

Town of Pelham Council Report

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Subject: 2026 Municipal and School Board Election Update

Prepared By: Sarah Leach, Acting Town Clerk

Department: Clerk's Office

Recommendation:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council receive report 2026-0005 “2026 Municipal and School Board Election Update,” for information;

AND THAT Council indicate its preferred polling station model for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election, being Model ___, for planning purposes only, recognizing that the final determination of polling locations and election delivery remains at the discretion of the Clerk.

Background:

The 2026 Municipal and School Board Election is scheduled for Monday, October 26, 2026. This information report is intended to inform Council and the public of key dates, general information, and upcoming events related to the election.

Analysis:

Local Area Clerk Joint Procurement and Working Group

For the 2026 municipal election, all 12 local area municipalities banded together in a joint procurement process for election services. Whether proceeding with online voting, in-person voting, or a combination of both, all services will be provided by the same vendor to create consistency in policy and practice throughout local municipalities.

The awarded vendor is Neuvote Systems Inc. Established in 2015, Neuvote is a reputable election services provider, based in Ontario that will deliver a fully inclusive voting experience for the election. Neuvote will provide Pelham with both paper ballot voting and online voting. Additional services will include the production and distribution of voter notification cards.

Nomination and Campaign Period

Candidates may file their nomination papers, together with the prescribed nomination fee and the required 25 endorsement signatures from eligible electors, beginning Friday, May 1, 2026. Nominations will be accepted during regular business hours, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Nomination Day, which marks the final day to submit a nomination, is Friday, August 21, 2026. On this date, nominations will be accepted until 2:00 p.m. Nomination Day is also the final day on which a candidate may withdraw their nomination.

As of the writing of this report, the nomination fee is \$200.00 for the Office of Mayor and \$100.00 for all other offices. Fees must be paid by cash, debit, certified cheque, or money order.

A candidate's campaign period begins once the nomination form has been filed and continues until December 31, 2026. Adjusted campaign periods apply in situations where a candidate withdraws their nomination.

Nomination Requirements

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA) establishes nomination requirements. It is noted that the Province typically publishes finalized nomination forms and detailed requirements in early Q2 of the election year. Once released, the nomination process and all associated forms will be confirmed and made available to prospective candidates.

Section 29(1) of the MEA provides that a person may be nominated for an office only if, on the day they are nominated:

- a) they are qualified to hold that office under the legislation that creates it; and
- b) they are not ineligible under the MEA, any other Act, or otherwise prohibited by law from being nominated for or holding the office.

The MEA further requires that nominations for Council (excluding school board trustees) be endorsed by at least 25 eligible electors. Endorsement forms must be completed on the prescribed forms once issued by the Province. The following statutory requirements apply:

- Individuals providing an endorsement must be eligible to vote in the municipality on the date the endorsement is made (s.33(1.2));
- Endorsements must be submitted with original signatures (s.33(1.2.1));
- New/additional endorsements are not required if a candidate withdraws and subsequently files for a different office;

The MEA does not restrict an elector from endorsing more than one candidate.

As in previous election cycles, the Clerk's Department will prepare nomination packages for prospective candidates and third-party advertisers, including all required forms, guidance materials, and statutory information. These packages will be available for pickup at Town Hall and online in early spring 2026.

Third Party Advertising

Third-party advertisers may register with the Clerk, using the prescribed form, from Friday, May 1, 2026, to Friday, October 23, 2026, during regular business hours.

A third-party advertisement is a paid message that supports or opposes a candidate or a question on the ballot. It does not include issue-based advertising or advertising that does not incur costs to produce, post, or broadcast.

Third-party advertising must be conducted independently of candidates. A candidate cannot register as a third-party advertiser, and third-party advertisers cannot coordinate their advertising with any candidate's campaign. Individuals, corporations, and trade unions intending to advertise in more than one municipality must register separately in each municipality in which they plan to advertise.

Most campaign finance rules that apply to candidates also apply to third-party advertisers, including spending limits and contribution limits. All third-party advertisers must comply with the financial reporting requirements set out in the MEA.

Campaign Finances

The MEA strictly regulates campaign financing. Corporations and trade unions are prohibited from contributing to candidates in municipal elections; however, they may register as third-party advertisers and contribute to their own advertising campaigns.

Spending limits apply to both campaign expenses and post-election appreciation events and are calculated by the Clerk at the time of filing based on the number of eligible electors. Candidates may also self-fund their campaign within prescribed limits:

- Head of Council: \$7,500 plus \$0.20 per elector, to a maximum of \$25,000
- All other offices: \$5,000 plus \$0.20 per elector, to a maximum of \$25,000

Candidates are required to maintain complete and accurate financial records and must file a campaign financial statement by March 30, 2027. If contributions or expenses exceed \$10,000, the filing must also include an auditor's report.

Election Promotion

As with every municipal election, the Clerk's Department is prioritizing efforts to increase voter awareness and improve overall voter turnout. A multi-channel communications approach will be used to ensure that residents receive clear, timely, and accessible information.

The Town will continue to leverage social media platforms, digital media, and the Town's outdoor digital signage for election messaging. The election webpage will remain the primary location for up-to-date information, including voting options, dates, candidate resources, and legislative requirements.

To further support outreach, the Manager of Communications and Government Relations is planning to issue a direct-mail campaign in late Q1 or early Q2. Based on lived experience and recent significant changes to postal codes across Town, this initiative has been identified as a priority. The mail-out will provide high-level information about the role of municipal government and the responsibilities of Council, content that is beneficial given the increasing number of new residents relocating from single-tier municipalities.

In 2022, the Niagara Region established a regional communications working group and produced region-wide media for statutory election notices. Although the working group has not yet been formally re-established for 2026, it is anticipated that a similar coordinated approach will occur.

Voters' List

The 2026 municipal election will be the first conducted using the new voters' list provided by Elections Ontario. This represents a significant and highly anticipated change to Ontario's election framework. The updated system consolidates information from both provincial and municipal voter databases, improving accuracy and enhancing voter experience by enabling updates through a single platform.

Eligible electors may confirm, update, or add their information to the voters' list online at RegisterToVoteON.ca until August 12, 2026. After this date, amendments and additions must be completed directly through the Clerk's Department or at a voting location on Voting Day.

Updates to school board designation continue to be administered through the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Electors must make changes through MPAC's online system, and such adjustments remain subject to MPAC's eligibility requirements.

Following August 12, 2026, attending Town events, such as Summer Chill, will again serve as an effective outreach method to help residents confirm their voter information and increase overall awareness leading into the election. The Clerk's Department will pursue these opportunities.

Vote Opportunities

The 2026 municipal election will continue to use a hybrid voting model, offering both in-person voting and an online voting option.

Online voting will be available during the advance voting period only. In-person advance voting will also be offered, while Voting Day will be limited to in-person voting exclusively.

As this will be Pelham's first election utilizing online voting, this approach reflects a cautious and widely adopted practice among municipalities. While no service disruptions are anticipated, Voting Day typically represents the highest demand on online election systems. Concluding online voting prior to Voting Day ensures that, should any unforeseen technical issues arise, they do not impact the final day of voting and allow for an uninterrupted in-person voting experience on Voting Day.

Election Workers

As the Clerk's Department has received approval for an additional full-time Committee Coordinator position beginning in 2026, the hiring of an additional temporary Election Coordinator will not be required. Every four years, the Committee Coordinator's focus will shift from committee administration, which concludes at the beginning of the nomination period, to supporting election-related activities.

The Clerk's Department will begin recruitment for election workers in late Q1 to early Q2 of 2026. Positions will include Deputy Returning Officers, Vote Tabulator Officers, Information Clerks, and Reserve Workers.

The recruitment strategy will be to staff election roles with interested Town employees, supplemented by a limited number of external hires only if/where necessary. In 2022, Clerk's experienced challenges in recruiting externally and maintaining sufficient staffing levels throughout the election period, with commitment levels declining over time. Leveraging internal staff is expected to improve reliability, retention, and overall election readiness. Internal staff are also bound by Town employment standards, policies, and training requirements, further reducing compliance risks.

Ideally, Poll Supervisors will be Clerk's staff. The Clerk will not be stationed at a single voting location on Voting Day and will instead remain mobile throughout the

municipality, while also being available in the office to oversee and prepare for end-of-day ballot tabulation and results reporting.

Polling Locations - Advance Voting

For advance voting, the Town will offer a 10-day online voting period, available 24 hours a day, concluding the evening before Voting Day. In addition to online voting, one full day of in-person advance voting will be offered at the Meridian Community Centre (MCC) on a Saturday.

A new proposal for the 2026 municipal election is to offer in-person advance voting at Town Hall for five consecutive weekdays leading up to Voting Day. This model is anticipated to be operationally efficient, as Clerk's staff can independently staff these voting days. During quieter periods, staff will also be able to continue with regular work responsibilities.

This in-person advance voting opportunity will overlap with the online voting period. It also allows staff to be readily available to assist residents with voting-related questions, including support for online voting access and troubleshooting.

Overall, this approach offers three advanced voting opportunities, consistent with those provided during the 2022 Municipal Election, albeit in a revised format. Staff will proceed with this proposed advance voting model unless Council directs otherwise or expresses interest in alternative arrangements.

Polling Locations – Voting Day

The introduction of online voting presents an opportunity to significantly restructure Voting Day. While online voting will not be available on Voting Day itself, its use during the advance voting period is anticipated to reduce voter volumes at physical polling locations on Voting Day.

Online voting has been pursued primarily due to its potential to generate cost savings, particularly in terms of election staffing and the number of physical polling stations required. It is acknowledged that the full financial benefits of online voting will not be realized in the upcoming election, as the system is being implemented alongside in-person voting. Nevertheless, the introduction of online voting presents meaningful opportunities for cost reductions.

Typically, Council is not consulted on election administration matters such as polling station locations, as the conduct of the election falls under the authority of the Clerk. However, Council input may be beneficial in instances where significant operational changes are proposed.

In the 2022 municipal election, six physical polling stations were operated on Voting Day, with two stations serving each ward. This number does not include polling stations located at institutional facilities, which are legislatively required and are not proposed to change.

For the upcoming election, three clear options are available regarding the number and configuration of Voting Day polling locations. Council is welcome to provide input on the option it may be inclined to support.

Model 1 – Six Polling Stations (Two per Ward)

This model would result in minimal change from the 2022 municipal election. The only modification would be the relocation of the Fire Station #1 polling station to Old Pelham Town Hall due to ongoing renovations at the Fire Station.

This option does not present any operational or financial advantages and maintains the same staffing and facility requirements as the previous election.

Model 2 – Three Polling Stations (One per Ward)

This model represents a modest approach to change. While Pelham does not yet have its own data regarding anticipated uptake of online voting, neighbouring municipalities that have implemented online voting report significant utilization.

Reducing the number of Voting Day polling stations to one per ward is expected to be supported by increased online voting participation during the advance voting period. Under this model, election workers would still be required; however, it is anticipated that a bulk of staffing needs could be met through internal staff participation, thereby limiting recruitment pressures.

This model distributes voting locations across the municipality while maintaining ward-specific polling locations. Clerk's staff would lead operations at each station.

While increased voter attendance at these polling stations is possible, depending on online voting participation, voting transactions are generally processed efficiently, and some queuing is both anticipated and accepted. Any increase in volume due to the reduction of one station in each ward is expected to be manageable.

Voting Day: Monday, October 26, 2026		
Monday, October 26, 2026 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Pelham Fire Station #2 766 Welland Road	Ward One
	Pelham Meridian Community Centre (MCC) – Accursi Room 100 Meridian Way	Ward Two

	Pelham Meridian Community Centre (MCC) – Gym 100 Meridian Way	Ward Three
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Model 3 – One Super Poll

Under a “super poll” model, all eligible voters from all wards would vote at a single polling location. Given the anticipated voter volume associated with this model, the MCC would be the most appropriate venue.

A primary advantage of this model is operational efficiency, as it requires only one polling location to be set up and staffed. Consolidating all election staff and clerks in a single location also supports consistency in administration and oversight. While line-ups would be expected under this model, adequate staffing levels, including additional Deputy Returning Officers, would be scheduled to ensure that voter flow is managed efficiently.

Notable disadvantages of this model include the requirement for all residents to travel to the MCC, with Ward One residents facing the greatest travel distance. Additionally, high voter turnout may result in parking pressure at the facility. While no other events are scheduled at the MCC on Voting Day, increased parking demand remains a potential operational consideration.

Financial Considerations:

There are no immediate financial implications associated with this informational report. However, the preferred polling station model will have financial implications as election planning progresses.

Alternatives Reviewed:

This report is provided primarily for information purposes and is intended to inform Council of the early stages of election preparation. Council is being asked to indicate its preferred polling station model to guide further planning.

Strategic Plan Relationship: Enhancing Capacity and Future Readiness

This report supports capacity and future readiness by modernizing election delivery through the introduction of online voting and creating operational efficiencies elsewhere in the election process. These changes position the Town to adapt to evolving technology, changing voter expectations, and potential future cost pressures.

Consultation:

Town Clerk
Chief Administrative Officer

Other Pertinent Reports/Attachments:

2026 Municipal and School Board Election Key Dates

Approved and submitted by:

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Chief Administrative Officer