TASK FORCE ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION & RENEWAL
INTERIM REPORT OF PANEL 1

Recommendation

Ward 2 Councillor Tony Carella and Mr. Steven Del Duca, Co-Chairs, Panel 1, Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal, recommend the attached report be received for information.

Economic Impact

Nil

Communication Plan

In consultation with the co-chairs, the Corporate Communications Department will issue a media release upon the adoption of this recommendation.

Purpose

To inform Council of the work of Panel 1 to date.

Background – Analysis and Options

The *Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal* was appointed in the spring of 2007 to make recommendations for increasing voter turnout in the 2010 municipal election. While Panel 2 will be making recommendations for increasing first-time voter turnout to 60%, Panel 1 is charged with increasing the participation rate of currently qualified voters to 50%, from 38% in the 2006 municipal election. To that end, Panel 1 met for the first time in September of last year, and six times subsequently, to address the issue from a variety of perspectives: comparing participation rates in democracies around the world, examining factors which reduce the likelihood of voter turnout in Canada, Ontario and the City of Vaughan, and discussing strategies for mitigating those factors---all of which work is described in the attached report.
.

Regional Implications

Nil

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 20/20

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Conclusion

The attached report outlines the work done by Panel 1 to date

Attachments

Interim Report of Panel 1, March 31, 2008

<u>Report prepared by</u>:

Councillor Tony Carella

Respectfully submitted,

Tony Carella, Co-Chair   Steven Del Duca, Co-Chair
Councillor – Ward 2

City of Vaughan

Task Force on Democratic Participation & Renewal

Panel 1

Interim Report

March 31, 2008

Panel 1 of the *Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal* has met on six occasions to date and---cognizant of its goal of changing behaviours---has adopted on a provisional basis a change-model developed by Proscsi Research to guide its efforts. The acronym for this model, **ADKAR**, refers to the five stages that individuals go through when changing their behaviour:

- **A**wareness of the need to change (as expressed in the statement: "I really should vote")

- **D**esire to change ("I want to vote")

- **K**nowledge about how to change ("I know where I vote, when the poll is open, etc.")

- **A**bility ("I am eligible to vote")

- **R**einforcement ("I'm pleased with the results, so I want to do this again")

In furtherance of this process, the panel has devoted itself to three broad action areas in respect of its goal of increasing voter turnout to 50% in the 2010 municipal election. These areas are: Asking, Researching, and Marketing.

Asking

"Asking" is the general label for all those activities the panel is undertaking to better understand the current phenomenon of relatively low voter turnout more or less locally. In furtherance of such understanding, the panel is devising a number of questionnaires, for completion by ordinary voters as well as key informants---those who by virtue of academic study, municipal government involvement (e.g., the Federation of Canadian Municipalities/ FCM, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario//AMO), or relevant political experience can be expected to provide insights that may explain the current situation and what remedies may be reasonably available to the City in achieving increased levels of voter participation in future elections. Processes involved in "Asking" may include on-line questionnaires/surveys, focus groups, polling, and public sessions to receive comments from ordinary voters.

A preliminary list of potential key informants includes:

- Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, former Minister of Democratic Renewal
- Matthew Mendelsohn, former Deputy Minister for Democratic Renewal (now Deputy   Minister, Intergovernmental Affairs)
- George Thomson of the Ontario Citizens Assembly
- Clerk of the City of Vaughan
- Clerk of the Town of Markham
- Dr. R. McDermid, Political Science Professor from York University
- Dr. M. Siemiatycki, Director of Ryerson University's Immigration and Settlement Studies

Depending on the interviewee, questions which might be asked of key informants include the following:

a) What voting mechanism does your municipality currently use?

b) What voting mechanism might you consider using, and why?

c) How would you go about increasing voter participation (in municipal elections)?

d) What is wrong with the current (municipal) election system?

e) What works well with the current (municipal) election system?

In terms of the general public, the type of information sought is demonstrated in the sample questions below:

1) If you did not vote in the last municipal election specifically, why did you not vote?

    a) the issues were not important to me;
    b) I did not know what the issues are or were;
    c) I disliked the candidates running in my riding;
    d) no particular reason;
    e) I was too busy or out of town;
    f) any or all of the above;
    g) none of the above;
    h) voting in a municipal election is futile;
    i) not eligible to vote

2) Are you firm in your refusal to vote in a municipal election?

    a) yes
    b) no

3) If Internet voting or voting by telephone were made available, would you vote in the next municipal election?

    a) yes
    b) no

4) If more places to vote were made available (for example, a polling station closer to your home or office), would you vote in the next municipal election?

    a) yes
    b) no

5) If polling station hours were increased (i.e. the polls were open much earlier and stayed open much later), would you vote in the municipal election?

    a) yes
    b) no

6) If you were given an incentive, would you vote in the next municipal election?

    a) yes
    b) no

7) If failure to vote resulted in being fined by the city, would you vote in the next municipal election to avoid such a fine?

    a) yes
    b) no

Researching

"Researching" refers to the panel's casting of a wider net, in search of an answer to the questions 'Why is voter turnout low?' and 'What can be done about it?' As the phenomenon is not limited to Vaughan, or indeed Canada, research has turned up material from democratic countries around the world---through the review of relevant literature, legislation and regulations, and practices in place in other municipalities.

Keith Archer and David Coletto provide an insight that should not be ignored. In a paper delivered at the 2007 conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, they note:

> *Scholarly investigations of effective representation, including*
> *studies of voter turnout, have emphasized the role that political*
> *institutions may play in contributing to citizen attitudes towards*
> *the political system. Perhaps the most important of these*
> *institutional arrangements is the character of the electoral system.*

Thus, the focus of research has been in four specific areas of the electoral system:

- Alternative voting methods
- Convenience of voting
- Increased access to election information
- Civics and education (for all generations)

Alternative Voting Methods (Internet Voting, Telephone Voting, etc.)

Reasoning/Benefits
- Encourages citizens to vote by making the process easier, less formal
- Provides more opportunities for the busy employee
- Engages a larger percentage of the population in the political process.
- Internet or telephone voting is successful in engaging typically difficult-to-reach audiences (e.g., university students, the disabled) and could level the playing field so all eligible members of society have an equal opportunity to engage in the electoral process
- Coincides with the mandate of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat in Ontario, which opened the doors to exploring alternative voting methods in Ontario (as of April 2007).
- Two-step Internet voting – employed in the Markham election – significantly reduces the risks associated with voter authentication, and is in fact more reliable than other traditional methods such as mail-in ballots
- In a 2000 poll, 62% of non-voters said they would have been more likely to vote if the Internet voting option had been available (federal election).
- One in five (21%) of those who voted online in Markham in 2006 said they did not vote at all in the 2003 municipal election
- 86% of those voting online in Markham did so at home, with 10% at work.
- 78% of those voting online described themselves as very satisfied with the process.
- Citizens are shifting to the Internet for information and engagement, due to time flexibility and relative easy access (85% of Canadian households are Internet enabled).

Convenience of Voting

Adjusting hours of operation/structure for voting centres
• Polls to open at 8am (or earlier) and close at 9pm , to give commuters time to get home and vote.
• Earlier opening of the polls will allow for early morning commuters to vote without impacting their work schedule.
• The City must acknowledge that eligible voters are increasingly working for employers that are located a significant distance from their place of residence.

Additional dates for advance voting
• Weekend voting for those that work during the week should be continued, and additional days of voting similar to the 2007 provincial election (when they extended it from six to 13 days, based on the mandate of Ontario's Democratic Renewal Secretariat) should be explored. *NOTE*: The Democratic Renewal Secretariat has a mandate to test new voting and vote counting methods in upcoming elections.
• Ensure that voting procedures at advance polls are subject to the same scrutiny as on election day, including but not limited to the presentation of identification to authenticate a voter at the poll.

Increased access to election information

The creation of a repository of information – making it mandatory for candidate biographies and campaign platforms to be posted online on a centralized site.
• There is an ongoing challenge that voters claim that fewer candidates reflect the characteristics of electors.
• The real challenge is that electors don't know who they are voting for, what their platforms are or what they stand for.
• To combat this issue, the City needs to be pro-active, and provide web space for each candidate (a brief summary, beyond address and phone number, which would include a short bio of the candidate to help influence the "informed voter"). This profile would be a mandatory component of registering for running in a municipal campaign.

Increasing the use of social media/Internet
• Canadians are currently experiencing a rise of social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and Facebook groups)
• Blogs and the blogosphere are creating a new wave of civic engagement at all levels of politics in Canada and around the world, something we should take advantage of.
• Blogs and social networking have been increasingly accepted in the mainstream and by media sources. These changes in the media landscape should be incorporated into this committee's strategies as it proceeds.

Increasing advertising by the city to promote elections.
• There is an opportunity to establish non-partisan billboards/mobile signs paid for by the City promoting the election in advance (similar to efforts made for Winterfest and Concerts in the Park).
• There is a need to go beyond the statutory requirements when it comes to "getting out the vote, since simple compliance with those requirements is not increasing turnout

Overarching belief:
• E-government is about better government, that is, government that is more accountable, open, democratic, and effective.
• E-government initiatives must strike a balance between efficiency and

effectiveness.
- A municipality may be the best setting in which to experiment with e-democracy initiatives. (see "The Crossing Boundaries Municipal Caucus Discussion Paper", 2002)

Civics and education (including suggestions to be shared with Panel 2 of the Task Force)

Establish a "who does what" of politics, to familiarize residents with what falls under municipal jurisdiction. To help understand what the city does, versus the region, the province or the federal government.
- The City should publish information detailing the roles and responsibilities of each level of government. For many it is a lack of awareness that is problematic, and the City should be proactive in educating its residents, which in turn could lead to a higher voter turnout.
- Need to provide on a regular basis articles/opportunities in the local media discussing roles and responsibilities of a municipal politician.

City wide mandate to work with schools to promote politics and voting beyond *the election year to engage students*

- Develops political socialization at young age.
- Identifying and hiring of young residents to work at the elections and communicate their experiences back to their peers through school forums, papers and community workshops with youth.

Democracy Awareness Program & "You Can Vote!" Mail Out
- Creating a "youth-friendly democracy awareness program aimed at informing youth about the importance of the democratic process and voting. Sending a regular mail from the Clerk to citizens as they turn 18 explaining what the act of voting means together with an explanation on our electoral and democratic system.

"Promoting Democracy in Schools" Program
- Developing a "Promoting Democracy in Schools" program involving speaking tours by councilors, political fairs, election simulations, and debates in schools to promote a more practical understanding of and exposure to how our democratic system works. These activities are to be non-partisan at all times.

Youth Website
- Creating youth-focused websites to engage young people in voting, politics, and democracy. The website would provide resource materials aimed at youth and at helping students and organizations learn about our democratic institutions and practices. It would also have youth website links.

Democracy Support Fund
- Creating a fund administered by the City of Vaughan to support events and activities organized by youth groups aimed at promoting the participation of young people in our democratic system. The money could be allocated to a Student Council, for example, to organize a mock election or hold a political fair.

Civic engagement and community service. Get people more involved.
- Engaged people are more interested in what goes on in the community and can see the effect of their participation
- Engaged people are able to understand the political landscape and the effect it

has on their communities
- Help generate more interest in influencing the political agenda
- Help ensure that individuals are more likely to vote

Involvement of Parents
- Creating a social marketing program to raise the awareness of parents regarding the importance of discussing democratic issues at home and voting with their children. This could be complemented by a "Bring Your Child to Vote" initiative at election time and even a "Bring Your Parent to Vote" initiative

Research Sources

- Bill McKibben, *Los Angeles Times*, "The Power of the Click", October 16, 2007.
- Centre for Collaborative Government, "The Crossing Boundaries Municipal Caucus Discussion Paper", 2002
- *Report of the Commission on Legislative Democracy*
- Delvinia Report, "Understanding the digital voter experience", 2007.
- Elections Ontario, *Access, Integrity and Participation: Towards Responsive Electoral Processes for Ontario*, September 2004.
- Jerome H. Black, 2002. "Representation in the Parliament of Canada: The Case of Ethnoracial Minorities," *Citizen Politics: Research and Theory in Canadian Political Behaviour.*
- John O'Looney, "The Implications of Internet Voting", www.govtech,com
- Joseph Kushner and David Siegel, "Why do municipal electors not vote?", *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*
- Luis Silva, Letter to the editor, *Toronto Star*.
- New Brunswick Commission ("NBC") on Legislative Democracy, Summary of Recommendations, "Boosting Voter Turnout"
- New Brunswick Commission ("NBC") on Legislative Democracy, Summary of Recommendations, "Making Your Voice Heard, Stronger Voices for Youth"
- New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy Report, Released Jan 10, 2005
- $\forall$Ontario acts to undo electoral apathy", *Globe and Mail*, April 25, 2007
- Pippa Norris, *Democratic phoenix: Reinventing political activism*. 2002.
- Pippa Norris, eVoting as the Magic Ballot, JFK School of Government, 2002.
- Sabrina Jalees, Call it Vote-A-Palooza, *Toronto Star*, October 18, 2007.
- *The Hill Times*, "Facebook struggles to accommodate political networking", December 17, 2007.
- Voter turnout in Canada. www.mapleleafweb.com
- Voting, Markham Style, *Toronto Sun*, June 18, 2007

Marketing

"Marketing" deals with all the strategies needed both (1) to promote awareness of the work of the Task Force itself, as well as (2) to generate suggestions for enhancing voter turnout based on the results of "Asking" and "Researching". The former include media interviews of panelists, the use of "in house" advertising, a section on the City's website, public outreach and education, as well as the use of social communication networks (e.g., Facebook).

Both strategies---measures to promote awareness of the work of the Task Force and to increase voting---are suggested in the examples of next steps listed below, all of which will require various degrees of elaboration, to be indicated in future reports:

Sample Next Steps

- Meet with the new City Clerk (once identified) to discuss initiatives which have enhanced voter participation in other jurisdictions (e.g., internet voting) and could be considered for implementation in Vaughan's 2010 municipal election.

- Enlist the assistance of those members of Council who use electronic newsletters to communicate with their constituents, to invite completion of questionnaire on voting habits.

- Recruit high school student-volunteers seeking to complete their pre-graduation volunteer service requirement by attending at a variety of city and/or community-organized events and, under supervision of panelists with Task Force credentials, interviewing attendees, using the final version of the questionnaire developed   by members of Panel 1.   These events might include but not be limited to: Concerts in the Parks, Winterfest,   Public Speakers Series, Maplefest, Binder Twine, Thornhill Festival, Woodbridge Fair,   etc.)

- Give further consideration to a recommendation that a referendum question to the 2010 ballot designed to elicit increased participation

- Provide an elections teaching unit to local schools, especially those designated as polling stations, to instruct students in the importance of voting, on the assumption that they will communicate that message to their parents

- Organize a conference on the issue of voter participation, to garner added suggestions as well as spread awareness of the Task Force's mission

Conclusion

The panel is excited by the challenge it faces. Collectively, panelists evidence a wide range of talent and experience which each has generously contributed to the work of the Task Force