



MOVING TO A FOUR YEAR TERM OF COUNCIL

**By: D. Craig – AMO Board
Representative**

ISSUE

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.***