

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

Recommendation

That the October 2, 2024, Office of the City Clerk report OCC02658, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG. ACCESS.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	Edmonton School Division (Edmonton Public Schools) Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 8, 2024, OCC02492, Bill 20 Update 		

Executive Summary

- The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* (Bill 20) significantly amends the *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)*, which regulates municipal and school board election procedures including election financing, candidate nominations, voting processes and the counting of votes.
- This report outlines the legislative framework for election administration, provides additional information on the impact of Bill 20 on the planning and operations of the 2025 Edmonton Election and outlines anticipated additional financial costs that result because of these changes.

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

- The City of Edmonton's net budget requirement is estimated to be \$12.4 million for each four year Election cycle, which equates to \$3.1 million annually (Attachment 2).
- Edmonton Elections has a cost sharing arrangement with both the Edmonton Public School District (29%) and Edmonton Catholic Separate School District (11%) for the costs associated with planning and delivering their elections for trustees.

REPORT

This report sets out the legislative election framework, provides an overview of the amendments made to the *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)* by the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 20)* and details its anticipated impact on the planning, delivery and budget of the 2025 Edmonton Election.

Edmonton Elections

Edmonton Elections is the non-partisan unit within the Office of the City Clerk that plans and executes the Edmonton General Election (Edmonton Election) on behalf of the City of Edmonton, Edmonton School Division (Edmonton Public School Board) and Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division. Edmonton Elections administers the Edmonton Election in full compliance with all legislative requirements and uses the following principles to guide all major decisions to ensure Edmontonians have confidence in easily accessible electoral processes:

- **Accessible:** All Edmontonians are able to access the services, supports and information they need to trust and participate in civic processes.
- **Inclusive:** All Edmontonians are able to participate in civic processes.
- **Equitable:** Barriers to services, supports and information will be removed, enabling all Edmontonians to see themselves represented in the outcome of civic processes.
- **Ethical:** Edmonton Elections will maintain the highest standard of ethics at all times, and ethics will be a primary focus for all decisions and activities.
- **Safe:** All participants will be able to safely engage with civic processes, following all health and safety protocols.

Election Framework and Authorities

The legislative and planning framework for the Edmonton Election is multilayered. The overarching legislative framework comes from the *Municipal Government Act*, the *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)* and the *Education Act*.

In the 2025 Edmonton Election, voters will elect:

- One Mayor
- One Councillor per ward
- One Trustee per Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division ward
- One Trustee per Edmonton School Division (Edmonton Public School Board) ward

As was the case for the 2021 Edmonton Election, a provincial senate nominee election and/or referendum vote may be held in conjunction with local elections in Alberta. There is also legislative possibilities for a municipal or school board vote on a bylaw or question. At this time,

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

there are no additional votes anticipated to be held in conjunction with the 2025 Edmonton Election nor considered in the estimates within this report.

Based on the framework established in the *LAEA*, the City of Edmonton appoints and delegates authorities for the conduct of elections to the returning officer and substitute returning officer, and establishes procedures in Bylaw 19457 - Elections Bylaw.

The City of Edmonton has agreements with the Edmonton School Division and the Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division to act as the election administrator for all three elections until December 31, 2026. These are cost-sharing agreements under which the Edmonton School Division and Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division reimburse the City for 29 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, of the costs.

2024 Amendments to the *Local Authorities Election Act*

The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* (Bill 20) received royal assent on May 30, 2024 and will come into force on proclamation, which is anticipated to occur in fall 2024. The amendments made to the *LAEA* by this legislation will impact the operational implementation of the 2025 Edmonton Election. These amendments include:

- The prohibition on automated voting equipment (voting tabulators).
- The requirement for the returning officer to conduct a recount, at the request of the second place candidate, if the margin of victory is within a 0.5 per cent threshold.
- The mandatory implementation of a permanent electors register using information contained in the provincial register of electors, supplemented by information obtained and maintained by the municipality.
- More complex requirements for electors to prove their eligibility:
 - Identification requirements will now vary depending on whether or not the elector is on the permanent electors register.
 - Vouching is limited to the ability to vouch for an elector's address.
 - Alberta driver's licences and identification cards containing post office box addresses are now acceptable.
- Expanded special (mail in) ballot eligibility and the implementation of new special ballot voter registration and verification processes.
- New requirements for individuals to submit their notice of intent to run before raising or spending campaign funds, and for local authorities to maintain a public register of candidates.
- The expansion of the campaign period to four years and implementation of annual reporting requirements for all candidates who have declared their notice of intent to run.
- New requirements for local authorities to redact certain personal information before releasing candidate nomination papers and financial disclosures.
- New option for local jurisdictions to require, by bylaw, candidate nominations to be accompanied by a criminal record check.
- The expansion of the third party advertising definition to include taking a position on a vote on a bylaw or question.

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

- The introduction of political parties and slates of candidates, where enabled by regulation. The provincial government has indicated that this approach will be piloted in Edmonton and Calgary.
- New ministerial powers to extend or adjourn voting times in the event of an emergency.

Edmonton Elections participated in four engagement sessions between July 9 and August 8, 2024 regarding the development of regulations to support Bill 20's implementation. Municipal Affairs indicated during these sessions that the associated regulations will be released in fall 2024, and that Bill 20 will be proclaimed in force at that time.

Analysis of Impacts on the 2025 Edmonton Election

Since the introduction of Bill 20 in April 2024, Edmonton Elections has been working to analyze the details, adapt plans and prepare for the LAEA amendments to come into force to ensure that the 2025 Edmonton Election is legislatively compliant.

While the amendments to the LAEA will impact all operational aspects of the 2025 Edmonton Election, the following legislative changes are projected to have notable cost impacts. Attachment 1 provides more detail.

Automated Voting Equipment Prohibition

Automated voting equipment has been used to count ballots in Edmonton elections for more than two decades. The prohibition on its use requires an increased number of election workers to conduct the ballot count at voting stations and the count centre on election night, and to conduct any potential recounts that may be required. The current projection indicates that in order to ensure efficient counting of votes on election night, an additional 1,230 advance and election day workers will need to be hired. The costs for recruiting and training election workers will also increase, as will rental costs for the count centre, as a larger space than the facilities previously used will be required to accommodate the hand counting of advance, institutional and special ballots.

Increased costs are associated with the legislative requirements to use separate ballots and ballot boxes for each election—mayor, councillors and 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.

Cost Category	2025 One-time & Ongoing Costs (\$000)	2026 Ongoing Costs (\$000)
Contracts	\$0	\$0
Labour	\$1,803	\$0
Material & Equipment	\$701	\$0
Services	\$58	\$0
Total Additional Costs	\$2,562	\$0

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

Permanent Electors Register

Municipalities are now required to implement and maintain a permanent electors register and to align the data with Elections Alberta’s register of electors. The current Elections Logistics Management System (ELMS) needs to be upgraded to accommodate the creation and maintenance of a new register. Costs associated with the development of the register include the staff and technology necessary to upgrade and integrate the additional module(s) and to facilitate data sharing with Elections Alberta. Ongoing costs relate to the management and maintenance of the permanent electors register between elections.

New systems and processes will be required to process voter registrations and integrate the permanent electors register with voting processes. Conducting a pre-election voter registration campaign will require additional call centre capacity, as well as additional advertising and printed materials to engage in voter outreach. The number of voter information cards will increase from approximately 400,000 in 2021 to 640,000 in 2025. This increase in number is a result of the requirement to be printed and mailed to each registered voter rather than each residential address. There will also impact printing and postage costs.

Cost Category	2025 One-time & Ongoing Costs (\$000)	2026 Ongoing Costs (\$000)
Contracts	\$0	\$150
Labour	\$1091	\$448
Material & Equipment	\$352	\$0
Services	\$319	\$0
Total Additional Costs	\$1,762	\$598

Expansion of and Changes to Special Ballots

Removing the eligibility limitations for special ballots is expected to increase the number of electors voting by special ballot. This will increase printing and postage costs, and will require additional staff to process requests for special ballots.

In addition, more staff will be required to implement the new processes for receiving completed special ballot packages and verifying special ballot voters.

Cost Category	2025 One-time & Ongoing Costs (\$000)	2026 Ongoing Costs (\$000)
Contracts	\$0	\$0
Labour	\$355	\$0
Material & Equipment	\$8	\$0
Services	\$8	\$0
Total Additional Costs	\$371	\$0

Candidate Campaign Finance Changes and Introduction of Political Parties and Slates of Candidates

New processes and staff capacity will be required to manage the new requirement for individuals to provide Edmonton Elections with written notice of their intent to run before receiving campaign contributions or incurring campaign expenses, and for all candidates that provide a notice of intent to file an annual financial disclosure. This includes the development and maintenance of a new public register of candidates, as well as managing and responding to an increased volume of inquiries.

The expansion of the campaign period from one year to four years will impact ongoing costs as new staff capacity will be required to manage the register of candidates, review annual candidate campaign finance disclosures, report annually to Council and communicate with the Election Commissioner related to any compliance issues.

While details regarding the requirements for the pilot implementation of political parties and slates of candidates will be released in forthcoming regulations, Edmonton Elections has identified cost impacts related to:

- Developing and managing registration processes.
- Managing and responding to inquiries from and related to political parties and slates of candidates.
- Reviewing financial disclosures from these new political participants.

Edmonton Elections also anticipates that increased administrative capacity will be required to monitor and report to Municipal Affairs on the pilot implementation of political parties and slates of candidates for the 2025 Edmonton Election.

Cost Category	2025 One-time & Ongoing Costs (\$000)	2026 Ongoing Costs (\$000)
Contracts	\$0	\$0
Labour	\$630	\$233
Material & Equipment	\$0	\$0
Services	\$0	\$0
Total Additional Costs	\$630	\$233

Enhanced Election Support Structure

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.

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

Cost Category	2025 One-time & Ongoing Costs (\$000)	2026 Ongoing Costs (\$000)
Contracts	\$0	\$0
Labour	\$658	\$146
Material & Equipment	\$14	\$7
Services	\$4	\$0
Total Additional Costs	\$676	\$153

With these impacts, the City of Edmonton's net budget is estimated at \$12.4 million for each four year Election cycle, which equates to \$3.1 million annually (Attachment 2).

Next Steps and Timelines

This report builds on the May 8, 2024 verbal report, OCC02492 Bill 20 Update, by providing an update on the cost impacts of the amendments to the *LAEA* implemented by Bill 20.

Municipal Affairs has indicated that the associated regulations will be released in fall 2024, and that Bill 20 will be proclaimed in force at that time.

Edmonton Elections is planning to bring an initial report on Bylaw 19457 to Council at the October 22, 2024 City Council meeting. This report will frame the policy decisions and request decisions from Council to inform a new Elections Bylaw, which will be presented to Council in December.

The proclamation of Bill 20 will launch the campaign period for the 2025 Edmonton Election, enabling candidates to submit their written notices of intent to run.

Key Dates

- Candidate nominations open on January 1, 2025 and close on September 22, 2025.
- Nomination Day is September 22, 2025.
- Election Day is Monday, October 20, 2025.
- Hand counting of ballots will commence after voting closes at each voting station which is at 8 p.m. or after the last person in line at 8 p.m. has voted.
- Unofficial election results will be reported and the hand counting of ballots is complete.
- The Returning Officer will release the official results at noon on Friday, October 24, 2025.

Budget/Financial Implications

The changes outlined in this report fall under External Factors/Changes in Legislation, which allows the City to respond to external factors such as provincial or federal budgets or changes imposed by legislation during the supplemental budget adjustment process, as guided by the City's Multi-year Budgeting Policy (C578). As a result, the Bill 20 Update and 2025 Edmonton Election Budget Adjustment will be included as funded in the proposed Fall 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment (SOBA) process.

BILL 20 UPDATE AND 2025 ELECTION BUDGET ADJUSTMENT

\$3.1 million will be required annually to manage the Elections Program moving forward (Attachment 2). These costs are not uniform and include a mix of one-time and ongoing costs. As a result, program surpluses and deficits are anticipated to be realized. These program surpluses and deficits will be managed within a reserve moving forward. Further information on this process will be outlined in the upcoming '2024 Reserves Review' report in quarter 4, 2024.

Community Insight

Edmonton Elections initiated a voter engagement process in January 2024 by launching a survey through the Insight Community, circulating a similar survey to a wide range of community organizations and holding one-on-one sessions with interested organizations. Over 4,000 survey responses were received and detailed insights were shared by nine community organizations. Of those respondents who indicate that they experience barriers to voting, the majority highlight that a lack of awareness of voting processes and confusion between the requirements of federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions affect their ability to participate.

A summary report on the data collected is expected to be released in fall 2024. Edmonton Elections will continue to analyze the detailed feedback to gain an improved understanding of the barriers that voters experience when participating in the election process and to support the identification of strategies to reduce these barriers.

GBA+

As noted above, Edmonton Elections is guided by five principles: accessible, inclusive, equitable, ethical and safe.

These principles are incorporated into all aspects of election planning and steer every key project decision. By integrating principles such as accessible, inclusive and equitable into election planning, Edmonton Elections aims to reduce barriers to participation in the election process with an emphasis on the voting experience.

Edmonton Elections is currently completing a comprehensive GBA+ analysis of all election processes, strategies and operational procedures. This analysis will incorporate the feedback received through the voter engagement initiative, as well as build on existing City frameworks such as the Anti-Racism Strategy, Anti-Black Racism Action Plan, and Indigenous Framework. The corresponding processes and actions developed by Edmonton Elections to mitigate barriers to participation will align with the insights and recommendations shared in these reports.

Attachments

1. Additional 2025 Edmonton Election Costs by Impact Area (Bill 20)
2. 2025 Edmonton Election Cost Estimates