

Subject: 2026 Election Communications Plan

Staff Report No. CAO-005-26

**Department/
Commission:** Office of the CAO

Date: April 15, 2026

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council receive this report for information.

Report Highlights

- Staff will deliver a phased, neutral communications program to support the 2026 Municipal Election and Council approved hybrid voting model.
- Communications will focus on clear voter education, with particular emphasis on the introduction, security, and accessibility of online voting.
- Targeted outreach will promote broad, inclusive participation among voters, candidates, and election workers across all demographics.
- A mix of digital, print, and in-person channels will be used, with results evaluated through participation metrics and post election review.

1. Purpose:

This report introduces the 2026 Election Communication Plan to Council. It outlines the steps staff will take to ensure voters are aware of key dates, how to vote, who the candidates are, and other important election information.

2. Background:

On February 4, 2026, Council received report CPS-004-26, which outlined the proposed voting locations for the 2026 Municipal Election. As part of that discussion, Council directed staff to bring forward an election communications plan for review, so Council is aware of how staff intend to inform Stouffville voters about the election.

3. Analysis:

3.1 Plan Purpose

The 2026 Municipal Election Communications Plan outlines how staff will inform, educate, and engage residents, candidates, and election workers in advance of and throughout the 2026 Municipal Election. The plan supports Council's approval of a hybrid voting model that includes internet voting, paper ballots, and optical scan vote tabulators, and is intended to promote transparency, accessibility, fairness, and strong democratic participation, while making it easy for residents to connect with election information in their everyday lives.

3.2 Plan Focus

The Communication's Plan is a joint effort between the Clerk's Department and Corporate Communications and is designed to position the Town as the trusted and neutral source of election information. Staff will focus on increasing awareness and understanding of election processes, building confidence in the voting system, and encouraging participation across the community.

A key focus of this plan is meeting residents where they are through visible, in-person engagement. This includes outreach at community events, staffed information booths, and distributing printed materials in prominent locations across Whitchurch-Stouffville to ensure information is accessible to residents who may not rely on digital channels.

Key objectives include:

- educating residents on how, when, and where to vote;
- encouraging a diverse range of candidates to run for office;
- supporting voter list accuracy;
- increasing awareness of advance voting opportunities; and
- providing timely, clear, and accessible information throughout the election period.

3.3 Plan Details

A significant component of the plan is public education related to the hybrid voting model, particularly the introduction of internet voting. Staff will implement a comprehensive education campaign to explain how online voting works, outline security and accessibility features, and address common questions or misconceptions.

Educational resources include a dedicated election website (stouffvillevotes.ca), instructional videos, frequently asked questions, step-by-step guides, printed materials, and in-person demonstrations delivered at community events and Town facilities.

To support candidate awareness and participation, the Town has worked with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) to host two Candidate Information Sessions. The Town is also participating in a joint information session with other York Region

municipalities. Finally, on the Town's election website, other information sessions being offered are listed to support prospective candidates in their search for information. Information for these sessions is being pushed through traditional social media channels, on roadside signage, through the election website and other various outreach efforts.

The plan identifies several key audiences, including eligible voters, eligible candidates, and eligible election workers. Communications efforts will also be tailored to reach youth and first-time voters, seniors, and residents with accessibility needs. Staff will use targeted messaging and several methods to help reduce barriers to participation and ensure residents understand both their voting options and opportunities to participate in the election process.

3.4 Plan Phases & Campaigns

Communications activities will be delivered through a phased approach that aligns with the election lifecycle. Early phases will focus on candidate outreach, followed by voter education and voter list verification.

As voting approaches, communications will intensify to support online voting education, promote advance voting, and encourage participation through the "Be Heard: Vote." Campaign, supported by a presence at community events and in physical locations across the Town.

Following Election Day, staff will communicate unofficial and official election results, issue thank you messaging and complete a post-election evaluation report.

3.5 Communication Methods

Staff will use a combination of digital, print, and in-person communication channels, with an emphasis on face-to-face engagement and visible community presence.

Methods include social media, short-form videos, online and radio advertising, printed materials, mobile signage, and Town publications such as *On the Road* magazine. Printed materials and flyers will be distributed in high-traffic community locations across Whitchurch-Stouffville to reach residents as they go about their daily routines.

Staffed information booths at major community events and Town facilities will provide voter lookup assistance, online voting demonstrations, and election-related information, helping residents access support in a convenient way.

3.6 Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the plan will be evaluated through voter turnout, advance and online voting participation, website engagement, social media metrics, attendance at information sessions, and public feedback.

4. Options:

4.1 Option A (Recommended)

That Council receive this report for information.

5. Financial Implications:

The estimated communications budget is \$8,500 and will be funded through the Town's Election Reserve.

6. Broader Intergovernmental Impacts and/or Considerations:

The Town's Communications Team will monitor communications from other local municipalities and York Region to help inform and align messaging, ensuring it remains clear, consistent, and effective for the community.

7. Communication:

The communications plan is attached to this report as Attachment No. 1.

8. Alignment with Strategic Plan:

1. An Engaging Town
Increase Community Engagement & Outreach
2. Good Governance
Provide Good Governance
3. Organizational Effectiveness
To Elevate our Organizational Effectiveness

9. Attachments:

Attachment No. 1 – 2026 Election Communications Plan

10. Related Reports:

February 4, 2026 – CPS-004-26 [2026 Election Voting Locations](#)

December 5, 2025 – CPS-021-25 [2026 Municipal Election Update](#)

June 26, 2024 – CPS-012-24 [Voting Method for the 2026 Municipal Election](#)

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For further information on this report, please contact the Department Head: Sunny Bains, Chief Administrative Officer, at 905-640-1900 or 1-855-642-8697 ext. 2436 or via email at sunny.bains@townofws.ca

Review Confirmation:

Reviewing Division	Review Required?				Reviewed By
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Legal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes	GJ
Clerks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	