

**OFFICE OF  
THE CITY AUDITOR**

# **ADVISORY REPORT**

## **2025 MUNICIPAL ELECTION**

**JANUARY 19, 2026**

# Report Summary

## BACKGROUND

The Province of Alberta requires municipalities to hold an election every four years. On October 20, 2025, the City of Edmonton held an election in which eligible residents of Edmonton elected a mayor and members of City Council as well as school board trustees for the Edmonton Public School Division and Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division. The Office of the City Clerk – Edmonton Elections is the non-partisan unit responsible for conducting the election under provisions of the *Municipal Government Act*, *Local Authorities Election Act*, and *Edmonton Election Bylaw 21014*.

The Office of the City Auditor has provided the Office of the City Clerk with audit and advisory services for each municipal election since 1989.

## ADVISORY PROJECT

The Office of the City Auditor included an advisory project related to the 2025 Municipal Election in its 2025 Annual Work Plan. An advisory project is a collaborative professional service where we provide advice, analysis, and suggestions to a business area to improve their governance, risk management, or control processes. It does not result in a formal audit opinion or statement of assurance or formal recommendations.

## CHANGES FROM PAST OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR ELECTION INVOLVEMENT

In October 2024, the Government of Alberta's *Bill 20: Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* changed election rules under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. One significant change prohibited the use of automated voting equipment such as electronic tabulators. The Act requires manual counting of votes on election day, by election workers at each of the primary voting stations and at a centralized count centre for advance votes, special ballots, and election day ballots that didn't get counted prior to station closing.

In past elections, the Office of the City Auditor conducted an audit to provide assurance on the election's results accuracy. The use of electronic tabulators allowed us to perform testing before, during, and after voting, confirming the tabulators counted votes accurately. We also verified the integrity of the security seals on the electronic tabulators during voting.

The change to hand counting ballots in 2025 did not allow us to provide assurance on the accuracy of the election results. We could not observe a significant enough number of vote counts to conclude on the overall election results accuracy.

### **ADVISORY PROJECT OBJECTIVE & SCOPE<sup>1</sup>**

Our objective was to provide proactive advice on risk and controls to the Edmonton Elections team as they prepared for, during, and after the 2025 municipal election.

The scope of this advisory project included all documentation and work that Edmonton Elections requested OCA involvement with for the 2025 Municipal Election. Validation of election results was outside the scope of this project.

### **WHAT WE FOUND**

We provided Edmonton Elections with potential areas for improvement to reduce risks throughout this project. Edmonton Elections addressed all of our significant findings before and during the election period.

Election day observations highlighted common themes that frustrated both voters and staff. These challenges centred primarily on difficulties with the computer system, potentially stemming from inadequate training, technical issues, or human error, and struggles with accurately completing the necessary worksheets and forms.

After assessing our overall observations through the course of this advisory project, we have one suggestion in this report. We suggest that Edmonton Elections consider a more comprehensive training approach for election workers in future elections to support workers and reduce voter frustration.

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<sup>1</sup> We conducted this engagement in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *Global Internal Audit Standards*.

# 2025 Municipal Election Advisory Project Results

## WHAT DID WE DO?

The work we did for this advisory project was in three phases:

- Election preparation
- Election day
- Post-election

During each of these phases we provided advice to the Edmonton Elections team on potential risks, procedural gaps, and areas for improvement.

## PHASE 1: ELECTION PREPARATION

Prior to election day, we:

- Reviewed selected documentation
- Attended walkthroughs for various processes
- Verified that the Elector Assistance Terminals were properly tested before use
- Attended training sessions for election workers

### Reviewed Election Process Documentation

We reviewed election process documentation for ballot accounting, results reporting, recount readiness, and unofficial results check and release. We asked questions for clarification on how certain processes would be further executed in detail, but our review did not identify any specific areas for improvement to reduce risks.

Reviewing these documents allowed us to prepare for our role observing voting stations and ballot counts.

### Observed Edmonton Election Staff Walkthroughs

We attended walkthroughs conducted by Edmonton Election staff for specific steps in the election process, including:

- Nomination day
- Registering a voter at a voting station
- Ballot counting

- Review of various election forms and ballot forms

Based on these mock evaluations, we provided Edmonton Elections with potential areas for improvement to the processes. Examples of some of the advice we provided was that Edmonton Elections:

- Consider whether a second ballot counter should be aware of the result that the first ballot counter recorded, as results were to be written on a common form. Accuracy of the result is the most important part of the count, and if a second counter were to arrive at a close but different result, they may be tempted to simply conclude that they had the same count as the first.
- Confirm that final ballot design would include clear wording for a voter to only mark one 'X', indicating selection of their preferred candidate. This would help to provide clarity to the elector.

#### **Validated Elector Assistance Terminals**

We validated Edmonton Elections testing of controls for the Elector Assistance Terminals (devices that enable voters with various abilities to mark their ballots privately and independently, and print a completed ballot for subsequent counting). We did not identify any significant issues.

#### **Completed Elections Training**

Office of the City Auditor staff completed training for the Presiding Deputy / Assistant Presiding Deputy and Count Supervisor roles. We provided feedback to Edmonton Elections on the lack of hands-on training and experience with using the election software and filling out worksheets.

Completing this training also allowed us to prepare for our role observing voting stations and ballot counts.

#### **Observed Advanced Voting Stations**

We observed the election process at 12 of 12 advanced voting stations. We provided Edmonton Elections with potential areas for improvement including:

- Improvement to the layouts of some voting stations to reduce potential for one voter to see which candidate another voter was selecting. We discussed these instances on-site and voting station staff made adjustments.
- Staff in some of the voting stations could have benefited from additional training on how to complete the worksheets and forms during the vote, as well as been made more aware of the importance of completing those forms in a timely manner.

We discussed these observations with Edmonton Elections staff. They indicated that our observations were in line with what they had also been seeing and in response Edmonton Elections created an additional training opportunity for Presiding Deputies and Assistant Presiding Deputies to gain some of the hands-on experience in advance of election day.

## **PHASE 2: ELECTION DAY**

On election day, Office of the City Auditor staff visited voting stations throughout all 12 Wards to observe the election processes in action. This included opening of voting stations, voting during the day, closing of voting stations, and counting of ballots. We observed the operations of the voting stations and provided feedback to the Presiding Deputy or Edmonton Elections staff when required.

### **Observed Voting Stations**

On election day, Office of the City Auditor staff visited 134 of the 222 voting stations. We visited 12 stations to observe the opening processes, 134 stations during regular voting, and 12 stations during the voting station closing.

Overall, we observed either no issues or minor issues in 93 percent (125/134) of the voting stations that we visited, while we observed more significant issues in 7 percent (9/134) of the voting stations that we visited.

For all significant issues we discussed our observations with the Presiding Deputy, Area Supervisor, and/or Edmonton Elections

staff and the issues were subsequently resolved. None of the issues were significant enough to impact the outcome of the election.

Examples of significant issues we identified include:

- Numerous Presiding Deputies and voting station staff commented on the lack of adequate training, especially for the computer systems used. This led to long lineups for voters waiting to register and receive ballots.
- Voting station staff did not properly seal ballot boxes, consistent with documented procedures and training.
- Presiding Deputies did not complete the Periodic Ballot Tracking Worksheet and the Consolidated Ballot Tracking Worksheet at the scheduled times. Not completing these worksheets often appeared to be the result of Voting Station staff prioritizing trying to keep voters moving through the station and troubleshooting issues, but there were also difficulties due to a lack of understanding as to how the worksheets should be prepared. Not completing these worksheets likely contributed to subsequent delays encountered at Voting Station close.

#### Observed Count Stations

On election day, Office of the City Auditor staff observed 12 of 222 counting stations to identify any significant gaps from Edmonton Elections planned approach.

We found some Count Supervisors struggled with administrative processes, including filling out required documentation and entering results into the voting system.

#### Suggestion 1

We suggest that Edmonton Elections consider a more comprehensive training approach for election workers in future elections. This would include the following:

- Hands-on training with the computerized systems used by Deputy Returning Officers to register voters.

- Hands-on training for the completion of key forms and worksheets used by Presiding Deputy and Count Supervisor.

### **PHASE 3: POST-ELECTION**

After election day, Office of the City Auditor staff attended the recount for Ward sipiwiyniwak. The purpose for our attendance was to observe the recount procedures being performed, and we did not observe any issues at the recount. We also validated ballot accounting performed by Edmonton Elections, prior to finalization of the results.

#### **Observed Ward sipiwiyniwak recounts**

We attended the October 22 recount of ballots cast within Ward sipiwiyniwak voting stations, which included election day, advance voting, and mail-in ballots for the ward.

The purpose for our attendance was to observe the recount procedures being performed, and we did not observe any issues at the recount.

#### **Validated Ballot Accounting**

Ballot accounting is the process of confirming the accuracy of the election results by reconciling how many ballots were provided to a station, how those ballots were used (either as votes cast, spoiled, or rejected ballots), and how many ballots were returned after voting and counting were complete.

During our review we found reconciliation issues relating to ballot accounting of preliminary results at eight voting stations. None of these errors would have impacted the results of the vote counting. We discussed these items with Edmonton Elections and they addressed them prior to the release of the final results.

### **WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT**

Enhancing the training of election staff on their election day tasks will lead to increased effectiveness and efficiency at the voting station for voters on election day.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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