

# VOTE



Newmarket



## 2022 Municipal Election

### Post-Election Report

**December 9, 2022**

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## Introduction

The 2022 Town of Newmarket Municipal Election took place over a continuous 10-day voting period, October 15th-24<sup>th</sup> utilizing an online voting platform as the primary means for voters to cast their ballots. Additionally, a limited paper ballot option was available during the voting period at the municipal offices. The voter turnout for the election was 25.07%, below the 36.3% provincial average reported by AMO. While voter participation in municipal elections remains low in municipalities across Ontario, the number of candidates elected by acclamation is a significant contributor to the lower voter turnout figures in the Town of Newmarket. On Council, three of the nine positions were acclaimed, including the Mayor and two Councillor positions. One French School Board Trustee position was also elected by acclamation.

Voter Turnout	24% (15,221 votes cast)
Number of Online Votes Cast	15007
Number of Paper Ballot Votes Cast	214

This report provides an overview of the planning components to deliver the 2022 Town of Newmarket Municipal Election, with commentary on what worked well and identification of aspects for improvement, including actions required and recommendations for the next municipal election in 2026. A companion report from Rick Sikorski, Elections Communications Advisor focuses on the communications aspects of election planning and should be reviewed in conjunction with this report.

## Election Planning

### Online Voting Platform - Voatz

An RFP process undertaken in 2021 secured a vendor to provide the online voting platform to be the primary voting method for the 2022 Town of Newmarket Municipal Election. Voatz Inc. was the successful proponent. Voatz proved to be an excellent vendor selection. The Voatz team delivered exceptional customer service and the team assigned to the Town were easy to work with. Findings from an online voter survey led by Dr. Nicole Goodman of Brock University illustrated that over 83% of Newmarket voters were very satisfied with the online voting process.

In addition to the web-based application, Voatz also customized a mobile app for both the iOS and Android platforms. These apps provided voters with visual or dexterity disabilities additional accessibility enhancements and a full, secure voting experience, including capabilities for: VoiceOver and TalkBack screen readers, Voice Control navigation (on iOS), configurable font size, and flexible timeout limitations. [Detailed instructions](#) for using the Voatz Accessibility app were available on the [election website](#).

Voatz produced a ["How to Vote Online in the 2022 Newmarket Election"](#) video that was posted to the Town's YouTube channel and linked in the How to Vote section of the election website.

A third party security audit of the Voatz platform led by the Town of Newmarket on behalf of the 15 Ontario municipalities utilizing Voatz was undertaken by the Digital Boundary Group (DBG) in the months leading up to the election. No significant security issues were discovered during penetration tests. Voatz resolved any minor items flagged in the report expediently.

Voatz provided onsite, in-person support at the start of the 10-day voting period and were available for troubleshooting throughout the election. In-person assistance was provided throughout the final Voting Day and at the close to coordinate the compilation and posting of results.

### Action Items:

An RFP will need to be issued in 2025 to secure a provider for an online voting platform vendor for the 2026 election.

### Recommendations for 2026

Based on the 2022 experience, Voatz should be given serious consideration to be the online voting platform provider in the next municipal election.

## **Paper Ballot Voting**

On March 29, 2021, Council approved the use of online voting and paper ballots for the 2022 Municipal Election (see Council minutes item 9.3.7). A competitive acquisition was undertaken to obtain tabulator services in 2021 and the contract was awarded to ES&S Canada.

ES&S supplied tabulators, accessible voting machines and a ballot-on-demand for the election, as well as training and on-site support. ES&S provided excellent customer service throughout the contract period. After a lengthy dialogue between the parties, a ballot acceptable in design and language was achieved.

For the paper ballot voting option, the Town offered in-person voting by appointment only at the Municipal Offices. The election call centre opened three days in advance of the 10-day voting period to facilitate voter assistance and to book paper ballot voting appointments.

### **Action Item:**

Should a paper ballot option be considered again for the 2026 Newmarket Municipal Election, an RFP process should be commenced in early 2025.

### **Recommendations for 2026**

ES&S provided excellent client service and the technology supplied worked well. Based on their 2022 performance it is recommended that the Town explore using their services again.

Voter's appreciated having the paper ballot option, particularly those in the seniors demographic. During election promotions at Town events leading up to the election, many citizens expressed that they were not pleased that appointments were required to vote by paper ballot. These comments were echoed throughout the 10-day voting period by electors visiting Voter Assistance Centres and to staff fielding calls at the call centre.

Consideration should be given to removing the requirement for electors to make an appointment to vote by paper ballot.

## **Weekly Team Planning Meetings**

Weekly election team planning meetings commenced in January 2022 and occurred each Wednesday morning. Meetings were comprised of the Legislative Services election team and invited election support colleagues from across the Corporation (Director of IT, Marketing, Coms) as required.

These meetings were followed by a larger team meeting that included members of the Voatz team. Every Monday morning, the Voatz lead and the Election Coordinator held 1:1 meetings to review material in advance of the larger Wednesday team meeting.

### **Election Team Meeting Agendas/Notes:**

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### **Weekly Meetings with the Voatz Team – Agendas/Notes:**

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## **Information Guide for Candidates**

The Town of Newmarket Candidate's Guide was revised and posted to the election website and the Candidate Portal.

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## **Candidate Nomination Process (DocuSign)**

Revisions to the Ontario Elections Act granted permission to municipalities to implement online candidate registration. The Town of Newmarket was one a small number of municipalities to offer this option, in addition to in-person filing. Working in conjunction with

the IT department, the Elections Team procured DocuSign as the vendor for the digital document solution. The ability to accept online payment by credit card was incorporated into the process, aiding workflow and tracking.

### **Recommendations for 2026**

DocuSign proved to be an effective tool for enabling online management of candidate nomination forms. Candidates appreciated having the option to have a virtual nomination meeting and complete their documentation electronically.

Should the Election Team wish to offer an online filing option in 2026, DocuSign is a viable solution to consider again. DocuSign presents solutions that may benefit other aspects of the election such as collecting sign-off from staff the Appointment and Oath of Election Official form. This direction would be in-line with the Corporate IT strategy to streamline processes.

### **Candidate Information Session**

Rather than duplicating the Provincial Candidate's Information Session that was widely available for replay online on other municipality websites, the Election Team chose to deliver a Newmarket-focused session delivered in a hybrid format. Delivered in-person by the Town Clerk, the presentation included an inspirational message to candidates from municipal leadership expert, John Schaffter and interviews with Town of Newmarket staff. A recording of the presentation was linked on the election website and available on the Town YouTube channel.

[Thinking of running in the 2022 Newmarket election? - YouTube](#)

### **Recommendations for 2026**

The hybrid model worked well and it is recommended that this format be utilized again for the 2026 election.

The Province offers municipalities in Ontario the opportunity to have Ministry staff deliver a PowerPoint presentation to each municipality. The presentation is the same and rather dry. Municipalities should advocate having the province produce a professional, more engaging video presentation that is available online.

### **Accessibility**

The Election Team committed to making the 2022 Newmarket Municipal Election the most accessible ever and the [2022 Election Accessibility Plan](#) provides detail on how this was achieved. The Election Team made two presentations to the Accessibility Advisory Committee in 2022. The first took place in February and presented a high level overview of the election and a demonstration of the web and mobile versions of the Voatz voting platform. A second presentation in September 2022, led by the Voatz Accessibility team concentrated on demonstrating the live version of the mobile voting app. The Accessibility Advisory Committee shared insightful comments and fully supported the work of the Election Team.

#### **Online Voting Removes Barriers**

Removing the need to visit a voting location makes voting more accessible for many people in our community. Voters in this election could access their ballot and cast their vote online, at a time during the voting period that was convenient for them, in a location of their choosing, using their preferred internet-connected device, thereby lowering or entirely removing many of the hurdles that impede the voting experience for people with disabilities.

#### **Accessibility "Firsts"**

A number of accessibility enhancement "firsts" are worth noting. Newmarket was the first Ontario municipality to offer Voter Instruction letters in two accessible formats. Voters could request to receive their Voter Instruction Letters in either accessible PDF or reflowed large-scale print formats. The generation of these forms was undertaken by [allyant.com](#) through an introduction from Doculink/Gilmore. The Town's key contact at allyant is Kim Gilmer, Senior Account Manager, P: +1 800 563 0668 x5250, M: +1 613 899 5273, [kgilmer@allyant.com](mailto:kgilmer@allyant.com)

A downloadable mobile app offered enhanced accessibility features enabling citizens with visual, auditory and/or dexterity impairment to vote securely and independently from their smartphones. Voiceover (iOS) and TalkBack (Android) screen readers and Voice Control (iOS) were two of the many assistive capabilities made available in the app.

Voters who preferred a paper ballot option could access an accessible ballot-marking machine.

Two new temporary parking spots situated close to the entrance of Lounge 2 at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex were designated for accessible parking, reducing the distance to access the Voter Assistance Centre.

The Election Team delivered two presentations at the Newmarket Seniors Meeting Place in advance of the election. Though not well attended, seniors who took part learned how to vote online and remarked that the process was easier than they thought.

To provide enhanced accessibility for persons who may not have access to devices to vote, the Election Team created three voting technology hubs. During the 10-day voting period, two laptops set up with the online voting platform were placed at the Seniors Meeting Place for their use. Teaming up with the Newmarket Public Library offered an additional dedicated computer for voter use and library staff were trained on how to use the VoterView application to assist electors with making minor changes to their information. A third hub for voters to access voting devices was set up outside the Council Chambers of the Municipal Offices. Two iPad stations configured with the Voting App offered ease of use.

### **Recommendations for 2026**

The 2026 Newmarket Election Team should consider making the Voter Instruction Letter fully [a11y](#) compliant. Adding a braille and audio mp3 option to the accessibility options used in 2022 would achieve this standard.

Seniors comprised the majority of users of Voter Assistance Centres (VACs). While both the Magna Centre Gymnasium and Ray Twinney Recreation Complex Lounge 2 are fully accessible facilities, many staff working at these VACs, and seniors themselves remarked that older adults often struggled with the distances and stairs to go from the parking lot to the voting places. Attention should be paid to exploring an alternate venue to host a Voter Assistance Centre, such as the Seniors Meeting Place, as the space is well structured to serve this growing demographic.

### **Door-to-Door Enumeration**

Door-to-door enumeration was undertaken in new developments identified by colleagues in Planning. The Elections Coordinator and Communications Advisor conducted this effort in the new developments located in Glenway Phase 2, Shining Hill Phase 1, and Sundial Phase 1.

This work was undertaken over a weeklong period in the early evenings when residents would more likely be home. The team utilized cellular-enabled handheld iPads to update information in VoterView and delivered “door hanger” leave behind cards that provided information on how to ensure eligible voters were on the Voters’ List. Generally, homeowners that the team interacted with were receptive to receiving the information but not willing to check the list or make edits to their information at the door. Concerns about privacy or COVID-19 may be contributors to the hesitancy to engage.

### **Recommendations for 2026**

As many new developments are underway in Newmarket, door-to-door enumeration should be undertaken in these areas in 2026. Door knocker style cards are an inexpensive and effective means to relay information in these areas. An overrun of these cards was produced and made available to candidates to use in their own door-to-door campaigning efforts.

Consider using a delivery service or students to deliver doorknocker cards in the future as residents in these new developments demonstrated little interest in engaging in dialogue with election team staff.

### **Voter Assistance Centres**

Two Voter Assistance Centres (VACs) served electors who required additional assistance or access to technology to vote using the online voting platform. Similar to 2018, the VACs were situated in the gymnasium of the Magna Centre and in Lounge 2 of the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex. Town employees staffed VACs and were cross-trained to ensure that a staff person could step in and serve voters in any capacity. Two staff functions comprised these roles, Voter Assistance Officer and Revisions Officer. Each VAC employed a lead VAC Manager to supervise staff and operations at each facility. Student volunteers from high schools throughout Newmarket were engaged as Customer Service Officers, acting as greeters to electors upon arrival at the facility and providing wayfinding guidance to the voting rooms. VACs operated from 10 am – 8 pm during the 10-day voting period, October 15-24.

## Tech Support

Owing to the COVID19 pandemic, supply chain challenges were flagged as an issue that could affect acquisition of computer equipment by municipalities for use in October municipal elections. MCR Rental Solutions provided technology rental solutions for the 2018 Newmarket municipal election and the Town was pleased with their performance. Working with Procurement Services and IT, the Election Team was able to initiate an amendment to the 2018 Non-Competitive Award, granting authority to engage MCR to provide technology rental and staff support for the 2022 municipal election. In 2022, MCR proved to be an excellent vendor to work with, providing all technology requested and serving the Election Team with onsite support at VACs and the Municipal Offices throughout the 10-day voting period, all delivered with attention to detail and exemplary customer service.

New for 2022 was the addition of iPad kiosks for voter use. These were popular with electors and were easier for staff to disinfect after each use. Early in the voting period, the Election Team added inexpensive stylus pens for use by voters who were not familiar with the operation of a touch screen.

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## Action Item for 2026:

As part of the approval to amend SS-2022-055 - Non-Competitive Approval Requested - Procurement of Rental Tech for Election to enter into a contract with MCR for the October 2022 election, Procurement Services recommended, "THAT staff consider a competitive process approximately 12 months before the next Municipal Election, or consider non-standard options, if applicable, as described in the Town's Procurement by-law."

## Contingency Planning at VACs

Parks & Facility Services coordinated back-up generators at both VAC locations. The Elections Team purchased a new generator for use at the Ray Twinney Complex as one used in previous elections was no longer functional.

### Contacts:

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## Recommendations for 2026

2022 was the second Newmarket Municipal Election that employed online voting. Survey results illustrated a high degree of satisfaction from electors with the online voting process. Overall, attendance at VACs was low, with the exception being the final day of voting where a significant increase in voter traffic was experienced.

Both staff and electors voiced concerns over the use of Magna and Ray Twinney as suitable voting locations. The disruption to programming caused by closing the gymnasium at Magna and Lounge 2 at Ray Twinney for a 10-Day Voting Period is significant.

For 2026, exploration of alternative site(s) for a Voter Assistance Centre should be considered. Further, it is likely that VACs are not required for a 10-day voting period and hours of operation could be compressed, which would also save on staffing resources. As mentioned previously, Seniors represented the primary user group at Voter Assistance Centres (VACs). The Seniors Meeting Place is centrally located, fully accessible and has ample parking. This may be an ideal location for a VAC in 2026.

## Staffing

As a primary source of information, please refer to the 2022 Post-Election Staff Survey Summary Final document found here:

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## Recommendations for 2026

Recruitment of Town Staff to work shifts during the 2022 Municipal Election did not yield the anticipated overwhelming response to participate. Several factors may account for this, including the desire by some staff to receive overtime payment versus time in lieu, hesitancy due to lingering COVID-19 concerns, workload in base positions, among others. The post-election staff survey illustrated that dissatisfaction with the election staff experience was most prevalent amongst By-Law staff who did not participate voluntarily but were assigned to work at Special Voting Locations and At-Home Voting.

Reducing the number of days and hours of operation at Voter Assistance Centres should negate the necessity to hire as many staff as in previous elections.

The Town of Newmarket and other Ontario municipalities should continue to advocate for reforms to the Municipal Elections Act to become more aligned with the expanding number of communities offering online voting over an extended period. Presently, there is a legislated requirement to offer voting in Special Voting Locations on Voting Day. Being able to spread out voting opportunities at these locations over multiple days would ease the burden on staff serving voters at these facilities on a single day.

High School students are required to complete a set number of community volunteer hours prior to graduation. The Election Team reached out to Newmarket High Schools to recruit student volunteers to act as greeters and to provide wayfinding guidance at VACs. This opportunity was welcomed, promoted at high schools, and generated considerable student interest to sign up for volunteer shifts. Students received 30 minutes of training online in the week leading up to the 10-day voting period. While students welcomed the opportunity to assist with the election and log required volunteer hours, the low voter attendance resulted in students having little to do during their shifts. For 2026, the use of student volunteers deserves a rethink and may not be necessary.

## Training

Online training sessions using the Zoom platform were developed and delivered to election staff. Presentations were customized to each audience: Customer Service Staff, Library Staff, Voter Assistance Centre Managers, and Revisions/Voter Assistance Officers. Recordings of presentations were available on Town Central. Staff appreciated being able to review the material again at their leisure. An in-person training session delivered to Legislative Services team members was held in the Council Chamber.

Sarah Niezen created a series of excellent “how-to” videos for various aspects of the VoterView tool and these were incorporated into the training sessions.

## Recommendations for 2026

Online training with replays available proved an effective means to train staff and should be considered as the model of preference for the 2026 municipal election.

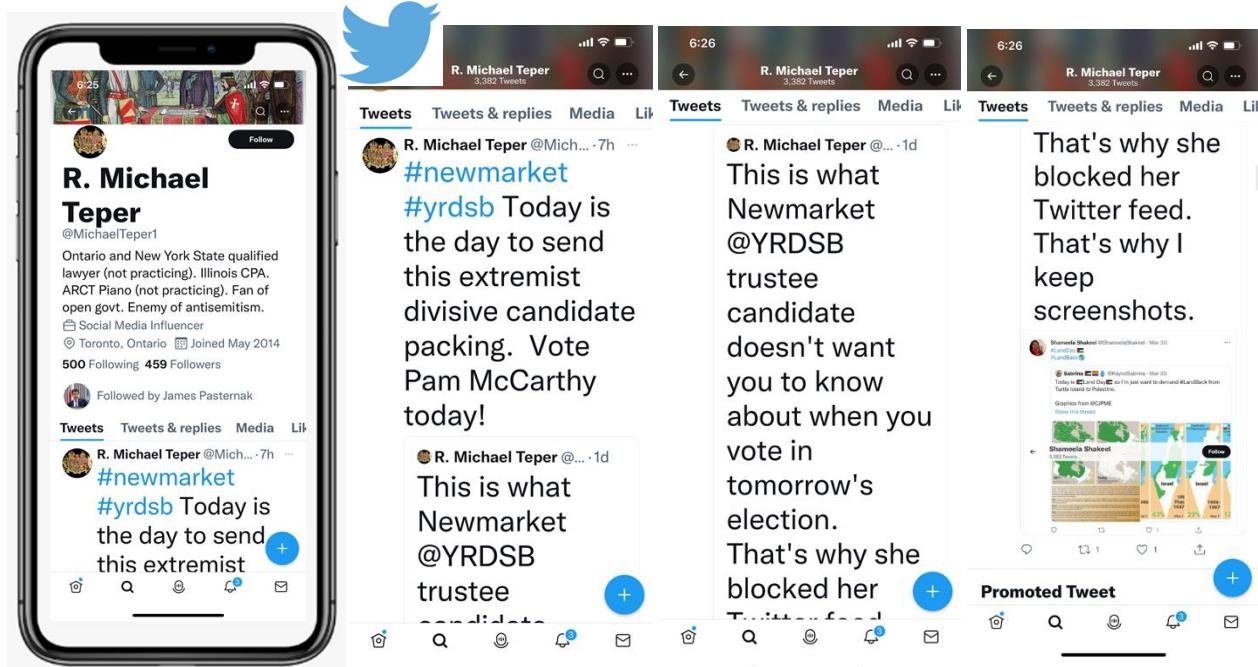
## Election Procedures

Election procedures were revised or created as required and posted to the [election website](#) and the candidate portal.

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## Third Party Advertising

The 2022 Municipal Election marked the first time the Town had a registered Third Party Advertiser. The sole registrant utilized the online Docusign Platform to submit their registration documents. The only activity noted during the election appeared on social media.



## Marketing & Promotion

Please refer to the companion report from Rick Sikorski, Elections Communications Advisor focuses on the communications and marketing aspects of election planning and should be reviewed in conjunction with this report.

Participation in All Candidate's Meeting presented by the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce



[Newmarket voters grill municipal election candidates on issues - Newmarket News \(newmarkettoday.ca\)](http://newmarkettoday.ca)