

City Council Report

REPORT NUMBER 101-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk

DATE

PREPARED

April 22, 2026

FILE

CITY COUNCIL
MEETING DATE

May 5, 2026

SUBJECT

Election Sign By-law Amendment

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 101-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk, 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 By-law Amendment 100-2026 be presented for approval to amend By-law 56-2022, being a By-law to manage and regulate Election Signs in the City of Thunder Bay as outlined in this report.

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 and number of signs and minimize restrictions on locations maintaining those reflect safety standards, operational needs and neutrality.

The changes included in this report include the feedback received from the Standing Committee on Finance & Administration and maintain the prohibition of election signage in City parks, municipal facilities and at voting locations. Further, the report provides for information on the process for requesting to post signage on municipal property (i.e. City owned vacant land).

These changes provide a balance that respects residents right to freedom of expression under the Charter, the importance of the municipality to remain neutral within the election process, and to maintain and upkeep City infrastructure such as green spaces.

DISCUSSION

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.

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 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 8.2: 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.

The allowance of election signs with permission on select public and private property aligns 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 noted above:

- Section 3.1 (o.1): "Municipal Building" means any structure owned, leased, or occupied by the City for the purpose of providing services, administration, or operations. This includes, but is not limited to, City Hall, fire stations, libraries, community centres, recreational facilities, and public works depot

- Section 7.4: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on any Roadway, Sidewalk, median, traffic island, traffic signal or traffic control device;
- Section 7.5: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign that obstructs anyone from entering a Highway or a portion of it, or obstructs the City or a public utility from carrying out snow removal or any maintenance, installation, or repair.
- Section 9.1: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on any Park or, at or within 150 m of Municipal Buildings.
- Section 9.2: No person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on a Boulevard abutting Private Property without the permission of the owner or occupant of the abutting Private Property.
- Section 9.3: Where not otherwise restricted by the by-law, no person shall Place or permit to be placed an Election Sign on Public Property without the permission of the owner.
- 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.

The changes noted above mean that candidates may choose the size of election signs and the number they erect provided they have permission of the property owner and the signs do not obstruct sight lines for traffic, roadways or impede accessibility for pedestrians.

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*.

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.

Administration is of the opinion that there may be a benefit to provide a process for candidates to request posting election signs on City property with the exception of City parks and municipal facilities. The City owns many properties, some of which are vacant and may be of interest to candidates. This also ensures that the City of Thunder Bay has taken an open and inclusive approach that respects freedom of expression. Should a candidate wish to make a request to post election signage on City property the following process will be followed:

- 1) Candidate will make request via request form on the City's website (fillable PDF), request would include the address of the City property, location, size and number of signs requested.
- 2) The City will have up to 10 business days to review the request and reply to the candidate.
- 3) Criteria for review will include, ensuring that signage meets the requirements for sightlines, road safety and accessibility and that the City does not need to maintain the property during the election period (i.e. grass cutting).
- 4) The candidate will be contacted to advise of the City's decision, this will be the decision of the Returning Officer/City Clerk and included as a Procedure under Section 42(4)1(i) of the Municipal Elections Act.
- 5) If the location is approved, information will be shared with all candidates so that further requests for the same property may be considered in an efficient and transparent manner.

It is not anticipated that the City will have significant requests for signage under the process noted above as City property is extremely limited with the exclusion of City facilities and City parks.

The amended by-law will continue to be enforced during the election period beginning on August 24, 2026 on a complaint basis and through the Municipal Enforcement Services Office. Complaints will be assessed based on adherence to safety and public property restrictions. Administration is confident that the changes proposed respect residents' right to freedom of expression and balance the City's responsibility for neutrality within the election period.

CONSULTATION

On April 14, 2026, Report 90-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk was presented to the Finance and Administration Standing Committee recommending amendments to the Election Sign By-law 56-2022 to remove restrictions related to size, timing, number of signs, and location. At this meeting, the Standing Committee referred this matter to City Council for further discussion and requested administration review the concerns presented at that meeting relative to the extended time originally proposed to post election signs and the allowance on public property with permission.

Members of the Standing Committee expressed concern with respect to expanding the period of time when election signs could be erected from 2 months to 6 months with enforcement capacity and community support as the key considerations. In addition, concerns with the removal of restrictions on public property were discussed, citing anticipated challenges with park space and administrative capacity to manage requests.

Administration reviewed the feedback provided by members of the Standing Committee and as such is presenting an updated by-law amendment that addresses the concerns brought forward.

In addition to the consultation with the Standing Committee, a public survey was completed following the 2022 Municipal Election and feedback was also provided by candidates with respect to election signage.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

BACKGROUND

On April 14, 2026, Report 90-2026-City Manager's Office-Office of the City Clerk was presented to the Finance and Administration Standing Committee recommending amendments to the Election Sign By-law 56-2022 to remove restrictions related to size, timing, number of signs, and location. Members of the Standing Committee provided feedback and referred the amendments to Administration for consideration prior to presenting at City Council.

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 – By-law Amendment 100-2026

REPORT PREPARED BY

Crystal DePeuter, Municipal Election Coordinator & Krista Power, Director of Legislative Services & City Clerk

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

John Collin, City Manager

04/28/2026 (MM/DD/YEAR)