

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white text on a blue square background.

Edmonton

A vertical white line on the left side of the dark blue box.

OFFICE OF
THE CITY AUDITOR

REPORT
2021 Municipal
Election

MARCH 1, 2022

2021 Municipal Election

BACKGROUND

The Province requires municipalities in Alberta to hold an election every four years to determine the mayor and city councillors for the next four-year period. The election also determines school board trustees for the Edmonton Catholic Separate School Board and Edmonton Public School Board. Additionally, the 2021 municipal election provided voters with the option to vote on provincial referendum items relating to equalization payments and daylight saving time, and to elect Senate of Canada candidates.

To plan and execute the election, the City Clerk's Office puts together the Edmonton Elections team. The team includes staff from other City business areas or contractors to help with technology, training, logistics, recruiting, and communications.

The City Clerk, as the City's election Returning Officer, requested that the Office of the City Auditor (OCA) participate in the election planning process. OCA staff would assist by performing testing, and visiting voting stations during the election. This is a recurring project, as the OCA has provided audit and advisory services for each municipal election since 1989.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE¹

Our objective was to assess whether the 2021 Municipal Election planning and voting were conducted in accordance with provincial legislation and Edmonton Elections procedures.

¹ We conducted this engagement in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

To conclude on our objective, we assessed whether Edmonton Elections:

1. Plans the election to address potential issues that could impact the effectiveness, accuracy, or auditability of the voting process.
2. Accurately records and reports election results, and carries out the election in compliance with legislation, bylaws, and procedures.

In addition to our role in providing assurance, we also served in an advisory capacity. Similar to OCA involvement in prior years, we reviewed documentation and provided advice to Edmonton Elections based on our past experiences. We did not assume any management responsibilities related to election processes.

WHAT WE FOUND

We found that the 2021 Municipal Election planning and voting were conducted in accordance with provincial legislation and City of Edmonton Bylaw *19457 Elections Bylaw*. We observed a couple of deviations from Edmonton Elections procedures, but none that would have impacted the municipal election results.

Logic and Accuracy Testing

In the weeks before voting starts, Edmonton Elections performs logic and accuracy testing on all of the vote tabulating machines. They do this testing to ensure each machine is properly set up for the election (the logic testing) and correctly records the votes (the accuracy testing). We validated the Edmonton Elections' logic and accuracy testing and did not find any issues.

Edmonton Elections performs additional logic and accuracy testing on a sample of vote tabulating machines after the election. We also validated this testing, and did not find any issues.

Voting Station Observations

During advance voting (October 4 - 13) and election day voting (October 18), OCA staff visited 151 of the 240 voting stations.

During our visits to each station, we:

- Observed the voting station to determine if staff were effectively managing operations and whether or not the station was physically set up to promote vote secrecy.
- Checked the details on blank ballots for accuracy and watched tasks performed by ballot and registration clerks for compliance with defined procedures.
- Watched vote tabulating machine operations to confirm that they were accurately counting the ballots, and reviewed machine details to ensure they were the same as those that were tested during logic and accuracy procedures.

We observed a couple of deviations from Edmonton Elections procedures, although none that would have violated provincial legislation or the City bylaw. These deviations did not impact the municipal election results, and in these instances we reminded voting station staff of the correct procedures. We are not making any recommendations related to our voting station visits.

Ballot Style

During the election, we had two observations related to ballot styles.

Advance Vote

During the advance vote, voting station staff made Edmonton Elections aware that some voters were being offered the wrong ballot style in voting stations. Edmonton Elections staff investigated and determined that the issue was related to how registration clerks were using an online "Where to Vote" website, specifically designed for determining ballot style based on a voter's address.

To remedy this issue, Edmonton Elections made changes to the website to prevent the error from occurring, added an additional clerk to verify that proper ballots were being

provided, and subsequently performed spot checks and daily check-ins with voting station staff. No further instances of this issue were noted during the election.

Election Day - Ward Métis

On the morning of election day, staff in a Ward Métis voting station notified Edmonton Elections that they did not receive the correct ballot styles for their station. Edmonton Elections contacted other voting stations in the ward and determined that the issue was present in a total of seven stations, all within Ward Métis. They paused voting in the impacted stations until they were able to deliver the proper ballots.

Edmonton Elections believes that the most likely cause was staff mislabelling boxes for transporting ballots to those voting stations. This caused the voting stations to receive incorrect ballot styles.

Conclusion

Each of these two issues were related to human error, and Edmonton Elections responded once they were notified of the issues. After the election was complete, Edmonton Elections evaluated the root cause of the issues and has put plans in place to mitigate the risk in future elections. We have reviewed those plans and confirmed that they will reduce the risk of similar occurrences happening in the future. We are not making any recommendations related to these issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank the Edmonton Elections team for their open approach and collaboration throughout this project.