

# Standing Committee Report

**REPORT NUMBER** 090-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk

**DATE**

**PREPARED**

February 18, 2026

**FILE**

**STANDING**

**COMMITTEE**

April 14, 2026

**MEETING DATE**

**SUBJECT**

Election Sign By-law Amendment

## **PURPOSE**

WITH RESPECT to Report 090-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk, we request endorsement of the Finance and Administration Standing Committee to forward the following recommendation to City Council:

WE RECOMMEND THAT the draft Amendment to the Election Sign By-law, as outlined in this report and appended as Attachment A, be approved;

AND THAT the by-law amendment as proposed in this report be presented to City Council for ratification.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Thunder Bay's current Election Sign By-law, 56-2022, includes restrictions on size, number of signs per property, and placement of signs outside of a candidate's ward and on public property. Feedback from the 2022 Municipal Election and a change in landscape with respect to municipal approaches to election sign restrictions, resulted in a review of the current by-law. Administration is recommending amendments to the by-law to allow for a more permissive approach while maintaining safety and respect for private property owners. The proposed changes would remove restrictions on size, number of signs and specific locations and in place add general restrictions relative to safety standards for election signage.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

Election signs play an important role as communication tools in the democratic process. Since the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, there has been increased dialogue and sensitivity to how election sign by-laws can support a resident's right to freedom of expression. The City of Thunder Bay has an opportunity to re-examine the

current by-law through this lens and proposes the removal of restrictions placed on the location and size of election signs; as well as clarification on the timeframe for when election signs are permitted.

This report recommends the removal of the following restrictions related to size, quantity, and location. This will allow candidates and property owners increased freedom to display election signs provided there is adherence to the safety standards in place:

**The sections below are recommended for deletion:**

- Section 3 Definitions:
  - (w): “Private Property” means real property that is not a Highway or Public Property.
  - (x): “Public Property” means real property owned or under control of the City of Thunder Bay, Provincial Government, Federal Government or any of their respective agencies, boards or commissions including but not limited to Highways, all road allowances, Boulevards, Parks, open spaces and vacant public lands.
- Section 4.4: Election Signs permitted under this by-law shall have dimensions that are not more than 1.2 meters in side width, for each of two sides, and not more than 2.0 meters Sign Height, except where a Billboard sign or mobile signs is utilized under a valid permit, then this Sign Height restriction for Election signs does not apply.
- Section 7.1: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign, in any ward that they are not officially nominated or registered in.
- Section 8.1: No Election Sign shall be placed or permitted to be placed on Private Property without the property owner’s or an occupant’s consent.
- Section 8.2: No more than three (3) Election Signs will be allowed per Private Property lot.
- Section 8.3: Notwithstanding subsection 8.2, one Election Sign per Candidate per 500 meters of frontage is allowed for commercial or industrial properties.
- Section 9.1: No person shall Place or permit to the [sic] placed an Election Sign on any Public Property, including City boulevards and highways.
- Section 11.1: Despite the foregoing provisions regarding the timing of Placing Election Signs, election Signs may be erected on a Candidate’s Campaign Office, once the Candidate has filed their nomination with the City Clerk.

The allowance of election signs with permission on both public and private property is in line with a changing landscape and will further support residents the right to freedom of expression. To address the operational needs of the City, the requirement for the City to be neutral, and respect for property owners, the **following additions to the Election Sign By-law are recommended.**

**The sections below are recommended for addition/replacement of deleted sections above:**

- Section 7.4: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on any traffic signal or traffic control device;
- Section 7.5: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign that obstructs the City from entering the highway or any portion of it for the purposes of snow removal or any maintenance, installation or repair.
- Section 7.6: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on City Boulevard lands without the permission of the owner of the adjacent property.
- Section 7.7: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on any property without the property owner's or an occupant's consent.
- Section 12.7: The City, a public utility, or their agents may remove or relocate Election Signs in order to exercise any power authorized by law, including but not limited to carrying out municipal maintenance practices, or the construction and maintenance of a public utility, as determined by the City or in a public utility's sole discretion. In all circumstances the costs or losses associated with the replacement of an Election Sign shall be the responsibility of the Candidate.

All Election Signs whether on private or public property must adhere to the restrictions in Section 7.2 and 7.3 related to street and intersection visibility, and accessibility that will remain:

- No Election Sign shall be located where it will interfere with the safe movement or visibility of any vehicle or pedestrian traffic or where it is a general hazard to public safety.
- No Election Sign shall be located so as to obstruct or impede any fire escape, fire exit, door, window, scuttle, skylight, flue, air intake or air exhaust, nor so as to prevent or impede the free access of emergency personnel to any part of a building, including any emergency water connection or fire hydrant.

In addition, the restrictions on election signs at or within 150 m of a voting location will remain in place to protect the integrity of the election process aligning with the requirements of the *Municipal Elections Act*.

Changes to the language in Section 6.1 (a) will establish a timeframe for the placement of election signs of approximately 6 months:

**“the Tuesday following Nomination Day** of a referendum, a municipal question or a municipal or school board election or by-election; or”

will be replaced with:

**“the day nominations open** for a referendum, a municipal question or a municipal or school board election or by-election; or”

This change will provide candidates the opportunity to make full use of the municipal election period.

Election signs can create waste and challenge community standards for aesthetics. It is important to note that the removal of select restrictions does not equate to an increase in the number of signs but rather encourages a balance of the protection of democratic rights with principles of safety and neutrality. It allows for greater freedom for both the candidate and property owner in how sign resources are applied. Ultimately, candidates are responsible for the management of their campaign resources both human and financial and are encouraged to consider environmental impact in planning their approach to election signs.

The financial cost for election signs can be a barrier to candidacy; however, the landscape has changed and candidates are no longer bound to physical signage as a measure of support. Digital platforms now offer an alternative to signs in the city. In addition, the removal of restrictions related to ward boundaries will allow candidates additional strategic freedom in sign placement.

The amended by-law will continue to be enforced on a complaint basis and through the Municipal Enforcement Services Office. Complaints will be assessed based on adherence to safety and public property restrictions.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATION***

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### ***BACKGROUND***

In May 2022, Report R 88/2022 (City Manager's Office – Office of the City Clerk) was presented recommending the creation of stand-alone Election Sign By-law 56-2022 to provide greater clarity for the public and candidates and assist By-Law Enforcement with managing complaints. The Election Sign By-law 56-2022 was enacted on June 27, 2022.

The City's Sign By-law 135-1992, as amended, provides for the regulation and management of all permanent and temporary signs in the municipality. The By-law, however, does not have provisions specifically to the temporary signs used in an election or by-election.

***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

Attachment A – DRAFT By-law 100-2026 - Amendment to the Election Sign By-law BL 56/2022

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

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***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

John Collin, City Manager

04/08/2026 (MM/DD/YEAR)