

SAULT STE. MARIE

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Residents can vote by mail

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A Canada Post mailbox. PHOTO BY TED RHODES /Postmedia

Sault Ste. Marie residents can vote by mail in the next municipal election.

Anyone interested would have to register with the city clerk's office. Secrecy envelopes and declaration cards would be sent to interested persons. An estimated of 10 per cent of Sault residents could choose the new voting option, city clerk Rachel Tyczinski told city council during an online meeting last Monday.

"I do think that is one way that we can fulfil an effort to increase voter participation by providing greater access to various methods of voting," said Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker.

Vote by mail would join advance polls and election day voting as options for residents to support their chosen candidates.

The vote-by-mail option will also help "in case we haven't passed the issue of surges and pandemic and things of that nature," said Shoemaker. "I think what nobody wants to see is what happened in Newfoundland."

A provincial election switched from in-person to mail voting last February because of a COVID-19 outbreak.

"Adding a registered to vote by mail option makes some sense and that it'll hopefully have some success and some people will take us up on the opportunity to exercise their franchise this way," said Shoemaker.

He and wardmate Donna Hilsinger introduced an amendment to a tabulator purchase to offer the new voting opportunity.

Based on 10 per cent of voters, or 5,500 residents, wanting to vote by mail, the cost would be about \$45,000, Tyczinski told council.

Council agreed to spend about \$320,000 to buy the vote tabulator. The equipment should speed up results and “provide some efficiencies in terms of accuracy, spoiled ballots,” said Shoemaker.

“I don’t think it goes quite as far as offering alternatives that would increase turnout or provide greater enfranchisement.”

Slightly more than 40 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2018 municipal election. Voter turnout was lowest among Sault residents aged 18 to 45.

The next municipal election is in 2022.

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