



CITY OF ST. ALBERT ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUNDER

TITLE: MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS PLEBISCITE

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

On December 12, 2016 Councillor Russell provided notice in accordance with Section 23 of Procedure Bylaw 35/2009 that he intended to bring forward the proposed motion below.

In order for Council to debate the motion, the motion must be formally moved.

“That Administration prepare a plebiscite for the next civic election to enable voters to vote on major capital projects contemplated for 2018/19/20.”

BACKGROUND:

Note that the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* does not use the terms plebiscite or referendum; it only refers to a “vote on a question”. As per section 236 of the *MGA*, council may include a vote on a question on the ballot for a general municipal election, for a by-election, or for a stand-alone vote to be held between general elections.

Electors to vote on a question

236(1) A council may provide for the submission of a question to be voted on by the electors on any matter over which the municipality has jurisdiction.

(2) A vote of the electors under subsection (1) does not bind council.

Section 44 of the *Local Authorities Election Act* requires Council to determine the wording for a vote on a question. However, if Council does not determine wording for a question to be presented to electors, the returning officer must do so.

Form of ballot

44(1) If there is to be a vote on a bylaw or question, the elected authority by resolution

- (a) must determine the wording to be used on the ballot, and
- (b) may determine the form of the ballot.

(2) If the elected authority does not determine the form of the ballot under subsection (1), the returning officer must do so.

The following are considerations for Council if they choose to include a vote on a question on the ballot for the 2017 general municipal election.

- Council must, by resolution, establish the wording for a question to be voted on.
- When selecting wording for a question, will it be clear and understandable to electors? Will electors understand what outcome could be expected to occur if the results of the vote on a question are either Yes or No?
 - Council could consider hiring a consultant with expertise in surveys and the writing of questions to provide advice.
- Can electors be expected to have sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision on how to vote on the question? Typically, the information available to an elector on a complex municipal issue will not be as extensive or as detailed as the information on the matter that is typically available to Council Members. If this is a concern to Council, Council could consider a comprehensive public awareness campaign to give electors an opportunity to learn pertinent information about the matter before voting on the question.
- Does Council already know how they wish to proceed on the matter of the question, regardless of the result of a vote? Would Council's opinion on the subject matter of the question be altered by either an overwhelming Yes vote or an overwhelming No vote? Would it be altered by a close vote result?

If Council chooses to have a vote on a question, the wording of the question should be determined by the end of May 2017. Delaying further could require changes to timelines with our election services contractor which could have cost and efficiency implications. Also, accommodating more than one question, or either very long or multi-part questions, might necessitate larger format ballots or multi-page ballots which would increase costs and reduce efficiencies for handling and processing by election officials.

Report Date: January 23, 2017

Author(s): Chris Belke

Committee/Department: Legislative Services

General Manager: Maya Pungur-Buick

City Manager: Kevin Scoble