

ALTERNATE VOTING METHODS- ONLINE VOTING

1. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to explain the rules and process for online voting during the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Under Section 42 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the Act), the Clerk is authorized to establish procedures and forms for the use of alternative voting methods that do not require voters to attend a voting location in person.

Online voting, referred to interchangeably in this Procedure as “internet voting and having the same meaning throughout” was authorized by By-law No. 2026-018 under subsection 42(1)(b) of the Act.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 Clerk

The Clerk shall:

- Establish rules and procedures for the use of online voting;
- Ensure the integrity, security, and confidentiality of the voting process;
- Oversee the setup and testing of the online voting system;
- Ensure voters receive their Voter Information Letter (VIL) containing their online voting PIN;
- Monitor the operation of the voting system during the voting period; and
- Authorize the counting and release of election results.

2.2 Election Officials

Election officials shall:

- Help manage the online voting system;

- Support voters requiring assistance using the voting system; and maintain the confidentiality and security of election information.

2.3 Election Services Provider

The authorized election services provider shall:

- Provide and maintain the secure online voting platform;
- Ensure the system meets applicable security and encryption standards;
- Provide technical support during the voting period;
- Securely store and transmit voting data; and
- Provide audit and tabulation reports to the Clerk following the close of voting.

2.4 Electors

Voters are responsible for:

- Keeping their voting information safe;
- Voting prior to the close of voting; and
- Following the instructions in the Voter Information Letter (VIL).

3. Voting Period

Online advance voting will take place from:

October 5, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. to October 25, 2026 at 8:00 p.m.

Eligible voters may vote online 24 hours per day during this period.

At 8:00 p.m. on October 25, 2026, the online voting system will close automatically and no additional ballots will be accepted using this method.

4. Voter Notification

Prior to the start of the voting period, every eligible voter on the Preliminary List of Electors will receive a Voter Information Letter (VIL) by mail.

The VIL shall include:

- Information about voting methods and timelines;
- The official website address for online voting;
- A unique Personal Identification Number (PIN);
- Information about obtaining voting assistance; and
- Election dates and times.

The access credentials contained in the VIL are unique to each elector and are required to authenticate to access the online voting system.

All eligible voters will automatically receive access credentials. Voters do not need to choose their voting method in advance.

5. Voter Authentication

To access online voting, voters must first authenticate their identity using the voting credentials provided in their VIL. Voters must enter their assigned PIN and confirm their identity by providing their date of birth.

Authentication requirements will ensure that only eligible voters can access the electronic ballot. Once authentication is completed, the voter will be provided access to the electronic ballot corresponding to their school board. The system only permits one completed ballot per voter.

6. Casting an Online Ballot

To vote online, voters must:

1. Navigate to the online voting website using an internet-connected device.
2. Enter their voting credentials and complete the authentication process.
3. Access the electronic ballot.
4. Mark their voting selections by following the instructions.
5. Review their ballot prior to submission.
6. Submit the ballot electronically.

Once a ballot has been successfully submitted, the system records the vote and marks the voter as having voted on the electronic voters' list. The voter will immediately receive a confirmation code following the exit screen, confirming that their ballot has been successfully cast.

Voters may retain this confirmation code to verify that their vote was successfully submitted and recorded in the system. The confirmation code does not show how the person voted and does not compromise the secrecy of the ballot. Once the voter exits the screen, the confirmation code cannot be retrieved.

After submission, a ballot cannot be changed, retrieved or submitted again.

7. Voting Restrictions

A voter who has successfully voted online shall be recorded as having voted and cannot vote again using another voting method.

If a voter attempts to vote more than once, the system will prevent the submission of additional ballots.

If a voter who has already voted online attempts to vote in person, the electronic voters' list will show they have already voted. The system will alert the Election Officer, and another ballot shall not be issued.

7.1 Geofencing and Location-Based Access

The Clerk may implement location-based security measures for the online voting system, including geofencing, where deemed necessary to protect the security of the election.

Geofencing may be used to limit or restrict access to the online voting system from certain geographic locations or networks where potential security concerns have been identified.

Specific parameters and operational details relating to the use of geofencing or other location-based access controls may be developed in consultation with the election services provider and implemented in accordance with the technical capabilities of the voting system.

Further details regarding these measures will be established in consultation with the election services provider and shared prior to the commencement of the voting period.

8. Security and Integrity of the Voting System

The online voting system will utilize appropriate security safeguards to ensure the integrity of the election process, including:

- encrypted data transmission;
- secure authentication protocols;
- protection of voter anonymity and ballot secrecy;
- audit logs;
- secure storage of ballots and voting records until the legislated destruction timeline; and
- safeguards to prevent unauthorized access.

Only the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, and Manager of Information Technology (IT) will have access to the system's administrative functions.

9. Independent Security Testing

To ensure the integrity, reliability, and security of the online voting system, independent security testing shall be conducted by a qualified third-party cybersecurity firm.

The third-party firm shall perform comprehensive security and penetration testing of the online voting platform prior to the start of the voting period. This testing will assess the system for potential vulnerabilities, unauthorized access risks, and other cybersecurity threats that could impact the confidentiality, integrity, or availability of the voting system. Upon completion of the testing process, the third-party firm shall provide certification confirming that the system has undergone independent security testing and meets established cybersecurity standards. Copies of the certification will be provided to both the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the election services provider.

This independent testing process is being conducted in coordination with multiple municipalities utilizing the same online voting platform.

10. System Monitoring and Technical Support

During the voting period, the Clerk and designated election officials will monitor the online voting system to ensure its operating properly.

Technical support will also be available through the election services provider to address system issues that may arise during the voting period.

11. Voter Assistance

Staff from the Clerk's Office will be available at Town Hall during regular business hours (Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) to help voters during the online voting period, as well as staff at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Library located at 10 Anderson Lane (Monday – Thursday 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Friday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.)

Staff may assist voters with:

- accessing the online voting website;
- understanding the voting process and instructions;
- resolving login or authentication issues; and
- answering general questions about online voting.

Staff assistance will be limited to guidance and support only. Under no circumstances shall election officials view, influence, or mark a voter's ballot in order to preserve the secrecy and integrity of the vote. In addition, the election services provider will provide technical support to Clerk's staff throughout the voting period to address system-related issues or technical concerns that may arise. Where necessary, Clerk's staff may coordinate directly with the provider to resolve technical issues affecting voters. Voters who require assistance are encouraged to contact the Clerk's Office for support prior to the close of the voting period. Under no circumstances will the online voting period be extended if an elector has waited too long to obtain assistance.

12. Lost PIN / Replacement PIN

If a voter has misplaced or did not receive their voting credentials, replacement credentials may be issued upon request.

Administrative access to the voting system is restricted to authorized election officials, being the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, who are permitted to generate replacement credentials where appropriate. The Manager of IT also maintains administrative access to the system for technical support purposes; however, this access shall not be used to perform election-related functions or to administer voting services. Where a voter has provided an email address, replacement credentials may be issued electronically. If an email address is not available, authorized election officials may generate and download a PDF copy of the replacement credentials to be provided to the voter.

Prior to issuing replacement credentials, the voter must provide sufficient information to confirm their identity. This verification may occur through one of the following methods:

- In person: The voter may be required to provide acceptable identification confirming their name and qualifying address.
- By telephone or email: The elector must provide identifying information that can be verified against the voter's information on file.

Once new credentials are issued, the previously issued credentials are replaced and invalidated. For greater certainty, if a voter's credentials are obtained by another individual, the voting system requires the voter to provide additional identifying information in addition to the PIN in order to successfully cast a vote.

13. PIN Allocation

PIN credentials will initially be mailed to eligible voters via VILs.

Voters added to the voters' list after the VILs are mailed may receive new credentials from authorized election officials.

The issuance of credentials to voters added to the list after the initial distribution shall follow the same verification and credential replacement procedures outlined in Section 12 of this Procedure.

14. Close of Voting and Tabulation

The online voting system will automatically close at 8:00 p.m. on October 25, 2026. No further ballots will be accepted after this time.

Election results will not be accessed, printed, or released prior to the close of voting at 8:00 p.m. on October 26, 2026.

After voting closes, the Clerk or designate shall access the decrypted results file generated by the online voting system. The results will be communicated to the Clerk, who will incorporate the totals into the unofficial election results spreadsheet, which will be published and updated live for public viewing.

15. Scrutineers

The Clerk or designate shall be in the Council Chambers at Town Hall to generate the results tape from the advance voting locations and access the online voting results following the close of voting.

Scrutineers who have been properly appointed by a candidate will be permitted to attend and observe this process in the Council Chambers, provided they comply with all procedures established by the Clerk and do not interfere with the tabulation process.

Scrutineers shall not be permitted to enter the Clerk's Office. All observations of the tabulation process must occur within the Council Chambers.

16. Emergencies

If the Clerk determines that circumstances have arisen that may compromise the integrity or availability of the online voting system, the Clerk may declare an emergency under Section 53 of the Act and take any actions deemed necessary to preserve the integrity of the election.

Such actions may include, but are not limited to, temporarily suspending the online voting system, extending the voting period, or implementing alternative voting arrangements, where permitted under applicable legislation and election procedures.



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17. Record Retention

Election records relating to the online voting process shall be retained for the statutory retention period in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the Town's records retention by-law and records management practices.

Ballots cast through the online voting system will be securely retained by the election services provider until such time as the Clerk authorizes their destruction. All electronic voting records shall be maintained in a secure manner that preserves the confidentiality and integrity of the ballots.

June 1, 2026