems allow for a voter to complete their ballot interchangeably by using the Internet as well as the telephone.

³ Telephone voting is an alternative voting method which allows voters to complete a ballot using any point-to-point telephone connection. Qualified electors on the voters' list receive a voter information package containing instructions on how to dial in to access the system as well as how to navigate the audio ballot. Most interactive telephone voting systems rely on the voter to interact with the audio ballot by way of dialling on the key pad in relation to response requests, however, the potential exists to use voice activated responses to navigate and complete an audio ballot. After voting selections have been made for each office, the voter is prompted to review their decisions and continue on. Once the ballot is completely "marked" by the voter, he/she is then asked to review their selections prior to submission. Once submitted, the respective data is transferred to a secure server which effectively separates the voters' identity data (name, phone number etc.) from their ballot data. The former serves as the master voters' list identifying, in real-time, those electors who have voted and the latter represents pending results which are not tabulated until the end of voting day.

One of the most commonly cited concerns regarding telephone voting has been that it can take a significant amount of time to navigate through and complete an audio ballot. A ballot for a local municipality in Ontario can consist of a multitude of offices with which to vote including municipal candidates, school board candidates and referenda questions. Depending on the number and sequencing of selections and the review options engaged, a lengthy audio ballot can even serve to disengage and confuse voters. Furthermore, the clear pronunciation of candidate names can be a challenge if call quality on either end is compromised. Other documented issues relate to network congestion as the host telecommunications system must be able to support call volumes that are often difficult to predict. As with most technology solutions, the overall cost of telephone voting can fluctuate based on the scale and composition of the system. Often, the largest contributor to cost in this regard relates to the capacity of the system to be able to support high volumes of traffic and its ability to provide for an adequate backup system.

Arguably, telephone voting involves less risk and is more cost effective than a vote-by-mail solution (due to only involving one postal mail-out). It is also seen to be a better complement to a physical voting place based-model. That said, there are some operational concerns from the user's perspective with respect to the time in which it takes to complete an audio ballot. As a result, telephone voting may not be the most ideal method for every voter and perhaps not the best value for money.

Internet Voting

There are various forms of Internet voting, some of which allow a voter to submit an electronic ballot over the internet within a physical voting place supervised by Election Officials. The most commonly referenced model, however, is remote Internet voting, which allows an elector to cast an electronic ballot from their personal computer, tablet or smartphone anywhere there is an internet connection. Internet voting has been used by various jurisdictions in order to enhance the convenience of voting, to accommodate changing lifestyles and demanding work schedules, and to enhance accessibility for persons who may not be available or able to vote in person. For rural areas, Internet voting offers a means with which to reach electors who are geographically disconnected. For others, it offers a potential means to further engage those who may be more inclined to vote from the comfort of their own home or office rather than travelling to a physical voting place. It also presents a viable method to replace voting by way of proxy for those electors who may be out of the City either on vacation or at school, during election time. Some claim that online voting is more environmentally sustainable as it may result in decreased paper production and an overall lower carbon footprint when compared to the resource requirements of a traditional election.

There are several Internet voting products currently available to jurisdictions, most of which can be customized to support various process requirements⁴. In a remote Internet voting election, voters can access their online ballot during the voting period from any computer, provided it is connected to the internet and the internet

⁴ A jurisdiction will transmit security credentials to electors on the voters' list by way of the voter notification card.

Within a one-step process: the voter uses the credentials to access a ballot during the voting period. Prior to accessing the ballot, however, the voter is normally asked to authenticate his or her identity by answering a question based on information contained in the voters' list.

Within a two-step process: the voter notification card credentials are used by the elector to complete an online registration process. At the time of registration, an elector may also be asked to answer additional questions to establish a personalized access code in order to help authenticate their identity prior to accessing the online ballot. Following registration, additional credentials are forwarded to the elector either by a secondary postal mail out or by way of email. The voter would then use both sets of credentials along with their personalized access code in order to validate their identity and access the online ballot during the voting period.

browser meets the minimum technical security requirements. Most products also allow voters to access ballots from their tablets or smart phones. Online ballots commonly mirror that of traditional paper ballots and must subscribe to legislated requirements with respect to formatting and appearance. Internet voting can be designed to fully verify voter intent by disallowing unintentional spoiled ballots and, if so desired, providing warning prompts in relation to offices which may be under-voted or left blank. Completion of an online ballot is similar to marking a hard copy ballot, voters simply click on the check box next to the candidate or selection of their choosing and navigate to vote for each office appearing on the ballot. Upon completion, the voter has an opportunity to review his/her selections and make changes. When the ballot has been submitted, the voting data is stored in a secure database and is not tabulated until the end of voting day. This database is designed to encrypt the voting data in order to ensure there is no way to link a voter with his/her ballot after the electronic ballot has been submitted. It can also be managed to restrict access to designated Election Officials.

Internet Voting Research

In 2003, the Town of Markham was the first major municipality (i.e. electorate of 50,000+) in North America to use remote Internet voting. Markham offered it again in 2006 along with 19 other municipalities. In 2010, the number of municipalities in Ontario to use Internet voting more than doubled (44), although there were several variations with respect to the way the method was made accessible to electors. Some municipalities such as Markham and Peterborough provided Internet voting as a complementary voting channel during the advance voting period. Others such as Burlington, Belleville, Brockton, and Prince Edward County provided Internet voting as a complementary channel during both the advance voting period and on voting day. The majority of municipalities that used Internet voting in 2010 employed the method of voting along with telephone voting. These municipalities were either geographically dispersed, had transient populations and/or consisted of an electorate of less than 20,000. Commonly, remote Internet voting is offered as a replacement to a vote-by-mail model due to decreased risks and increased efficiency for both voters and administrators.

Several major municipalities in Ontario have confirmed they will be using remote Internet voting in 2014. The [City of Cambridge](#) (population of 132,000) and the [City of Sudbury](#) (160,000) will be using Internet voting for the first-time as a complementary method to their paper-based, physical voting location model. The [Town of Ajax](#) (110,000) and the [City of Parry Sound](#) (60,000) will also be using Internet voting for the first time in 2014, however, their implementation fully replaces paper ballots with electronic ballots. Similar to the model employed by the City of Stratford in 2010, Parry Sound will only offer remote Internet voting. Ajax will offer a combination of remote Internet voting as well as electronic ballots which can be submitted at one of several physical voting places throughout the Town. More than 100 other municipalities in Ontario including Mississauga, Waterloo, Kingston, Thunder Bay and East Gwillimbury are also investigating the potential use of Internet voting in the upcoming election. Both [Elections Canada](#) and [Elections Ontario](#) have been actively exploring the prospect of implementing an online voting channel for a number of years and have since allocated resources to undertake a detailed investigation and feasibility review of doing so.

Of the municipalities who responded to a [2010 AMCTO survey](#), 30 noted use of the Internet as a complementary voting channel in the 2010 Municipal Election. Of

those respondents, 70% noted they were extremely satisfied, 26% were very satisfied and 4% were satisfied. None of the municipalities noted an unsatisfactory experience with any Internet voting product. To date, City staff have consulted with a number of these municipalities to discuss their experiences. These conversations support many of the documented advantages of Internet voting. The potential risks and limitations were also discussed. The following provides a high level description of both the advantages and the challenges associated with Internet voting:

Advantages of Internet Voting

- Designed to encourage participation from those who may be less inclined to visit a physical voting location in order to vote
- Provides an additional voting opportunities for students and vacationers who are unable to visit a voting place (ie. more convenient than voting proxies)
- Enhances accessibility and privacy for voters with disabilities
- Generates faster, more accurate results due to electronically automating tabulation
- Presents a “green” option for voting due to the reduced need to travel to and from a voting place and due to the potential decrease in printed ballots and materials

Challenges of Internet Voting

- Perception of security concerns and process vulnerabilities
- Voter authentication
- A loss of transparency in the traditional sense with reduced oversight of some components of the voting process by candidates and scrutineers
- Internet proliferation (ie. the availability of internet access in the community)
- Administrative work necessary to support initial use
- Costs to administer as a complementary channel (it can often be less costly than traditional methods when employed as a single voting channel)

Security of Internet Voting

Several concerns have been expressed with respect to the security of Internet voting vis-à-vis fraudulent activity. Distributed Denial of service (DDoS) attacks, trojan horses, viruses and website spoofing have all been identified as potential threats. Internet voting procedures established by municipalities address potential risks by employing both technical and process related security measures designed to support system administration and control user access. Technical protective measures such as firewalling, user authentication techniques, failover connectivity and server redundancy all decrease the likelihood and effectiveness of these threats. Proper testing and auditing throughout the various implementation phases also serves to protect the voting system from external threats. Internet voting platforms utilize the same stringent access methodologies and encryption principles which protect internet banking sites and Electronic Medical Records (EMR) systems. Although there have been documented cases of malicious attempts designed to comprise an online voting system, there are no known controverted elections resulting from the use of an Internet voting channel.

Some have also expressed concerns with respect whether online voting is the best model to protect voter privacy. Although unsubstantiated to date, allegations that Internet voting will increase instances of voter coercion have led jurisdictions like

Estonia⁵ to modify their Internet voting system to allow an elector to cast several online ballots with their final submission being tabulated as their only vote. The intent of this model is to address concerns regarding one family member exercising illegitimate and unlawful authority over another by compelling them to mark their ballot in a certain way. Conversely, agencies representing voters with disabilities allege that Internet voting is the only channel which allows for some voters with disabilities to completely mark a ballot, in private, without the assistance of a designated friend or Election Official.

Validating the identification of voters is another concern often noted. As a result, [voter authentication practices](#) commonly exist as part of any online voting system and can be customized to include use of personalized security questions, [CHAPTCHA challenges](#), and/or unique identification codes (eg. "vote-TANs"). There are also procedural controls in place to authenticate potential electors. For example, only electors on the voters' list receive credentials which can be used to register to vote and/or vote online. An individual may be added to the voters' list but first must validate their identity by submitting an acceptable form of personal identification to a designated Election Official. Notwithstanding the process to validate the voters' list and the various techniques⁶ noted above, it will always be more difficult to validate voters using an unsupervised voting method. That is not to say that supervised voting methods are infallible in this regard, only to suggest that the prospect for abuse is greater in relation to an unsupervised voting channel. That said, [Section 89](#) of the Act is applicable in that the legal responsibility of upholding the integrity of the voting process rests with the voters themselves.

Internet voting products have continued to develop in response to common concerns expressed about the technology or the associated processes. For example, some products have the capability to create ballot images representative of the online ballots which are submitted. These images are marked accordingly from a database consisting of thousands of hand-written "X's" rendering the ballot image indistinguishable from any hand marked ballot. If a manual recount is ordered, these images can then be physically produced and run through tabulators along with manually marked ballots. Some products also have the capacity to provide encrypted receipts to voters verifying that their online ballot was registered. Within such systems, voters receive a text string when submitting their online ballot which they can use to reconcile against a master list (usually posted to the jurisdiction's official website) to verify that the system had accepted and tallied their vote.

Prior to the 2006 election, the City of Markham retained Dr. Henry Kim, York University Associate Professor of Information Systems and Management Science, to complete a [risk analysis](#) of remote Internet voting in order to address the key technical and process related challenges. The results demonstrate that a traditional voting place based method of election involves less risk than an Internet voting method, however, the overall risk score associated with the latter is not considerably higher than the former. The results also demonstrated that the assumed risks of Internet voting were substantially lower than vote-by-mail, a method which has been more commonly used by municipalities in Ontario.

⁵ Has used Internet voting since 2005 at all levels of government as a complementary channel to traditional methods of voting. Estonia is also a reference model for 'anywhere voting' (voters can vote at the voting place of their choice) and the use of a government issued ID card which is used for voter identification.

⁶ Biometric authentication measures are also currently under development.

Regardless of the voting channel(s) used in an election, risk cannot be completely eliminated - it must be managed.

Voter Participation

Voter turnout in the City of Guelph over the last decade has been underwhelming. The average participation rate has variably decreased by nearly 11% from 2000 resulting in a 33.91% turnout in 2010. This is well below the AMCTO documented average of 46.7%. The average for Ontario municipalities in 2006 (38.6%)⁷ was much closer aligned to Guelph's average (39.76%), however, the 2000 and 2003 elections demonstrate greater discrepancies with the provincial municipal average. This variable decline in the City's voter participation seems a stark contrast to what has often been referred to as a community with an active citizenry.

In an effort to better understand this issue a telephone survey was conducted in May, 2013. The survey was designed by staff with support from Oracle Poll Research and by Nicole Goodman, PhD a political scientist research consultant. The intent was to collect data from Guelph electors in order to measure voter awareness, determine voting method preferences and assess barriers to participation among the electorate. A preliminary report was provided by Oracle Poll and a detailed analysis was completed by Dr. Goodman. When asked why they did not vote in the 2010 Guelph Municipal Election, nearly 60% of the respondents noted one of the following reasons:

1. *I didn't support any of the candidates (16%)*
2. *I didn't know the candidates platforms/policies (16%)*
3. *Didn't know it was happening (13%)*
4. *I don't care about / dislike politics (13%)*

In addition to those noted within the Guelph survey, there are a myriad of specific and sometimes interrelated factors⁸ that impact voter participation. One could arguably conclude, however, that the majority of reasons cited by Guelph electors relate to a lack of information made available in 2010. Clearly, some of this will need to be addressed by candidates in 2014 through their political campaigns, however, the City can also take a more active role in enhancing voter awareness through communications and outreach. To assist in this regard, a robust communications plan designed to support the 2014 Municipal Election will be developed. Although the details are still yet to be determined, the plan will focus on new and innovative ways to better inform the electorate at large as well engage underrepresented groups such as students and new residents.

Aside from a more active approach to voter engagement and communications, remote Internet voting has often been suggested to be a potential solution to address declining voter participation rates. Internet voting ultimately results in a question of trade-offs between risk and enhanced voting opportunity. Although there are inherent challenges in adopting unsupervised voting channels, there is also the potential to enhance voter accessibility beyond the status quo and create an environment with which voter participation may be increased. A pertinent and timely report entitled [A Comparative Assessment of Electronic Voting](#) written for

⁷ A weighted average sourced from the [2006 AMCTO Post-Election Survey](#)

⁸ Including voter apathy, voter fatigue, education, socioeconomic conditions, demographics, electorate population and geography, the profile of civic issues during an election year, the activity rate of candidate campaigns (often tied to the comprehension of candidate platforms), the level of competition between candidates, voting system accessibility, trust in elections as well as the government at large, the weather etc. etc.

Elections Canada by the [Strategic Knowledge Cluster Canada-Europe Transatlantic Dialogue](#), adeptly represents the balance between risk and opportunity:

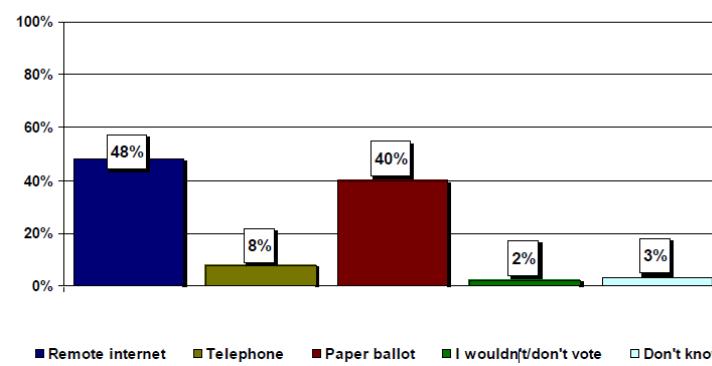
Careful examination of the literature on Internet voting as well as the pilot experiences of many jurisdictions suggests that both the extremely optimistic and pessimistic positions about the effects of Internet voting are overstated. Internet voting will not act as a panacea for the social causes responsible for electoral disengagement, nor will it remedy negative attitudes toward political entities. It will, however, increase voting opportunities for electors and make casting a vote more accessible. On the other side, Internet voting will not erode democracy or result in vote buying and election fraud any more than does the existing system.

The Elections Canada study clearly articulates that there is a need to conduct further research in order to better determine how Internet voting impacts voter participation. Any such research would also be used to build benchmarks to assist in the objective evaluation of the technology within the broader context of election service delivery. In order for this to occur, a greater number of jurisdictions will need to implement Internet voting and allow their program to be studied - a prospect which now appears more likely for 2014. To date, local jurisdictions in Ontario and Nova Scotia are being profiled as the leadership for Internet voting globally. The continued use of online voting to support the selection of political party leaders⁹ and union votes may also urge more to explore use. Furthermore, the documented examination and review of Internet voting will continue to assist others in their own implementation efforts – an [Issues Guide](#) and [Discussion Paper](#) developed as part of the City of Edmonton's review is case in point.

There has been [some research](#) conducted within Ontario specifically in relation to the impact of online voting in the City of Markham. This research points out that Markham's advance voting turnout rose by nearly 300% from 2000 to 2003 along with their use of remote Internet voting. The overall voter turnout, however, stayed relatively the same at 27%. Markham again used Internet voting as an early voting optional channel in 2006 and 2010. In 2006, overall voter turnout rose to 38% but then dropped again to 35.5% in 2010. [A review](#) undertaken with respect to the City of Peterborough, who also used remote Internet voting in 2006 and 2010, demonstrates a similar result in that overall turnout did not increase. It is important to note that both jurisdictions only used online voting during early voting periods.

According to a 2011 [survey](#) conducted by Elections Canada, 57% of non-voters said they would have voted had it been possible to do so over the Internet. This increased to 67% of non-voters between the ages of 18 to 24. Certainly those jurisdictions adopting the use of remote Internet voting are doing so to enhance the overall

"If the City of Guelph offered remote internet, telephone, and traditional paper ballots in the 2014 municipal election, I would be most likely to vote by: "



⁹ At the federal level in Canada, Internet voting was recently used to elect a Liberal leader and, before that, the leader of the NDP. Provincially, it was recently used as a method of voting to select leaders of the NDP in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and British Columbia, Liberal parties in Alberta, New Brunswick, and British Columbia, and the Alberta Party.

convenience of voting but also to engage youth who have traditionally been underrepresented. The Guelph survey reinforced these findings as 56% of respondents indicated that they would be more likely to participate if remote Internet voting were an option. Moreover, if online voting were offered as a complimentary channel in Guelph in 2014, respondents indicated that they would be more likely to vote online than in person at a voting place.

Final Thoughts

Remote Internet voting is an unsupervised form of voting, not unlike telephone and vote-by-mail which are currently used by approximately 33% of municipalities in Ontario. Municipalities using such methods are required to establish specific procedures to ensure that they are regulated and controlled to the highest possible degree. It is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to ensure the method of voting upholds the principles of the Act. It is the responsibility of the voter to ensure he or she does not contravene the provisions of the Act or compromise the integrity of the election process. [Section 49](#) provides that no person shall:

- *Interfere or attempt to interfere with an elector who is marking the ballot;*
- *Obtain or attempt to obtain, at a voting place, information about how an elector intends to vote or has voted; or*
- *Communicate any information obtained at a voting place about how an elector intends to vote or has voted.*

A contravention of any of the above noted provisions is subject to severe penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment or both. Some municipalities require voters to complete an online affidavit prior to voting online in order to confirm a commitment to upholding their responsibilities as an elector. This is a similar to a voting procedure which allows electors to vote at a voting place if they do not have an acceptable form of identification on their person. If evidence suggests a violation of the Act in any regard, the Returning Officer can take appropriate legal action.

Based on the practical research conducted to date and the composition of products currently available, the use of remote Internet voting as a complementary method does not seem to elevate risks beyond what is deemed to be acceptable vis-à-vis upholding the principles of the Act. In fact, the secured use of remote Internet voting serves to enhance and support many of the fundamental principles contained therein, most notably that *an election must be made accessible to all voters*.

Clearly, Internet voting cannot resolve some intrinsic problems which have been linked to the decline in voter turnout. Online voting does, however, offer a new way with which to potentially engage or re-engage underrepresented electors. Remote Internet voting aligns to what has been [referred to](#) as a *full transition to the use of technology within contemporary culture*. In the same way, it complements the Council approved [City of Guelph Open Government Framework](#) which establishes the foundations with which to encourage and embrace innovation, bolster transparency and accountability and leverage technology to better support civic participation. Although voting is only one aspect of community participation, it is an important one. Often referred to as the cornerstone of democracy, elections serve to reinforce the legitimacy of the political process. If nothing is done to correct the trending decline in participation, there is a real risk in eroding the public trust and bestowing an important civic duty upon a new generation of voters.