MOVING TO A FOUR YEAR TERM OF COUNCIL

By: D. Craig – AMO Board Representative
THE AMO Board directed that a report be brought back on moving to a four-year term.
BACKGROUND

- With the review of the *Municipal Act*, the Board directed staff to investigate the matter at its September meeting.
- The Province has introduced legislation that would set fixed dates for Provincial elections (the first Thursday in October every four years, starting Thursday, October 4, 2007)
- Toronto and Brampton have suggested setting a fixed election date for municipal elections and for extending the current elected term from three to four years as well.
- A brief survey was sent to a representative sample of councillors.
- The survey was sent to 108 elected officials from across the Province.
- 10.2% of recipients responded to the survey
QUESTIONS CONTAINED IN THE SURVEY

1. Do you believe the term of municipal councillors should be lengthened?

   * 80% of the respondents agreed municipal terms should be increased to 4 years

2. Do you believe there should be a fixed date for municipal elections?

   * 90% of the respondents agreed there should be a fixed date for municipal elections.
QUESTIONS (cont’d)

3. Do you believe municipal elections should occur in the same year as Provincial elections?

   * Only 30% agreed municipal elections should occur in the same year as Provincial elections.

4. Given that Provincial elections will now occur in the fall (October), I would prefer municipal elections to occur in the: Winter, Fall, Spring or Summer?

   * 90% of the respondents agreed elections should continue to occur in the fall.
QUESTIONS (cont’d)

5. Would you be in favour of a one-time extension of term-limits so the next municipal election (for a 4 year term) would coincide with a provincial election?

* The respondents were evenly split on the issue of extending the current term to 4 years.

6. Would you be in favour of data sharing between Elections Ontario and municipalities in terms of sharing voter lists?

* 100% of the respondents approved of municipalities and the Province sharing voters’ lists.
OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Five of the ten provinces provide for a four year term of office for municipal councils. They are:

* Newfoundland and Labrador
* Prince Edward Island
* Nova Scotia
* Quebec
* Manitoba
ADVANTAGES OF A FOUR YEAR TERM

1. Those favouring a longer term of office maintain that short terms are ineffective, as politicians spend too much time learning the job and then gearing up for re-election. With a three year term, some critics say the first year is spent learning the job, the second year is spent doing the job, and the third year is spent getting re-elected.

2. Longer terms of office would provide a timeframe for municipal councils to engage in more long range and strategic planning.
DISADVANTAGES OF A FOUR YEAR TERM

1. Proponents of a shorter term of office for politicians argue that it is more democratic and more responsive to the electorate.

2. Electors can maintain closer control over their elected representatives as an ineffective council can be more quickly voted out of office. Some jurisdictions with 4 year terms provide for a recall mechanism should an elected official no longer have the support of his or her constituents.

3. Members may be more sensitive to public issues and concerns as they need to face the electorate on a more regular basis.
OPTIONS PROVIDED BY AMO

a) Recommend moving to a 4 year term; keep the November date; that the effective date for starting a 4 year term be after the November 2006 election (i.e. the first 4 year term being 2006-2010)

b) Recommend moving to a 4 year term; keep the November date, but extend the current term to November 2007.

c) Status quo.

ACTION: AMO staff does not recommend Option B as it likely would be seen as self-serving and undemocratic.