

Alternative Voting Methods: Use of Optical Scan Tabulators, Marking Devices and Online Voting	City Clerk – Election Office
	Procedure No.: EO 26-007

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this procedure is to establish clear, consistent processes governing the use of Optical Scan Vote Tabulators (or “tabulators”), Accessible Ballot-Marking Devices, and online voting for the election, in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA). This procedure ensures the integrity, accuracy, secrecy, accessibility, and transparency of both voting and vote-counting processes.
- 1.2 This procedure has been developed in accordance with the principles of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, namely:
 - i. The secrecy and confidentiality of the voting process is paramount;
 - ii. The election shall be fair and non-biased;
 - iii. The election shall be accessible to the voters;
 - iv. The integrity of the process shall be maintained throughout the election;
 - v. There is to be certainty that the results of the election reflect the votes cast;
 - vi. Voters and candidates shall be treated fairly and consistently; and
 - vii. The proper majority vote governs by ensuring that valid votes are counted and invalid votes are rejected so far as reasonably possible.

2. Application

- 2.1 This procedure applies to all individuals involved in planning, administration, delivery, oversight and use of alternative voting methods. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - i. The City Clerk (Returning officer);
 - ii. Delegated election officials;
 - iii. Information Technology staff;
 - iv. Appointed service providers or vendors delivering alternative voting solutions;
 - v. Candidates and scrutineers; and
 - vi. Electors.

3. Legislative Authority

- 3.1 The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* authorizes the use of voting and vote-counting equipment, including voting machines, optical scan vote tabulators, and online

voting systems, provided that Council has enacted a by-law authorizing such use. Such a by-law applies to a regular election if passed on or before May 1 of the election year, and to a by-election if passed more than 60 days prior to Voting Day (MEA s. 42(1)(a), 42(2)(a)-(b)).

- 3.2 The City Clerk is responsible for the proper conduct of the municipal election in the City of Cambridge. In accordance with the MEA, the Clerk must establish procedures and forms governing the use of authorized voting and vote-counting equipment (MEA s. 12(1), 42(3)(a)(i), 42(4)).
- 3.3 The City Clerk has the authority to determine any matter or procedure not otherwise provided for in legislation, where, in their opinion, it is necessary or desirable for conducting the election (MEA s.12(1)).
- 3.4 The powers referenced above include the power to establish forms, including forms of oaths and statutory declarations, and the power to require their use (MEA s.12(2)).
- 3.5 The City Clerk may delegate any of their power and duties in relation to an election to any other election official, as they consider necessary (MEA s.15(2)).
- 3.6 Under Section 53 of the MEA, the City Clerk may declare an emergency if circumstances prevent the election from being conducted in accordance with the Act. The Clerk may then make any necessary arrangements for the conduct of the election, provided they are consistent with its principles. Such arrangements prevail over the Act until the emergency is declared over.

4. General

- 4.1 On April 14, 2026, Cambridge City Council passed By-law 26-042 authorizing the use of optical scan vote tabulators and online voting as alternative voting methods, and repealing By-law 21-092.
- 4.2 Any matter not addressed in this procedure shall be resolved, as far as practicable, in accordance with the principles of the MEA.
- 4.3 This procedure is subject to change and may be updated as required up to Voting Day (October 26, 2026). The most up-to-date version of this procedure will be available on the city's website.

5. Secrecy and Interference

- 5.1 The City Clerk and voting service providers shall ensure the secrecy of all ballots and voting processes.

- 5.2 No person shall interfere, or attempt to interfere, with an elector unless expressly requested and authorized by the elector.
- 5.3 No person shall attempt to obtain information regarding how an elector intends to vote or has voted. Election officials assisting electors must maintain strict confidentiality and act solely in accordance with the elector's instructions.

6. Pre-Testing Procedures

Preventative Maintenance

- 6.1 All optical scan vote tabulators, accessible ballot-marking devices, and online voting systems shall undergo preventative maintenance prior to the voting period.

Appearance of Ballots

Optical Scan Vote Tabulators

- 6.2 Each ballot shall include a designated marking space to the right of each candidate's name.
- 6.3 Ballot instructions shall direct electors to mark the space corresponding to their selected candidate.
- 6.4 Instructions shall be provided in both English and French.

Accessible Ballot-Marking Devices

- 6.5 Electors shall be provided with a ballot card for use with the accessible ballot-marking device.
- 6.6 The interface shall be accessible and intuitive, allowing voters to:
 - i. Select display preferences (e.g., colour, contrast)
 - ii. Choose language (English or French)
 - iii. Navigate one contest at a time
 - iv. Select candidates via clearly defined touch areas with visual confirmation
 - v. Review selections before finalizing
- 6.7 After confirmation, the voter shall print their ballot, which will include both a barcode and a readable summary of selections.

Online Voting

- 6.8 The online voting system shall:
 - i. Allow language selection

- ii. Present contests sequentially in a clear layout
- iii. Provide consistent navigation controls (e.g., “Next,” “Clear Selection”)
- iv. Offer visual confirmation of selections
- v. Include a full review screen prior to submission

Programming

Optical Scan Vote Tabulators

6.9 The optical scan vote tabulators shall be programmed so that:

- 6.9.1 A printed record of the results can be produced at the close of voting indicating the number of votes cast for each candidate or each answer to any by-law or question.
- 6.9.2 A ballot is returned to the designated election official if the tabulator determines that the ballot:
 - i. Has no votes in the space for marking the ballot;
 - ii. Has more votes in the space for marking a ballot than an elector is entitled to mark;
 - iii. Has less votes in the space for marking a ballot than an elector is entitled to mark; or
 - iv. Is damaged or defective or has been marked in such a way that it cannot be properly processed.

Accessible Ballot-Marking Devices

6.10 The accessible ballot-marking device shall be programmed so that:

- 6.10.1 Each inserted ballot is recognized by the device, enabling the voter to mark a selection(s) per office or a response to any by-law or question, as applicable; and
- 6.10.2 The elector is provided with the opportunity to review and confirm their selections for each office and any by-law or question prior to printing the ballot.

Online Voting

6.11 The online voting system shall be programmed to ensure that:

- 6.11.1 Voters are required to enter their assigned login credentials, including a unique identifier, PIN, and password, in order to access the online ballot;

6.11.2 Selection(s) may be made per office or a response to any by-law or question, as applicable; and

6.11.3 The elector is provided with the opportunity to review and confirm their selections for each office and any by-law or question prior to submitting the ballot.

Logic and Accuracy Testing

6.12 The City Clerk shall provide notice to candidates of the date, time, and location of the logic and accuracy testing.

6.13 Prior to Advance Vote and Voting Day, the City Clerk or designate shall:

6.13.1 Test each tabulator to ensure it accurately counts votes cast for each office and for each response to any by-law or question;

6.13.2 Test each accessible ballot-marking device to ensure it accurately records and marks selections for each office and for each response to any by-law or question; and

6.13.3 Test the online voting system to ensure it accurately records selections for each office and for each response to any by-law or question.

6.14 Any errors detected when testing the tabulators, accessible ballot-marking devices and online voting shall be identified and corrected, and the device(s) shall be tested again until the desired results are achieved.

6.15 Candidates will be permitted to view the logic and accuracy testing.

6.15.1 Candidates may appoint one scrutineer to observe the logic and accuracy testing and are responsible for informing the scrutineer of the date, time, and location of the testing.

6.15.2 Candidates and their appointed scrutineer may observe all testing activities from a designated viewing area.

6.15.3 Candidates and their scrutineer shall not:

- i. Enter restricted testing areas or approach workstations;
- ii. Touch or operate any equipment, test ballots, or related materials;
- iii. Interrupt, delay, or otherwise interfere with testing activities;
- iv. Photograph, record, or livestream testing or equipment;
- v. Access or attempt to access sensitive or secured information (e.g. seals, serial numbers, system data);

- vi. Handle or inspect test ballots, reports or related documents;
- vii. Engage in disruptive, aggressive, or confrontational behaviour;
- viii. Direct, instruct, or otherwise interfere with election staff;
- ix. Publicly share or disseminate misleading or inaccurate information regarding the testing process; or
- x. Permit unauthorized individuals to enter or remain within the testing area.

Completion of Testing

6.16 At the completion of the testing, the City Clerk or designate shall:

6.16.1 Clear all vote totals and produce a zero report for each optical scan vote tabulator and the online voting system, which will be made available for inspection and may be signed by a candidate or scrutineer;

6.16.2 In the case of optical scan vote tabulators and accessible ballot-marking devices, apply a security seal to the memory media compartment to ensure integrity; and

6.16.3 Securely store all optical scan vote tabulators, accessible ballot-marking devices, and testing laptops in a controlled environment until they are deployed for voting.

7. Voting Place Procedure

7.1 An optical scan vote tabulator shall be used in every voting place during advance vote and election day.

7.1.1 Except in retirement homes, long-term care facilities and hospital polling locations.

7.2 An accessible ballot-marking device shall be available at each advanced voting poll, in one poll in each ward on voting day, at each special voting location.

7.3 A tablet shall be available at each voting location and designated online voting help centre to assist voters with accessing and using the online voting system.

Candidates and Scrutineers

7.4 The roles and responsibilities of candidates and scrutineers at the voting place are established in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.

7.5 To protect the secrecy of the vote, candidates and scrutineers shall not accompany or assist an elector at the voting screen.

- 7.6 Candidates and scrutineers shall not examine or object to a ballot while it is being processed by the tabulator, nor shall they examine or object to an online ballot while an elector is in the process of casting their vote.

Zero Report

- 7.7 Prior to the opening of the voting place during Advance Voting, special location voting, or on Voting Day, the designated election official shall produce a zero report from the data stored on the optical scan vote tabulator's memory media. The zero report shall confirm that zero votes are recorded for each candidate and for each response to any by-law or question.
- 7.8 For advanced voting, the zero report will only be produced on the first day of advanced voting, as one tabulator will be used for all advanced voting locations.
- 7.8.1 Upon the beginning of voting for each subsequent advance vote day, a configuration report will be printed with the details of the tabulator, including the ward.
- 7.8.2 The zero report and any configuration reports shall remain affixed to the tabulator until the results are printed by the tabulator after the close of voting on election day.
- 7.9 For special locations, the zero report will be produced on the first day of advanced voting, as one tabulator will be used for all special locations.
- 7.10 For online voting, a zero report will be printed on the first day of advanced voting and available at that location for inspection.
- 7.11 Candidates or scrutineers may be present when the designated election official produces the zero report.
- 7.12 If the zero-report total is not zero for a candidate or for an answer to a by-law or question, the designated election official shall immediately notify the City Clerk and await further instructions.

Marking the Ballot

Paper Ballot with Optical Scan Vote Tabulators

- 7.13 A designated election official shall issue a ballot to an elector in a secrecy folder.
- 7.14 The elector will mark the ballot manually with the provided writing tool.
- 7.15 To mark the ballot, the elector shall vote by marking the space to the right of the candidate of their choice or for the answer to any by-law or question.

7.15.1 After marking the ballot, the elector shall place the ballot into the secrecy folder and proceed to the designated election official.

7.15.2 The designated election official shall feed the ballot into the tabulator in front of the elector.

Accessible Ballot-Marking Device

7.16 A designated election official shall issue a special ballot designed for the accessible ballot-marking device in a secrecy folder.

7.17 The elector will insert the ballot into the accessible ballot-marking device.

7.18 The elector will utilize either the touchscreen, audio-tactile keypad, sip-and-puff device, or rocker switch device.

7.19 To mark the ballot, the elector shall select the box with the name of the candidate of their choice or for the answer to any by-law or question.

7.19.1 After marking and printing the ballot, the elector shall place the ballot into the secrecy folder and proceed to the designated election official.

7.19.2 The designated election official shall feed the ballot into the tabulator in front of the elector.

Online Voting

7.20 Online voting may be completed using the elector's personal device, at a designated polling location, or at an Online Voting Help Centre using a provided tablet.

7.21 The elector shall access the voting system by entering their assigned login credentials, including a unique PIN and password.

7.22 To mark the ballot, the elector shall select the box corresponding to their chosen candidate or their response to any by-law or question.

7.23 Once the ballot has been completed, the elector shall review and submit their vote through the voting system.

Errors in Operation

Optical Scan Vote Tabulator

7.24 In the event that the tabulator ceases to operate during voting, the designated election official shall contact the Election team for support.

7.25 The designated election official shall proceed as follows:

- 7.25.1 Place all ballots, removed from the secrecy folder, directly into the auxiliary compartment in the presence of the elector.
- 7.25.2 Once the tabulator has been restored to operational status, resume inserting ballots into the tabulator.
- 7.25.3 Following the close of voting, open the auxiliary compartment and process all stored ballots through the tabulator, in the presence of any candidate or scrutineer in the poll, prior to generating the results.
- 7.26 If a tabulator that has ceased operating during voting is replaced, and the original memory media is functioning:
 - 7.26.1 The zero report shall be transferred to the replacement tabulator; and
 - 7.26.2 The designated election official shall process all ballots from the auxiliary compartment through the replacement tabulator, in the presence of any candidate or scrutineer in the poll, after the close of voting.
- 7.27 If the memory media of a tabulator that has ceased operating is not functioning and must be replaced during voting, the designated election official shall:
 - 7.27.1 Produce a new zero report; and
 - 7.27.2 Process all marked ballots, including those stored in the auxiliary compartment, through the tabulator, in the presence of any candidate or scrutineer in the poll, after the close of voting.

Accessible Ballot-Marking Device

- 7.28 In the event that an accessible ballot-marking device ceases to operate during voting, the designated election official shall contact the Election Team for support.
- 7.29 The designated election official shall continue to process electors by providing manual paper ballots or access to the online voting tablet, with assistance as required, until the accessible ballot-marking device is repaired or replaced.
- 7.30 Electors may also attend the City Hall polling location to use an accessible ballot-marking device if the device at the ward voting place is not operational.

Online Voting

- 7.31 In the event that an elector experiences difficulty accessing or using the online voting system, the Election Team shall serve as the first point of contact for assistance.

- 7.32 The designated election official shall assist electors with standard issues, including:
 - 7.32.1 Accessing the voting system, logging in, or credential-related concerns;
 - 7.32.2 Navigation of the voting process; and
 - 7.32.3 General inquiries related to casting a ballot.
- 7.33 Where an issue is identified that may impair an elector's ability to successfully cast a ballot, the designated election official shall escalate the matter to the voting system provider for resolution.
- 7.34 Where an issue is identified that disrupts or prevents the proper functioning of the online voting system, or where a system-wide issue may impact the integrity or proper conduct of the election, the designated election official shall immediately notify the City Clerk or designate. The City Clerk shall take all necessary steps to support system restoration and may, in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, declare an emergency if deemed necessary.

8. Closing the Voting Place

Advanced Voting

- 8.1 Each night of advance vote, after the close of voting, the designated election official shall
 - 8.1.1 Ensure any ballots in the auxiliary compartment are fed into the tabulator; and
 - 8.1.2 Ensure the tabulator and voter assist terminal are securely stored.
- 8.2 On the last night of advance vote, after the close of voting, the designated election official shall:
 - 8.2.1 Ensure any ballots in the auxiliary compartment are fed into the tabulator;
 - 8.2.2 Secure the tabulator until it is delivered to the City Clerk's designated location; and
 - 8.2.3 Return the ballot making device to its case to be securely stored until election day.
- 8.3 The City Clerk shall provide notice to candidates of the designated location and time where advance vote results will be generated.
- 8.4 The City Clerk's designated location:

- 8.4.1 The tabulator, with memory media, zero report and all subsequent reports, will remain sealed and intact and shall be store in a secure place until election day; and
- 8.4.2 The designated election official shall generate advance vote results after the close of voting on election day in accordance with section 8 of this procedure.

Special Locations and At-Home Voting

- 8.5 At the close of each special location and at-home voting, the designated election official shall:
 - 8.5.1 Ensure the ballot box is sealed, and that the seal is signed, dated, and time stamped;
 - 8.5.2 The designated election official shall ensure that the sealed box is transported to and stored in a secure location as directed by the City Clerk; and
 - 8.5.3 The sealed ballot box shall remain secured and unsealed until after the close of voting on Voting Day.
- 8.6 On Voting Day, all ballot boxes from special locations and at-home voting shall be delivered to the City Clerk's designated location for processing.
 - 8.6.1 Ballot boxes shall be opened, and all ballots shall be processed through a designated tabulator after the close of voting on Election Day; and
 - 8.6.2 The processing of ballot shall take place in the presence of scrutineers and candidates who are present.

Election Day

- 8.7 After the close of voting on election day, the designated election officials shall:
 - 8.7.1 Ensure any ballots in the auxiliary compartment are fed into the tabulator;
 - 8.7.2 Close the poll on the tabulator to produce two copies of the results report;
 - 8.7.3 Remove the memory media from the tabulator and deliver it to the City Clerk's designated location; and
 - 8.7.4 Pack the tabulator into the carrying case and wait for it to be pick-up before leaving the polling location.
- 8.8 If the results report does not print, the designated election official shall contact the Election Team for support.

Online Voting

- 8.9 After the close of online voting at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, October 26, 2026, the designated election official or system administrator shall:
- 8.9.1 Ensure that the online voting portal is closed to new logins;
 - 8.9.2 Permit any electors who have successfully logged into the voting portal prior to 8:00 p.m. to complete their voting session, provided it is completed within ten (10) minutes of the close of voting; and
 - 8.9.3 Secure the online voting system in accordance with the procedures established by the City Clerk.
- 8.10 In the event of any system error or failure in closing the online voting system or recording results, the designated election official shall notify the City Clerk.

9. Results

- 9.1 The results of all advanced voting, including internet and in-person, shall not be generated or made available prior to the close of voting at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
- 9.2 Following the close of voting, results from online and in-person voting shall be combined and reported as unofficial results.
- 9.3 Unofficial results shall be displayed at the City Clerk's designated location and posted on the City's official website.

10. Definitions

For the purposes of these procedures, the following definitions and abbreviations shall apply:

“Accessible Ballot-Marking Device” refers to is an assistive voting tool that allows electors to independently mark a paper ballot, which is then counted using an optical scan vote tabulator.

“Auxiliary Compartment” means the front compartment of the Tabulator Stand where Marked Ballots are temporarily stored in the event a Vote Tabulator fails to operate.

“Ballot” means a Ballot prepared under Subsections 41(2) and 41(6) of the Act.

“Ballot Box” means the secure container in which voted Ballots are deposited.

“Certified Candidate” is a person whose nomination has been certified under Section 35 of the Act.

“Declaration of Qualification” refers to the declaration eligible electors must take prior to voting via the internet; it confirms they are eligible to vote in Cambridge and advises them of the penalties prescribed by the MEA.

“Voting Location” is a specific, physical location designated by the Returning Officer in accordance with Section 45 of the Act for in-person, paper ballot voting.

“Disruption of Service” refers to an unlikely disconnection that an eligible voter may encounter during the online voting process. If a disruption of service occurs, the eligible voter must log back into the system and restart the voting process.

“Advanced Voting Period” refers to the period prior to Election Day, October 26, 2026, during which time an Eligible Voter may cast a ballot via the internet or an in-person paper ballot at a Designated Voting Location during specified dates and times.

“Election Official” refers to a person designated by the Returning Officer to assist in the conduct of City of Cambridge 2026 Municipal Election.

“Eligible Voter / Eligible Elector” is a person who, as of voting day, is: a) a resident of the City of Cambridge or the owner or tenant of land in the City of Cambridge, or the spouse of such owner or tenant; and, b) is a Canadian citizen; and, c) is at least 18 years old; and, d) is not otherwise prohibited from voting.

“Internet Voting” refers to the process by which an eligible voter casts their ballot via the internet. To vote online, an eligible voter must access the official election website using the required security credentials.

“Internet Voting Provider” refers to the vendor retained by the city to provide internet voting services.

“Mark” and **“Marked”** and **“Marks”** means any mark made in the designated voting space on a Ballot.

“Memory Media” means media that is removable, battery-sustained memory where all tabulated vote totals are stored for each Vote Tabulator.

“Office” refers to the race in which a candidate is registered to run as governed by the Act (i.e. Mayor, Regional Councillor, Ward Councillor, and School Board Trustee).

“Optical Scan Vote Tabulator” or **“Tabulator”** refers to a form of “vote counting equipment,” as defined in Ontario’s *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, that scans paper ballots, records voter selections, and electronically tabulates election results while preserving ballots for verification and recount purposes.

“Results Tape” means a paper record produced by each Vote Tabulator at the close of voting to show unofficial results for each Candidate.

“Returning Officer” means the City Clerk and the person appointed under the Act to preside over the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election for the City of Cambridge.

“Scrutineer” means a person appointed by a Certified Candidate in accordance with Section 16 of the Act.

“Secrecy Folder” means an apparatus in which a Ballot can be placed so as to conceal the names of the certified candidates and the marks made by the Eligible Voter upon the face of the Ballot but exposes the initials of the Election Official(s).

“Test Ballots” refers to a pre-audited group of Ballots on which are recorded a predetermined number of votes.

“Voting Day” means Monday, October 26, 2022.

“Vote Tabulator” means a machine that optically scans a Designated voting space on a Ballot to read vote(s), store information and tabulate results.

“Voters’ List” refers to the list of all eligible electors in the city prepared by Elections Ontario and revised by the Returning Officer for use in the 2026 Municipal Election.

“Voting Period” refers to the days on which votes can be cast in the 2026 Municipal Election.

“Voting Pin” refers to the personal alphanumeric code randomly generated by the city’s Internet Voting Provider. This code is used by an eligible voter during the voting period.

“Voting Provider” refers to the vendor retained by the city to assist with the delivery of the election.

“Voting Screen” means a physical barrier designed to provide privacy to an Eligible Voter while they mark the Ballot.

“Zero Totals Tape” refers to a paper record produced by each Vote Tabulator prior to the opening of a Designated Voting Location demonstrating that no votes have been cast for a Certified Candidate.

11. Legislation

Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, CHAPTER 32

12. Related Policies/Procedures

Procedure EO 26-008 Ballot Casting and Adjudication

Procedure EO 26-009 Recount

13. Revision History

Action	Date
Approved	May 2026
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