



OFFICE OF THE  
**City Auditor**

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# **2007 Municipal Election Report**

January 15, 2008

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The Office of the City Auditor conducted  
this project in accordance with the  
*International Standards for the  
Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*

# 2007 Municipal Election Report

## 1. Introduction

Municipal elections are the most public of the Office of the City Clerk's (OCC) responsibilities. Election planning is a complex process, requiring about two years of intensive effort by the Election Planning Team to ensure that Election Day proceeds as smoothly as possible.

For the past seven elections, the OCC has asked the Office of the City Auditor (OCA) to participate on the Election Planning Team and to conduct field observations during Election Day. As part of the Election Planning Team, we provide control and process-related input throughout the election planning process.

During Election Day (October 15, 2007), 10 auditors visited 89 of the 289 voting stations (31%) to observe the voting process and provide feedback to the OCC on the overall integrity of the election process. In addition, we also observed the consolidation of results at the end of Election Day at three Remote Accumulation Sites and at Election Central.

## 2. Objectives

Our primary objectives as a member of the 2007 Municipal Election team were:

- To provide assurance that the 2007 Municipal Election planning and execution were conducted in a manner that ensures the accuracy and auditability of the vote.
- To assess compliance with election procedures as outlined in the *Presiding Deputy and Assistant Deputy Reference Guide*.

## 3. Criteria

The election process is managed in an efficient and effective way and public confidence in the elections process is achieved when the following criteria are successfully met:

- The election planning process addresses issues and potential issues that could impact the effectiveness, accuracy or auditability of the voting process.
- The election is carried out in a manner that ensures the accuracy and auditability of the vote.
- Reporting the results of the election is conducted in a timely, accurate, and auditable manner.

## 4. Observations and Recommendations

Overall, the 2007 Municipal Election ran very smoothly. The most significant process changes in the 2007 Municipal Election were the requirement for voter identification and the use of mail-in ballots. In order to vote, voters had to provide identification that confirmed their age and identity. For the first time, the City of Edmonton also offered mail-in ballots to individuals who were unable to vote at an advance voting station or at their voting station on Election Day. There were no significant issues with the implementation of voter identification or mail-in ballots.

We also assisted the OCC in the 2007 Municipal Election by providing staff to assist in quality assurance testing. This testing was performed before, during and after the election to ensure that the integrity of the election process was maintained through out the election.

Below, we outline some areas of accomplishment and four recommendations to further improve election processes.

### 4.1. Election Planning

The Election Planning Team, led by the OCC, is charged with planning, staffing, and organizing for each municipal election. Between advance polls; institutional, hospital, and at-home polls; and neighbourhood polls, the City of Edmonton had 289 voting station teams operating for the 2007 Municipal Election. Total voter turnout for the election was 152,576, which was approximately 27 percent of eligible voters. This was the lowest voter turnout since 1980 when approximately 21 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. In the previous municipal election (2004), approximately 42 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot.

Over 3,200 individuals worked on the 2007 election. In order to conduct all required electoral activities within strict time limits, significant pre-election organization preparations must occur. This includes being sensitive and responsive to making sure all applicable laws are followed, providing crisis communication and media relations training, and appointing, training and supervising the election staff. It was the responsibility of the Election Planning Team to ensure that all staff employed to work on the election had the necessary resources and training to effectively perform their responsibilities for the election. These resources included producing a reference manual that sets out the procedures to be followed for each of the Election positions during an election.

We believe that the 2007 Municipal Election planning was thorough and was instrumental in ensuring an efficient and effective Election Day.

### 4.2. Election Training

As is normal on election days, voting station and other election staff displayed varying degrees of familiarity with the defined processes. Overall, training seemed to be less of an issue than for some previous elections, with few observed anomalies. With over

3,200 people (most of them temporary one-day workers) involved in conducting the election, some degree of variability in staff members' abilities to carry out their responsibilities as planned is unavoidable. Most of the people who staff the voting stations are hired only for Election Day. Those in charge of the voting stations receive three to four hours of training. Those in charge of the ballots and of ballot boxes receive approximately two hours training. Other voting station personnel receive their training before the voting stations open on the morning of the election from the Presiding Deputy and Assistant Presiding Deputy.

Given that Alberta municipal elections are three years apart, even experienced election workers cannot be expected to remember the details of setting up and operating a voting station. We believe that relatively small changes to existing training courses could enhance workers' comprehension of approved election processes. We believe that election training courses for Area Supervisors, Presiding Deputies, Assistant Presiding Deputies, and Ballot Box Clerks should be enhanced to incorporate hands-on sessions of the entire process.

There are several issues that arise during the course of a typical Election Day. For example, voting machines may not be set up properly or may experience technical failure, media may want to enter a voting station to take photographs or video of the process, or individuals may be disruptive in a voting station. Most of the issues that can arise during Election Day have been experienced in the past and contingency plans are understood by those who have gained experience over several elections. However, those processes are not clearly documented or well-understood by most of the people working in the voting stations. The current training and reference guides provide good descriptions of several of the potential issues that may be encountered. However, our observations in voting stations where issues occurred indicate that the issue resolution processes are not well-understood.

As part of the hands-on training sessions, we also believe that scripts that outline troubleshooting solutions should be developed for individuals who are working in Election Central (the primary trouble call centre on Election Day) and the Information Technology call centre so that infrequently encountered, but predictable issues can be managed more effectively. This process should also ensure that the Presiding Deputies in those stations that experience issues will have added assurance that the resolution processes are effective.

It is expected that the OCC will encounter new issues during every election. We recognize that it is not practical to develop contingency plans for all possible issues. However, we also believe that the OCC should develop documented contingency plans to ensure that commonly encountered issues are managed consistently from one election to the next.

**Recommendation 1**

The OCA recommends that the Office of the City Clerk incorporate hands-on training scenarios into training sessions for Area Supervisors, Presiding Deputies, Assistant Presiding Deputies, Ballot Clerks, and Ballot Box Clerks to better prepare those workers for situations they may encounter on Election Day.

**Management Response and Action Plan****Accepted**

Comments: We agree that hands-on training will assist individuals in understanding their responsibilities. With the limited time available for training, we will select one or two hands-on experiences that we feel will be of most assistance to each position.

Planned Implementation: To be implemented for the 2010 election.

Responsible Party: Office of the City Clerk

**Recommendation 2**

The OCA recommends that the OCC develop contingency plans to ensure that commonly encountered issues are managed consistently from one election to the next.

**Management Response and Action Plan****Accepted**

Comments: The OCC has attempted to do this for predictable issues in previous elections. We certainly expect to compile contingency plans for such situations for the next election.

Planned Implementation: To be implemented for the 2010 election.

Responsible Party: Office of the City Clerk

### 4.3. Process Matters

As indicated previously, overall the election process went very smoothly on Election Day. We believe that a few changes to processes have the potential to further enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall election process.

The City operated 289 advance voting, hospital and institutional voting, and neighbourhood voting stations for this election. The number of voters at voting stations vary widely, with some voting stations very busy while others had few voters. One voting station (#137) had zero ballots cast on election day, while Voting Station #529 had the most ballots cast (1,520). The current process of establishing neighbourhood voting stations is designed to provide voting stations in locations that are in close proximity to voters' residences. To increase staffing efficiency, we believe that the OCC should consider combining some of the voting stations with low voter turnout. We believe there is an opportunity to combine voting stations that have multiple stations in one facility/location or voting stations that are immediately adjacent to one another.

**Recommendation 3**

The OCA recommends that the OCC evaluate opportunities to combine voting stations to both increase voter accessibility and to increase staffing efficiencies.

**Management Response and Action Plan****Accepted**

Comments: We will review the number of voting stations for future elections and will determine if some of them can be eliminated while still maintaining convenient locations for voters. The prospect of higher voter turnout must also be considered in amalgamation decisions. Combining two polls that are in one location will be done provided the facility can manage the expected number of voters.

Planned Implementation: To be implemented for the 2010 election.

Responsible Party: Office of the City Clerk

#### 4.4. Supply Matters

One of the most consuming tasks associated with elections is supply distribution. Voting stations require a large variety of supplies that have to be ordered, allocated to each station, packaged for distribution, distributed, and finally returned to the ward offices or the warehouse at the end of Election Day. The OCC has established methodologies that ensure that the proper supplies arrive at each station and are returned to designated collection points. Few supply problems were reported this election and those that did occur were resolved in a timely manner. Based on our observations, we believe that some relatively small changes to supply materials and processes could even further enhance the supply management process.

While the voting stations are open, improperly marked ballots generate an error message on the ballot reader, the ballot is marked “spoiled,” and the voter is given a new ballot to mark. There were several voting stations that had to use auxiliary ballot boxes<sup>1</sup> this year because of temporary problems with the ballot reader. This process is well-defined and presents few difficulties. After the voting station closes, any ballots in the auxiliary ballot box are fed through the ballot reader. This process is typically overseen by an OCC staff member, an auditor, or an Area Supervisor. When ballots are removed from the auxiliary ballot box to be fed into the ballot reader, improperly marked ballots that are not readable by the machine are often observed, but the voter’s intent is obvious. Since the voting station is closed when auxiliary ballots are fed into the ballot reader, the process includes procedures for transcribing improperly marked ballots. In those instances where the voter’s intention is clear but the ballot is rejected by the ballot reader, the voted ballot is marked with a “serial number,” the votes are copied onto a new ballot which is fed into the machine, and the original ballot is marked “spoiled” and placed in the “spoiled” ballot envelope.

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<sup>1</sup> Auxiliary ballot boxes are boxes used to collect ballots at a voting station when the ballot reader is not working properly.

We believe that some changes to the demonstration “ballots” that are used in voting stations could reduce the frequency with which ballots are marked improperly (marking with an ‘x,’ circling the candidate name, etc.). For example, changing the demonstration “ballots” from small pads displaying two broken arrows to forms that more closely resemble the top portions of actual ballots might result in fewer spoiled ballots.

In every election there are voters who arrive at the wrong voting station. In some cases, they may have visited more than one station before finding their “home” voting station. Several voting station staff indicated to our auditors that their maps were not sufficiently detailed to allow them to redirect voters to the correct voting station. Although the “Where to Vote” phone line was available, voters who arrived at the wrong station didn’t typically access that resource. Increasing the level of detail on the maps provided to the voting stations may alleviate at least some of the frustration those voters experienced.

One of the issues that arose this year was that even when facilities and site supplies had been booked well in advance, some of these facilities were either not available when needed or the supplies at the site (table and chairs) were not suitable for voting station workers or the public (e.g., splintered table tops). The OCC has indicated that they are already working with organizations and suppliers to resolve these issues.

In addition to the ballots, there are a relatively large number of forms required for each election. Some of them are legislated in appearance, but most of them are City-designed forms. We believe that there is opportunity to reduce the likelihood of misuse of forms by clearly labelling them with the position(s) responsible for the form and the form’s application (e.g., change the title of the “Auxiliary Tally Sheet” to “Auxiliary Ballot Tally Sheet” and identify the Ballot Box Clerk as the person responsible for the form).

Although there were few incomplete supply packages this year, the process could be further enhanced. The current practice is to order all the supplies that are required for the election, store those supplies in the warehouse, and then assemble the supplies by voting station for distribution to the Presiding Deputies and the Ballot Box Clerks. Having voting station supplies pre-packaged by position could reduce the stress associated with opening voting stations. It may even be possible to reduce the complexity of the supply management process by ordering pre-packaged supplies directly from the printer.

**Recommendation 4**

The OCA recommends that the OCC make the following changes to the supply management process for the 2010 Municipal Election:

- change the demonstration ballots to more closely resemble the actual ballots
- provide greater detail on the ward maps
- label the election forms to indicate position(s) responsible and the form's application
- pre-package voting station supplies by positions

**Management Response and Action Plan****Accepted**

Comments: Opening and managing the polls on Election Day should be easier once we implement these recommendations.

Planned Implementation: To be implemented for the 2010 election.

Responsible Party: Office of the City Clerk

**4.5. Other Considerations**

The number of problems with ballot tabulators this year was high, with seven percent of all tabulators experiencing either machine failure or memory card failure on Election Day. There were several other "machine problems" that were actually setup or operational issues that may be substantially resolved with hands-on training. The OCC intends to move the IT call centre into the same location as Election Central for the 2010 Municipal Election to reduce the time required to resolve ballot reader issues.

The OCC undertakes a number of tasks to make voting more accessible and to help voters to be more informed about the election. These initiatives include: sponsoring candidate forums; providing where-to-vote cards; significant advertising efforts and coordinated media campaigns; hosting advance polls; offering at-home voting; providing polls at seniors' residences and hospitals; mail-in voting; ensuring all voting stations are accessible to persons with disabilities; and ensuring that the blind and visually impaired voters can vote unassisted at advance polls. All these initiatives are provided to assist voters with casting their ballots.

As another potential future initiative, we are encouraged that the OCC is monitoring the use of online voting in other municipalities. A survey conducted in 2006 by Delvinia Interactive suggested that a large majority of residents living in the Greater Toronto area would rather vote online if this method was offered in municipal elections. The town of Markham, Ontario became the first major municipality in Canada to pilot the implementation of internet voting for the 2003 municipal election and continued with this process in its 2006 municipal election. While voter turnout has yet to significantly increase in Markham, in our opinion, the internet as a voting tool is an option that needs to be closely monitored by the OCC. Obviously, the goal of internet voting would be to encourage new and disenfranchised voters. The lack of a paper or an audit trail that provides security is an issue that cannot be overlooked. The OCC will need to assess

the impact on voter turnout with the issues of voter authentication, service delivery, efficiency, security and accessibility in any review of online voting.

## 5. Conclusions

The 2007 Municipal Election once again demonstrated the benefits of comprehensive planning and preparation. Our observations of the processes leading up to the election and the manner in which Election Day was managed allow us to provide the assurance that this election was conducted in a fair and effective manner.

Through our involvement in planning, logic and accuracy testing of the ballot readers, oversight of the election reporting system, and participation in resolution of anomalies, we are able to provide assurance that the municipal election was conducted in an accurate manner.

In conclusion, we are pleased to report that the 2007 Municipal Election was conducted in a fair, democratic, and open manner. There were no anomalies observed either in the process or on Election Day that would call any of the election results into question.