

Electronic voting coming to Mono in time for 2018 election

Mono Council has approved a proposal to adopt alternative voting methods for the municipal elections in 2018.

Presented to council Tuesday by CAO Mark Early, the proposal will see Mono move from the present paper ballot method of voting, to electronic voting, via the internet and telephones. Numerous municipalities across Canada and Ontario, have already moved to this modern form of vote-casting, with more and more coming onboard every year.

The basic procedure is very simple and presents many benefits to the Town and voters alike. Each registered voter is sent a one-time, single-use personal identification number (PIN) in the mail, which then entitles the recipient to cast an online ballot from anywhere and at any time during the voting period.

From the Town's point of view, the benefits are primarily financial, with the process requiring far less administration and staffing costs than the traditional paper-ballot, polling-station method. However there are further advantages as well. One such is the fact that voter turnout has been seen to increase, sometimes dramatically, when electronic voting is used. Because it does not require the voter to cast the ballot in a specific place and in a specific time frame, they can more easily exercise their civic responsibilities. Single parents, commuters, persons with disabilities and shut-ins, are all able to vote, conveniently, with the new system. The possibility of human error, during ballot collection and tallying, is completely eliminated, as is the necessity of arranging for physical structures for polling stations. Feedback to the Town and to the candidates is virtually constant, throughout the process also. For the voter, the primary advantage, is that of ease of casting their ballot. By no longer having to travel to a specific voting location, they are free to vote at anytime and from anywhere, throughout the designated voting time period. In Mono, this will likely be the two-week period, preceding and ending with election day.

Other area municipalities, including Guelph, Shelburne, Mulmur and Melancthon will be adopting the electronic voting method for their upcoming elections. Across Ontario, 97 municipalities took advantage of this option in their last electoral contests and many more can be expected to embrace the technology, with both Amaranth and East Garafraxa, considering this approach, for 2018.

The Town will still maintain certain designated polling stations where those voters who may be uncomfortable with the change, or with technology in general, may go and have staff walk them through the new process.

In other business Tuesday, Council again heard from Gary Murakami concerning the ongoing discussions about the use of 'bird bangers' or noise cannons, by the Adamo Winery, disturbing the neighbours, among them Mr. Murakami and his wife.

At a meeting last Friday, January 13, with the Adamos and the complainants, which was also attended by representatives of OMAFRA, it was indicated that the use of noise cannons, within a prescribed time of day, was in fact, a normal farming practice and therefore exempt from the Town's noise bylaw.

Mr. Murakami disagreed with this position, stating that at the very least, it contradicted the spirit of the noise by-law. Although the previous public forum dissolved into discord and was not overly constructive, Councillor Ralph Manktelow stated that the Adamos and two representatives of the neighbours are scheduled to meet again, in camera, in hopes of resolving the issue amicably.

The Credit Valley Conservation authority (CVCA) presented their 2017 budget to Council, outlining their many programs and accomplishments in the area as well as the problems with maintaining water levels in Island Lake, due to last season's drought and the obligation for the CVCA to allow water to be released to maintain water quality below the release of effluent from Orangeville's sewage treatment system. Indications are that if we experience another dry spring and summer, these issues will continue to affect activities on the lake and also the aquatic health of Island Lake,

The CVCA budget projections for 2017 show a marked increase in the financial obligations of the Town and this disturbed several councillors. Deputy Mayor Ken McGhee pointed out that although the Conservation Authorities Act provides for the CVCA to levy taxes on the municipalities within 'its' jurisdiction, those municipalities have a finite amount of funds available to them, based upon their assessed tax base.

This year, the levy increase for Mono is 10.47% and in subsequent years ending in 2019, the increases will be 4.1% and 9.4%. Mr. McGhee said these are unsustainable increases for Mono, especially, since Mono's levy increase was less than 2% to its ratepayers. Councillor Manktelow agreed, especially in light of the fact that Mono also is assessed a levy by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, which increased by 13% for 2017.

Council approved a motion by Councillor Manktelow that a letter be sent to the two conservation authorities stating that these levy increases are unsustainable and are out of step with municipal taxation bases.