

Report to Council



Date: November 24, 2025
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: 2026 General Local Election Voter Registration Procedure
Department: City Clerk

Recommendation:

THAT Council receive, for information, the report from the Office of the City Clerk dated November 24, 2025, respecting the 2026 general local election voter registration procedure;

AND THAT Council direct staff to bring forward amendments to Elector Registration Bylaw No. 10547 as set out in the report from the Office of the City Clerk dated November 24, 2025.

Purpose:

To consider changes to the voter registration procedure for general local elections and other voting opportunities.

Background:

In British Columbia, the statutory framework for local government elections is primarily found in Part 3 of the *Local Government Act*. The *Act* empowers local governments to determine, by bylaw, certain aspects of the election procedure that will apply within their boundaries. One important aspect of election procedure over which local governments have a degree of discretion is the procedure whereby individuals register to participate in an election as electors. In the City of Kelowna this procedure is governed by Elector Registration Bylaw No. 10547.

Discussion:

Staff approach the administration of local elections with a recognition that this work impacts the fundamental democratic rights of the residents of Kelowna. At each stage of the process of planning, organizing and conducting local elections staff remain focused on maximizing the following core principles: fairness, administrative efficiency, transparency, accessibility, integrity.

Under the *Act*, registering as an elector is a necessary precondition to exercising one's right to vote in a local election. The registration process serves to ensure that only those individuals entitled to vote in an

election are permitted to vote. The registration process involves confirming that an individual meets the requirements of either a resident elector or a non-resident property elector as set out in the Act.

The most fundamental decision for local governments to make via their elector registration bylaw is whether to allow individuals to complete the elector registration process in advance of or on voting day. With voting day-only registration, voters are required to show proof of identity and residency at the voting location when they arrive to cast their votes, and election officials are then required to verify that the individual has presented valid documentation and is a qualified elector.

The City of Kelowna has historically limited registration to voting day only. This approach has reduced the administrative complexity of preparing for local elections and allowed the City to avoid additional costs in some areas. With that, it generally results in a more complicated and time-consuming voting experience for both electors and election officials. It can also lead to confusion and frustration as individuals who live outside the municipal boundaries or are otherwise not qualified to vote nonetheless arrive at voting locations on voting day and attempt to register.

As an alternative to voting day-only registration, local governments may allow some form of advance registration. Advance registration requires the local government to provide for a publicly-available list of registered electors. Any individual whose name appears in the register may vote without the need to show multiple pieces of identification and proof of address, as these are confirmed at the time of registration. Individuals whose names do not appear in the register have the option to register on voting day at the voting location. Advance registration is thus optional and does not create a barrier to voting.

The required register of electors may be implemented in one of two forms:

- Option 1: The provincial voter list maintained by Elections BC is adopted as the register of resident electors. Any resident who is registered to vote in a provincial election is automatically included in this list. Residents who are not registered on the provincial voter list may do so at any time via the Elections BC website or through the various other means provided. Once the provincial voter list is formally adopted as the register of resident electors, any residents who have not yet registered will be required to register on voting day. For non-resident property electors, a separate register must be maintained by the local government.
- Option 2: The local government maintains a register of electors that includes both resident electors and non-resident property electors. The local government is required to make all necessary arrangements for the advance registration process. Residents who have not yet registered by the time at which advance registration closes must register on voting day.

Review of Comparator Local Governments

Recent statistics collected by the Local Government Management Association indicate that nearly half of all local governments in British Columbia continue to restrict elector registration to voting day only. However, the choice of registration procedure is strongly correlated with a community's overall size and number of electors, as larger communities are far more likely to provide for advance registration opportunities in one of the two forms outlined above.

As shown in the table below, among 13 comparator municipalities only two (Chilliwack and West Kelowna) limited elector registration to voting day only in 2022.

Local Government	Provincial Voter List	Voting-Day Registration Only
Abbotsford	X	
Burnaby	X	
Chilliwack		X
Coquitlam	X	
Delta	X	
Kelowna		X
Langley (Township)	X	
Nanaimo	X	
Penticton	X	
Richmond	X	
Saanich	X	
Surrey	X	
Victoria	X	
West Kelowna		X

Recommendation

Staff recommend that the Election Procedure Bylaw be amended to introduce advance elector registration for the 2026 general local election, with the provincial voters list to be used as the register of resident electors for the City of Kelowna. Staff have taken into account the five fundamental principles of election work in the following ways:

Fairness: Ensures that all voting opportunities are conducted in a manner that enables all eligible voters to register and vote successfully.

Administrative Efficiency: Allows for a more efficient voting process to take place at the voting location. Compared with maintaining a local register of electors, adopting the provincial voter list greatly reduces the administrative burden on City staff as Elections BC will perform many of the functions that would otherwise fall to the local government.

Transparency: Residents are able to quickly and effectively confirm their registration status and take any necessary steps to ensure that they can vote on voting day. Once the provincial voter list is adopted by bylaw, it becomes the register of electors for the City of Kelowna and is made available for public inspection.

Accessibility: Provides additional ways for residents to register in advance while also maintaining the option to register on voting day for those unable to register in advance. Many voters are already familiar with the provincial voter registration process through provincial elections. For a significant proportion of voters no additional registration procedures would be necessary, thereby reducing potential barriers to voting on voting day.

Integrity: The provincial voter list is administered by Elections BC, which provides a secure and thorough registration process. Advance registration helps to reduce uncertainty around who is and is not eligible

to vote, thereby helping to avoid situations in which individuals who are ineligible mistakenly attempt to vote on voting day.

Potential Next Steps

Shifting away voting-day registration only and adopting the provincial voter list has significant implications for the administration of the 2026 general local election. Should Council adopt the necessary amendments to the Elector Registration Bylaw, the following work will begin:

- Staff will review and revise the City's election procedures and manuals to implement the new process. Training resources for election officials will be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- Logistical arrangements will be made to facilitate use of the voter list at each voting location. This may involve the deployment of additional computer equipment and other technical resources.
- A communications plan will be implemented to ensure that residents are aware of the change and able to take any necessary steps to ensure they can vote successfully, such as registering with Elections BC well in advance of the formal adoption of the provincial voter list. This will form part of the City's overall communications plan leading up to the general local election.

Conclusion:

Staff are recommending this change to the elector registration procedure for local elections. Adoption of the provincial voter list is aligned with the fundamental principles underlying all election-related work at the City of Kelowna. Should Council direct staff to proceed, a draft amended Elector Registration Bylaw will be brought before Council for further consideration.

Internal Circulation:

Communications
Information Technology

Considerations applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority: Local Government Act, s 76

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements: Local Government Act, Division 4 — Electors and Registration of Electors

Existing Policy: Elector Registration Bylaw No. 10547

Financial/Budgetary Considerations: Budget for the 2026 election will be considered as part of the 2026 Preliminary Budget.

Communications Comments: The election communications plan will reflect the change in voter registration procedures to inform residents of the change and how to make sure they're registered.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Consultation and Engagement:

Submitted by: M. Jud, Deputy City Clerk

Approved for inclusion: L. Bentley, City Clerk