

DATE: October 22, 2024

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Anticipated Election 2025 Costs
(Response to Request for Information #023)

ORIGINATOR: Karen Mills, Director Board and Superintendent Relations

**RESOURCE
STAFF:** Todd Burnstad

REFERENCE: [Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024](#)
[Local Authorities Election Act](#)
[Municipal Government Act](#)

ISSUE

At the October 8, 2024, Board meeting, Trustee Estabrooks requested the following information:

- Could administration please provide an update on the anticipated cost for EPSB for the 2025 municipal election given the news that the province will no longer allow electronic vote counters?
- What additional cost will maintaining a voter register incur upon the Division?
- Prior to the decision by the provincial government to count ballots manually, how much was the Division budgeting for the 2025 municipal elections?
- Was the school division consulted by the provincial government on these changes?
- What work is being done by administration to prepare for these anticipated budget implications?

BACKGROUND

The Division contracts the City of Edmonton (Edmonton Elections) as its election administrator. The Division has a cost sharing arrangement with Edmonton Elections in which the Division pays 29 per cent of total election costs for the costs associated with planning and delivering the elections for trustees.

Edmonton Elections provides a total election cost estimate to the Division four years in advance of the election and the Division allocates one quarter of the cost in each of the four years, rather than have the total cost come in a single year.

The total cost to the Division for the 2021 municipal election was \$1,633,322. Prior to the introduction of Bill 20, Edmonton Election's estimate for the Division's costs for the 2025 municipal election was \$3,563,407.65. This increase was due to the anticipated cost of upgrading the City's Election Logistics Management System (ELMS), purchasing the required tablets to enable efficient voting and communication with election central at voting stations, conducting a voter needs assessment and hiring key election staff earlier in the process given the increasing complexity of elections.

The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*, (formerly Bill 20) was introduced to the Legislative Assembly on April 25, 2024 and received Royal Assent on May 30, 2024. The Act will amend the:

- *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)*, which establishes the framework for the conduct of elections in Alberta municipalities, school divisions, irrigation districts and Metis Settlements
- *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*, which establishes the rules governing the conduct of local elected officials, as well as the overall administration and operation of municipal authorities in Alberta, including any policy those authorities may wish to implement

Attachment I provides an overview of changes proposed to the LAEA and MGA through the new legislation.

Most of the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act (Bill 20)* will come into force upon proclamation. Provisions that have property tax implications retain a January 1, 2025, coming into force date. Changes to the Division’s election bylaw, Bylaw 2020-2, in response to the new Act cannot be made until the Act is proclaimed. Proclamation is expected this fall.

CURRENT SITUATION

Edmonton Elections has analyzed the implications of available information, is adapting plans and preparing for the amendments to come into force to ensure the 2025 Edmonton Election is legislatively compliant. On October 2, 2024, Edmonton Elections presented Edmonton City Council with a detailed [update](#) on Bill 20’s cost implications. Edmonton Elections stated they are committed to finding cost savings wherever possible, but wanted to present realistic projections to Council. They shared that \$5.8 million of the total election budget is costs anticipated to be incurred as a result of Bill 20. The table below provides a summary of anticipated additional costs.

Anticipated Additional Edmonton Elections Costs for the 2025 Municipal Election as a Result of Bill 20

Impact Area	Anticipated additional costs
Automated Voting Equipment Prohibition	\$2,562,000
Permanent Electors Register	\$2,360,000
Special Ballot Expansion	\$371,000
Election Finance Changes, Candidates, Parties & Slates	\$863,000
Enhanced Election Support Structure*	\$829,000
Cost savings due to termination of the automated voting equipment vendor contract	(\$1,159,000)
Total additional cost	\$5,826,000

*Additional cost impacts related to complying with the broader amendments to the LAEA and managing the increased complexity of the Edmonton Election include additional core project team members to support more complex project planning, coordination and communications. There will also be an increase to the staffing and equipment required for the operation of the internal call centre that supports voting station operations during advance voting and on Election Day, as well as the reporting of results.

The greatest cost increases are a result of increased workers needed due to the prohibition on electronic tabulators and the requirement to create and maintain a permanent electors register. An estimate of the resources required is detailed in the table below.

Edmonton Elections Estimated Resource Requirements

	2021 Edmonton Election	2025 Service Package (approved 2022)	Bill 20 Impacts
Core Project Team	47 temporary project employees	43 temporary project employees	44 additional temporary project employees
Support Team	36 short-term (1-2 months)	51 short-term (1-2 months)	43 additional short-term employees (1-2 months)
Election Workers	3,520 Advance and Election Day workers (1 day to 2 weeks), including 30 count centre workers	3,000 Advance and Election Day workers (1 day to 2 weeks), including 30 count centre workers	1,230 additional Advance and Election Day workers (1 day to 2 weeks), all count centre and voting station count workers

Note that in addition to creating a need for more workers, the prohibition on electronic tabulators also results in increased costs because of the legislative requirements to use separate ballots and ballot boxes for each election—mayor, councillors, Catholic school board trustees and public school board trustees—which did not apply to elections conducted with automated voting equipment. The projected costs account for four times the number of ballots and ballot boxes as originally planned.

The Division was not consulted directly; however, all Albertans had the opportunity to provide input through an online survey. Targeted engagement sessions were also hosted by the government.

Edmonton Elections is currently estimating the cost to the Division for the 2025 municipal election at \$5,252,125.96.

Even though Bill 20 was being discussed in the spring of 2024, the anticipated increased election costs relate to the fall 2025 election, so no adjustment was made to the 2024-2025 budget but this increase will be included in the Distribution of Funds report related to the 2025-2026 school year.

Division staff are meeting monthly with Edmonton Elections staff to help ensure all efficiencies are found and no unexpected costs are incurred. The Division will also communicate the increased cost and its impact on our ability to maintain our administrative costs below the 3.2 per cent maximum threshold to the provincial government.

KEY POINTS

- The Division contracts the City of Edmonton (Edmonton Elections) as its election administrator and pays 29 per cent of total election costs for the costs associated with planning and delivering the elections for trustees.
- The total cost to the Division for the 2021 municipal election was \$1,633,322.
- Prior to the introduction of Bill 20, Edmonton Election's estimate for the Division's costs for the 2025 municipal election was \$3,563,407.65.
- The current anticipated total cost to the Division for the 2025 municipal election is \$5,252,125.96.
- Staff from the Division and Edmonton Elections are meeting monthly to help ensure all efficiencies are found and no unexpected costs are incurred.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I [Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act Change Summary](#)

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Bill 20 – *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* (AMENDED)

The proposed *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*, would make changes to two key pieces of municipal-related legislation: the *Local Authorities Elections Act (LAEA)* and the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*.

- The **LAEA** establishes the framework for the conduct of elections in Alberta municipalities, school divisions, irrigation districts, and Metis Settlements.
- The **MGA** establishes the rules governing the conduct of local elected officials once on council, as well as the overall administration and operation of municipal authorities in Alberta.

On May 23, 2024, amendments were tabled to more clearly outline the authorities to dismiss a councillor and repeal a bylaw.

Changes to local election rules under the LAEA

Proposed changes to the *LAEA* aim to add greater transparency to and trust in local election processes.

Description of Proposed Changes	Current Status
Align candidate eligibility criteria with councillor disqualification criteria in the <i>MGA</i> .	Candidates elected to council may face immediate disqualification due to misalignment with the <i>MGA</i> 's criteria.
Allow municipalities to require criminal record checks for candidates.	No provisions in place.
Allow union and corporate donations to local candidates, with the same donation limits as individual donors (\$5,000 per municipality per year).	Unions and corporations were prohibited from donating to municipal campaigns in the 2021 campaign.
Allow donations outside the local election year and require annual reporting of donations.	Donations outside of the campaign period (January 1 to December 31 in the year of a general election) were restricted to a maximum of \$5,000 per year.
Require third-party advertisers interested in plebiscites to register and report finances. Only Albertans, Alberta companies and Alberta unions can contribute to issues-based third-party advertisers, up to a maximum of \$5,000.	The <i>LAEA</i> only regulates third-party advertising for the promotion or opposition of a candidate during an election. There is no reference to issue-based advertising.
Limit donations to third party advertisers to \$5,000 per election period, which begins May 1 of the election year.	The current donation limit is \$30,000 for all individuals, unions, and corporations.
Enable regulation-making authority to define local political parties. This approach will be piloted in Calgary and Edmonton.	No provisions in place to regulate political parties at the local level.
Repeal the municipal authority to develop a voters list.	Municipalities can prepare a voters list, which must be shared with all candidates.
Require municipalities to use the most current provincial register of electors from Elections Alberta.	A permanent electors register is an internal document that assists with the conduct of an election. Municipalities can choose to develop one or not.
Expand the use of special ballots while strengthening special ballot processes.	Special ballots can only be requested for very specific reasons, including physical disability, absence from the municipality, or for municipal election workers.
Limit vouching to the ability to vouch for someone's address.	An elector can vouch for an individual's age, residence, and identity.
Repeal the ability for a candidate's official agent or scrutineer to object to an elector.	Candidate's official agents or scrutineers can object to an elector; however, the elector can still vote.
Enable regulation-making authority to postpone elections in emergencies.	No provisions in place to enable the Minister to postpone an election in the event of a natural disaster.

Prohibit automated voting equipment, such as electronic tabulators.	The <i>LAEA</i> permits municipalities, by bylaw, to process ballots by automated voting equipment.
Require recounts if requested by a candidate when the margin is within 0.5 percent of total votes.	Returning officers have discretion regarding recounts.
Clarifying rules and streamlining processes for scrutineers.	Concerns have been raised that the rules for scrutineers are not clear.

Strengthening the accountability of local councils under the *MGA*

Proposed changes to the *MGA* will help ensure local councils and elected officials are mindful of the common interests of Albertans and held to greater account by the citizens who elected them.

Description of Proposed Changes	Current Status
Require a councillor's seat to become vacant upon disqualification.	Municipal councils or electors can only remove a disqualified councillor through the courts if they refuse to vacate their seat.
Require mandatory orientation training for councillors.	Training for councillors must be offered, but there is no requirement for the councillor to attend the training.
AMENDED: Allow Cabinet to remove a councillor by ordering a vote of the electors to determine whether the councillor should be removed. An elector vote to remove a councillor is limited to councillors who Cabinet consider to be unwilling, unable, or refusing to do the job for which they were elected, or if Cabinet considers such a vote to be in the public interest by taking into consideration illegal or unethical behaviour by a councillor.	Minister can only remove a sitting councillor through the municipal inspection process and only under very specific circumstances.
Allow elected officials to recuse themselves for real or perceived conflicts of interest.	Elected officials can only recuse themselves for matters in which they have a financial interest.
Make the Minister responsible for validating municipal recall petitions.	A municipality's chief administrative officer is responsible for validating recall petitions.
AMENDED: Enable Cabinet to require a municipality to amend or repeal a bylaw given specific requirements are met that allow Cabinet to intervene (including: the bylaw exceeds the scope of the <i>MGA</i> or otherwise exceeds the authority granted to a municipality under the <i>MGA</i> or any other statute, conflicts with the <i>MGA</i> or any other statute, is contrary to provincial policy, or contravenes the Constitution of Canada.	Cabinet may only intervene with respect to a land use bylaw or statutory plan. No provisions exist.
Give Cabinet authority to direct a municipality to take specific action to protect public health and/or safety.	
Allow the Minister to outline joint use planning agreement criteria and requirements.	All criteria for these agreements are currently in the <i>MGA</i> .
Specify that the assessed person for an electric generation system is the operator.	There is a lack of clarity regarding who should be assessed for electrical generation systems.

Accelerating housing development under the *MGA*

Affordable and attainable housing has become one of the most urgent concerns across the country, and Alberta's government is constantly searching for innovative ways to meet this challenge, including new tools for municipalities to leverage under the *MGA*.

Description of Proposed Changes	Current Status
Require municipalities to offer digital options for public hearings on planning and development and restrict them from holding extra hearings when not required by legislation.	No requirements in place for digital options. Municipalities can hold extra hearings beyond what's legislated.

Description of Proposed Changes	Current Status
Fully exempt non-profit subsidized affordable housing from property taxation.	No provisions in place.
Enable multi-year residential property tax incentives.	Municipalities may offer multi-year incentives for non-residential development, but not residential development.
Limit the ability of municipalities to require non-statutory studies as requirements for building and development permits.	No provisions in place.

Next steps

Should the legislation pass, supporting regulations would be developed through stakeholder engagement with municipalities and other partners, which is expected to take place in late spring and summer of 2024. If passed, it is anticipated that the majority of the legislation would come into force upon proclamation. Provisions that have property tax implications retain a January 1, 2025, coming into force date.