

Setting the Record Straight on Municipal Elections

Some misinformation is being circulated that is causing concerns among residents about the 2017 municipal election in Rocky View County.

This fact sheet details some of these concerns so that Rocky Viewers may better assess the information they receive.

NUMBER OF VOTING STATIONS

It's important to strike a careful balance between protecting the integrity of the voting process and removing unnecessary barriers to voting.

There are advantages and disadvantages to having a single voting station in an electoral division. A single station may make it easier to track voters, but makes it more difficult and time consuming for people to vote, especially if transportation is an issue.

Under Alberta law, municipalities have one voting station per electoral division. If the Minister of Municipal Affairs grants permission, a municipal council may pass a bylaw authorizing more than one voting station. Two possible reasons that the option for additional voting stations in an electoral division might be considered are large numbers of voters (urban) or long travel times/distances (rural).

Rocky View County has sought and received ministerial permission for Council to consider more than one voting station per electoral division. County Council now has the option of passing a bylaw authorizing additional voting stations at their September 12, 2017 meeting.

Municipal councils cannot choose the location or number of voting stations. A council can only accept the standard one voting station per electoral division, or (with ministerial approval) pass a bylaw authorizing the Returning Officer to consider more than one station per division. If the additional voting station bylaw is passed, the Returning Officer determines the number and location of the additional voting stations.

SCRUTINEERS

For the 2017 municipal election, Rocky View County is holding an information session for election scrutineers to assist them in doing their jobs effectively. This is one of the steps the County is taking to enhance the elections process.

A scrutineer is a representative of a candidate for office. Each candidate can appoint an agent or scrutineer to monitor the voting process, raise legitimate objections to a voter receiving a ballot, and observe the ballot count once voting closes.

It has been incorrectly reported that fire fighters will be acting as scrutineers in the 2017 municipal election. This incorrect information stems from the International Association of Fire Fighters union offering their members as scrutineers. However, only if a candidate chooses to have a union representative as a scrutineer, and only if that union representative meets the legislated requirements for the position of scrutineer, can that person be present in a voting station.

Under Provincial law, only three types of people are permitted in a voting station:

1. Authorized election staff
2. Voters
3. A candidate OR a candidate's agent OR a candidate's scrutineer

IMPROVED DIVISION MAPPING

Rocky View County's combination of municipal addresses, postal addresses, and rural topography can make it difficult for some residents on boundary lines to know which electoral division they are in. This has inconvenienced voters who showed up at a voting station in the wrong division. The County had systems in place to help redirect voters to the right station, but they were manual and time consuming.

For the 2017 election, Rocky View County has developed three ways to help residents know the proper voting station in advance, and to help election officials quickly redirect anyone who shows up at the wrong station.

County Atlas: The new online Rocky View County Atlas provides the most up-to-date mapping of the County available. The map will be overlaid with electoral information to allow both residents and election workers at voting stations to quickly and easily identify the correct division. (This feature will be available after Nomination Day on September 18.)

Safe & Sound: The County's international award-winning Safe & Sound contact system will provide election information based on electoral division. Households who have subscribed will receive e-mails detailing who their candidates are, where and when to vote, and other details that are specific to their division location.

Post Cards: The County will be sending every household a postcard with the specific voting information that is relevant for that address.

VOTERS LIST

Some in the County are advocating for a voters list, but there is a great deal of misunderstanding over what such a list can accomplish.

A voters list can be seen as a “pre-approved” list of voters. It can help with the organization of an election, and can speed things up on Election Day if there are large numbers of voters. But there is a time lag between creating a voters list and Election Day. People move, die, reach voting age, get married, etc., all of which makes these lists inaccurate. Because of this, a system must be put in place to allow people who are not on the list to be able to vote if they are legally entitled to do so.

Rather than using a voters list for some voters, and an Election Day process for others, Rocky View County simply requires every potential voter to show identification and sign a legal Voter Registration Form at the voting station.

The County’s system ensures that anyone who can prove their identity and is legally entitled to vote has the opportunity to vote. This is the process followed by all Alberta municipalities, and the one outlined in Provincial law.

There are possible fines and imprisonment for anyone showing false identification or fraudulently signing a Voter Registration Form, and the process is overseen by election officials and scrutineers at the voting station.

It should be noted that if a voting list is prepared, it must, by law, be shared with candidates for office. This gives candidates the names and addresses of voters for use in their campaigning. Currently in Rocky View County, it is up to the candidate to get to know their division, and who the eligible voters are in that division.

Earlier this year, Rocky View County successfully mobilized the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties into asking the Government of Alberta to share their voter information more freely with municipalities. This would allow all municipalities to cost effectively create a voters list in order to manage voting stations and speed up voting. The Province has responded that it will consider the request in their next comprehensive review of the *Local Authorities Elections Act*, but at this time there are no timelines for such a review.

SUPPOSED VOTING IRREGULARITIES

In the past two elections, there have been *anecdotal* claims of voting irregularities.

No one who witnessed voting irregularities first hand in Rocky View County has come forward, and no evidence of voter irregularities has been presented or found.

Anecdotal evidence can include cognitive bias, and any claims of voting irregularities are often based on misunderstandings; incomplete reporting of events; or things for which there is simply no evidence. For example:

Misunderstanding the Law: In the last by-election, some students from Rocky View County who were attending university and living in another province came home to vote. This story is often related as an example of voting fraud, but in fact an Albertan retains the right to vote in their home municipality if they are living temporarily in another jurisdiction for the purposes of attending school or training. There are similar stories about voter eligibility based on misunderstandings of the Alberta *Elections Act* or the Alberta *Local Authorities Election Act*.

Incomplete Reporting: A well-shared story claims a resident was allowed to vote by showing a Costco card as identification. In fact, the resident simply pulled out his store card as a joke, and then immediately showed his driver's license as proper identification. But reporting of only the store card part of the story has created a myth about acceptable voter identification rules.

No Evidence: There have been stories about residents travelling to different voting stations to cast multiple ballots. But there is no evidence that this happened, and no one has come forward to identify anyone they suspect of such actions. There is a multi-layered system to prevent voting irregularities, including voter identification, the signing of a legal Voter Registration Form, scrutiny by election officials, scrutiny by the candidates' agents or scrutineers, and the observation of members of the public.

Rocky View County takes safeguarding the voting process very seriously, and manages its elections with care and diligence. The County is always striving to improve its processes and systems, and Rocky Viewers can have confidence that fair elections are held in their municipality.



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY