

All candidates meetings, electronic voting in Mono

Written By **TOM CLARIDGE**

The Town of Mono, currently in a close race with Shelburne to become Dufferin's second largest urban community, is going to provide some unique opportunities for an estimated 7,500 residents who will be eligible to vote in this year's municipal election. For one thing, the Orangeville Citizen is sponsoring three all-candidates meetings, the first of which will be 10 a.m. to 12 noon this Saturday morning, Sept. 15, at the Monora Park Pavilion, just north of Orangeville. The other two are to be held 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 2, at Mono Community Centre in Mono Centre and 7-9 p.m. Monday, Oct. 15, at Monora Park.

All five Mono Council seats are up for grabs, with Mayor Laura Ryan being challenged by Stephen Unwin, the Deputy Mayor's seat sought by former councillor Elaine Capes and former mayor John Creelman and the three councillor seats by incumbents Ralph Manktelow, Sharon Martin and Fred Nix and challengers Bob McCrea and Diane Walmsley.

The all candidates sessions and a new voting system are both aimed at improving pathetic voter turnouts. In 2014, Mono had the lowest turnout of any Dufferin municipality, with barely one in four eligible voters bothering to cast ballots.

This time, the election in Mono will be ballot-free, with eligible voters being able to exercise the franchise electronically, either on computers (at home or at the municipal office on Mono Centre Road) or by phone any time between Oct. 12 and Oct. 22, Ontario's municipal election day.

Everyone currently on the town voters' list will shortly receive by mail a Voter Instruction Letter that will have a PIN (personal identification number) and instructions on how to vote. As well, a Voter Help Centre will be established at the municipal office to assist electors with the online and telephone voting process or other general election inquiries. That help will be available on October 12 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., October 15 to 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and on October 22 when polls are officially open province-wide, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Fred Simpson, Mono's Deputy Clerk, says the voting by phone will be possible for anyone with a touch-tone phone. It will require the voter to use his or her PIN and respond to questions posed by a computerized voice.

The data centre in Halifax used by Mono to compute the voting is described by the Town as hosting "some of the most sensitive government and financial systems running in Atlantic Canada. It is built to provide a highly secure and reliable solution to ensure voter anonymity and secrecy of your vote while also ensuring a fair election process."

Mr. Simpson said elimination of traditional ballots and local polling stations should lead to achieving much faster election results. He expects the results to be posted on the town's website "in 15 to 45 minutes."

The website's voting instructions include a warning against trying to beat the system. "Stealing and opening another person's mail is illegal, as is representing another person and stealing that person's right to vote in an election. If you know someone else has voted with your PIN, report it to the Election Official (Mr. Simpson) immediately."

Mono is not alone among Dufferin municipalities in using electronic voting. Mulmur Township did it in 2014 and will use it again this time, and Grand Valley adopted it with the same advance voting made available, starting October 12.