



## STAFF REPORT

**Title:** 2025 Municipal Election - Candidate Forum

**Meeting Date:** September 17, 2024

---

### **Executive Summary:**

Across Alberta, municipal elections will be held on October 20, 2025. In previous municipal elections to date, the City of Cold Lake has not held a candidate forum or otherwise been involved in advertising or information sharing for candidates running in the municipal election. In past municipal elections, all advertising and forums for candidates were held by members of the public or organizations within the community.

His Worship Mayor Copeland has raised concerns on the community groups having the resources to be able to host such events and would like Council to have a discussion on the “City of Cold Lake” hosting such events.

This report is prepared to seek Council’s direction on whether they would like a candidate forum to be coordinated by the City of Cold Lake for the 2025 municipal election or would otherwise like the City to be involved in candidate advertisement or information sharing with the community. If this is to occur, Administration would seek feedback from Council on the scope of services that would be provided.

Or as an alternative, provide financial assistance/incentive grants to organizations to host candidate forums, facilitate candidate advertisement or information sharing with the community.

### **Background:**

In all municipal elections to date, the City of Cold Lake has not funded or otherwise coordinated, administered, delivered, or advertised for candidates running in the municipal election. At the recommendation of Administration, the City has focused on all legislative and quality control requirements in administering the election, while remaining entirely separate from campaign activities of interested candidates. The perspective has been that in order to ensure bipartisan, fair and transparent administration of the election, Administration would create distance from candidates to reduce risks or opportunity to challenge the City’s perceived impartiality or influence in the election. It is noted that elections can become contentious, divisive, and political. Some examples of risk or concerns could be:

- Avoiding any perception that the City was endorsing any one or more candidate(s),



- Ensuring that the City was not perceived to be supporting or otherwise agreeing with any perspectives, opinions or messages delivered by any one or more candidate(s),
- In any situation where any information, image, sound or video recording glitched or failed to work, the risk of the City being blamed for any real or perceived impact to any one or more candidate(s),
- In any situation where the City posted information about a candidate, there could be perceived intent by the City to create greater support or priority advertisement for one or more candidate(s),
- Providing tax payer dollars for candidate(s) campaigns which could be funded privately or through community support,
- Depending on the scope of what is recommended, utilizing administrative resources to during a time when Administration is focused on election administration.
- City funding candidate forums (to third parties) may also be misinterpreted on the basis of bias of the third party their own ideology. Even new media outlets are sometimes labelled as politically bias.

In 2021, there were some municipalities that were involved in providing information to the public about the candidates running for Council. Below are some examples of involvement that municipalities have had or may consider:

- Putting candidate basic information, photo, candidate priorities including links to candidate contact information, websites, and/or social media on the City's website,
- Coordinating the filming of videos of candidates stating their candidate platform to post on the City's website,
- Hosting and/or funding a candidate public forum where candidates can speak on their candidate platform and answer questions from the public,
- Hosting and/or funding a candidate public open house where candidates could speak to members of the public in an informal environment,
- Providing grant funding to an organization (non-profit or private) in the community to host a candidate forum for those running for City Council.

If the Committee is interested in the City pursuing any form of the above, consideration could be made as to expectations around the budget amendment that could be supported for it.



An approach could be that the City of Cold Lake provide a monetary incentive grant for all community groups and/or private businesses and/or media outlets to host municipal election candidate forums. That being said, it can be still criticized or misinterpreted on the basis of bias of the third party's own political ideology and/or support/endorsement of candidates (or even the perception thereof) funded by the tax payers. Even news media outlets are sometimes labelled/alleged as politically bias based on their own corporate priorities.

Administration is recommending that the City of Cold Lake not be involved in political candidate forums, and/or advertisements of candidates, to avoid risks of exposing the City of Cold Lake, its officers and municipal employees endorsing and/or favoring (or the perception thereof) any one or more candidate(s) over others.

This report is presented to seek feedback from the Corporate Priorities Committee to understand interest in the City becoming involved in candidate campaigns.

**Alternatives:**

The Committee may recommend that:

1. Direct Administration to host a municipal election candidate forum in 2025 and bring forward a budget to fund this initiative.
2. Direct Administration to prepare a monetary incentive grant for all community groups and/or private businesses and/or media outlets to host municipal election candidate forums.
3. Accept this report as information.

**Recommended Action:**

Administration is recommending that this report be a briefing note and no specific actions be taken at this time.

**Budget Implications (Yes or No):**

Yes

**Submitted by:**

Kevin Nagoya, Chief Administrative Officer