

THE MUNICIPALITY OF LAMBTON SHORES

Report CL 06-2025

Council Meeting Date: March 18, 2025

TO: Mayor Cook and Members of Council

FROM: Stephanie Troyer-Boyd, Director of Corporate Services

RE: Public Engagement with Flashvote

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report CL 06-2025 “Public Engagement with Flashvote” be received; and

THAT staff be authorized to engage Flashvote for a 3-year term.

SUMMARY

This report is presented to provide Council with information on Flashvote, a community survey service made for local governments to enhance public engagement.

BACKGROUND

Both staff and Council have observed that public engagement initiatives have been challenging. Several reasons why recent efforts to gauge public opinion have garnered unreliable results have been identified by staff. Assessing public input is difficult knowing that a diverse range of community interest and priorities, which often conflict, must be balanced in the results. Participation levels and unequal representation also compromise the results while surveys tend to solicit responses from those that are either strongly supportive or strongly opposed to an issue.

Addressing these challenges requires thoughtful strategies that encourage meaningful public participation. Understanding and mitigating these issues can enhance the effectiveness of public engagement initiatives.

The following information was provided to Council in the recent staff report on the Grand Bend Community Centre. *“As noted in previous discussions of online surveys conducted by the Municipality, staff caution that results from open online surveys are not considered statistically significant. While this survey received many responses, it may not accurately represent overall community opinion. Surveys that are conducted like this survey tend to solicit responses from those that are either strongly in support of an issue or strongly opposed. Municipalities typically do not conduct statistically significant surveys on a regular basis due to the cost associated with these types of surveys, however staff can investigate alternative ways for obtaining public opinion that may be used in the future.”*

Despite having very strong support for the project during the feasibility study stage, the results of the survey on the proposed facility design were largely negative. Staff and Council recognized that the way the survey was presented did not allow for a good representation of the whole community.

Staff have investigated various methods that municipalities use to solicit public input. Municipalities often use public input sessions, surveys and polls, social media and online platforms to reach out to their communities. As noted earlier, people who tend to participate in these methods typically have a strong interest in the matter or issue and we tend not to solicit the opinion of those without a strong connection.

[FlashVote](#) is a survey service that reaches out to residents through a survey tool that is tailor made for local government. Staff have met with representatives from Flashvote - a tool that offers scientifically designed surveys that provide statistically valid public input, allowing for decision-making based on a representative community sample and think that it would be beneficial for the municipality.

Here's why it stands out:

1. **Speed and Efficiency:** FlashVote delivers results swiftly—within 48 hours—allowing for the ability to make informed decisions promptly.
2. **Scientific Rigor:** The surveys conducted through FlashVote adhere to rigorous scientific standards, ensuring data accuracy and reliability.
3. **Broad Representation:** Unlike traditional methods, FlashVote reaches a diverse cross section of residents, avoiding skewed results.
4. **Informed Decisions:** FlashVote aims to help local governments make informed decisions by gathering input from a representative sample of residents. Traditional methods often rely on a small percentage of participants, which can lead to biased or incomplete data.

FlashVote empowers better decision making, saves resources, and helps to build trust in the community. By leveraging this tool, the gap between decision-makers and residents is closed, ultimately benefiting everyone. Ontario municipalities that use FlashVote include Saugeen Shores, Ingersoll, Meaford and Amherstburg.

The FlashVote system relies on recruiting a have a group of Lambton Shores residents to participate in any surveys conducted by the Municipality. When a resident registers, they are basically indicating they are interested and want to participate in the future surveys that will help shape the future of Lambton Shores. As surveys are rolled out, they will be conducted to complete the survey. Once the results of the survey are complete, all the data is shared on the website through a portal at includes filters such as location, demographic etc.

ALTERNATIVES TO CONSIDER

This solution is presented to Council as consideration to enhance public engagement initiatives.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Staff are requesting consent to enter into a 3-year agreement with Flashvote for their services.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The \$ 13,900 cost for this service was not included in the 2025 budget however staff feel that it can be absorbed in the 2025 marketing and communications operating budgets. The annual fee allows for six (6) surveys a year with no additional charge.

CONSULTATION

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