



## AGENDA ITEM

### Appointment of 2021 Municipal Election Returning Officer

**April 8, 2021**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

At the December 10, 2020 regular meeting of Council, Administration provided an update on the County's legislative requirements for the upcoming 2021 municipal election. At that time, Council appointed a Substitute Returning Officer. This was a new requirement under the Local Authorities Election Act. Since nominations opened on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the position of Returning Officer has been filled by the County Manager, as outlined in the legislation and the County's CAO Bylaw #1246/17.

As election activity begins to increase, Administration is looking for a dedicated person to manage the County's election as well as the other provincial and school board responsibilities that the County will be responsible for on Election Day.

For the past several elections Lacombe County has contracted out the Returning Officer position which has worked exceptionally well. For the 2010, 2013, and 2017 municipal elections Michelle Eadie (nee Grismer) was appointed as the County's Returning Officer. Michelle has once again agreed to serve as the Returning Officer for the 2021 election.

#### **ANALYSIS**

The 2021 municipal election will be a complex and time-consuming endeavor for the Returning Officer position. Not only does the Returning Officer have to manage the municipal election for seven individual divisions, but the position also manages voting for two school divisions in parts of those divisions. New for 2021 is the inclusion of voting for senate and the possibility of several provincial referendum votes.

Though Lacombe County certainly has staff that can perform the Returning Officer duties, given the considerable amount of time and work involved with this function they simply do not have the time to do it.



## **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

An allowance of \$46,2000 has been included in the 2021 operating budget for the municipal election of which a portion of this is for Returning Officer fees (approximately \$9,000 - \$10,000).

The County will also receive funding from the school divisions if an election is required and the Province will also be providing funding for the Senate and Referendum votes.

## **LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES**

Section 13 of the Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA) RSA 2000, c. L-21 states that:

- (1) An elected authority may, by resolution, appoint a Returning Officer for the purposes of conducting elections under the LAEA.
- (2) If an elected authority does not appoint a Returning Officer, the secretary (Chief Administrative Officer or a designated Officer of the municipality) is deemed to have been appointed as the Returning Officer.
- (3) The Returning Officer for a local jurisdiction may not be a candidate for the elected authority for that local jurisdiction.

Section 180(1) of the MGA states that Council may act only by resolution or bylaw.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Lacombe County sees the value in engaging the public through a variety of mediums and is committed to open, accountable, and responsive decision making, including different levels of engagement with the public as outlined in the Policy AD(40): Public Participation Policy. The appropriate level of engagement for each public participation opportunity should be selected on a project-to-project basis.

The levels of engagement within the policy are as follows:

- *Inform*: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- *Consult*: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- *Involve*: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

- *Collaborate*: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

*Empower*: To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

The principal purpose of engagement for municipal elections is to inform. The County will inform election partners and the public of Council's decision on the appointment of a returning officer.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

The following elements of the County's Strategic Plan are relevant to this issue:

Our Vision: "An attractive, balanced and progressive community".

Our Mission: "To build a safe and vibrant community through leadership, innovation and the development of healthy relationships".

Key Principles: 1) "Integrity – honest and trustworthy", 2) "Fair and Objective in our decisions and in how we treat individuals", and 3) "Accountability for our decisions and for our actions".

Key Success Measures:

- Stakeholder Satisfaction: "Healthy relationships with neighbouring municipalities, communities and our citizens."

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council approve the following resolution:

*That Michelle Eadie be appointed as the Lacombe County Returning Officer for the 2021 municipal election.*

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**PREPARED BY:** Michael Minchin, Director of Corporate Services



**REVIEWED BY:** Tim Timmons, County Manager

