



Emerging Issues Municipal Elections July 2008

Why aren't we interested in municipal elections?

Historically in Nova Scotia and across Canada, voters have proven that we have lack luster interest in municipal elections. Historically, HRM's voter turnout hovers around 40 percent. Sadly, this is on par with the national average but considerably lower than turnout for federal elections, which tends to be in the range of 60 to 65 percent¹.

What factors influence municipal voter turnout?²

Studies show that there are several factors that influence municipal voter turnout:

1. **Competition:** a tight race, especially for the mayor's seat, tends to bring the voters out to the polls.
2. **Contentious issues:** of course, the more issues are in the news, the more people talk about them and in turn, want to have their voice heard.
3. **Demographics:** property owners and resident's with higher education, tend to vote in municipal elections.
4. **Plebiscites:** for the Sunday shopping plebiscite in 2004, voter turnout was 54 percent versus the usual 40 percent³.
5. **Population size:** voter turnout is higher in municipalities with lower populations.

What are our chances of increasing voter turnout in October?

In an effort to increase voter turnout during the upcoming municipal election, HRM is providing citizens with the option of voting on-line or by phone during the advanced poll. In 2003, twelve Ontario municipalities provided Internet and telephone voting with no paper ballots. As a result, voter turnout increased to 51 percent on average, an increase of approximately 10 percent⁴.

In addition to having alternative voting methods this time around, Halifax is now in the midst of exciting times, with a broad range of local issues for voters to consider as they head to the polls: development approvals, HRMbyDesign, transit, the fast ferry, the commute to work and tax reform, just to name a few. Although we have contentious issues in our favor, we do not have a competitive mayoral race as of

¹ http://www.elections.ca/content_youth.asp?section=yth&dir=bas/faq&document=index&lang=e#q15

² http://www.torontovitalsigns.com/vitalsigns2001/18_learning1_toronto_voting.pdf

³ <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/antipoverty/analysis/sundayShopping.asp>

⁴ http://www.munimall.net/newsletter/2004_archive/040226.htm#me

yet. According to the latest CRA poll ⁵ published in June, Mayor Kelly has 48 percent support, while his only declared opponent, Councillor Sheila Fougere, has 20 percent.

Ultimately, voting is a personal choice and a personal responsibility. Given the number of important issues on the agenda this time around and the ease of voting online, the number of excuses we have for not voting are dwindling. We should all take some time to educate ourselves concerning the issues and the candidates. After all, voting is the best opportunity we have to make our voices heard and ultimately to influence the future of our city.

For more information contact Nancy Bray at nancyb@halifaxchamber.com

⁵ ATGOV Vol. 2, No. 8, Bulletin 8, July 3, 2008