

# Proxy Voting for Municipal Council Members

July 2020

This document is intended to give a summary of complex matters. It does not include all details and does not take into account local facts and circumstances. This document refers to or reflects laws and practices that are subject to change. Municipalities are responsible for making local decisions that are in compliance with the law such as applicable statutes and regulations. This document applies only to those municipalities whose meeting rules are governed by the Municipal Act, 2001.

This document, as well as any links or information from other sources referred to in it, should not be relied upon, including as a substitute for specialized legal or other professional advice in connection with any particular matter. The user is solely responsible for any use or application of this document.

## Overview

The province is providing municipalities with the flexibility to choose to allow proxy votes for municipal council members who are absent. This power helps ensure continuing representation of constituents' interests on municipal councils when a member is unable to attend in person due to, for example, illness, a leave of absence, or the need to practice physical distancing.

Municipalities that wish to allow proxy voting must amend their procedure bylaws to allow a member of council to appoint another member of the same council to act in their place when they are absent.

## Optional and Flexible

Allowing proxy voting is optional and it is up to each municipality to determine whether to allow proxies for council and under what circumstances. If a municipal council chooses to allow proxy voting, it is up to each member to decide whether they wish to appoint a member of that council as a proxy or not if they are to be absent.

Municipalities have the flexibility to determine the scope and extent of proxy appointments including, for example, any local rules or limitations, the process for appointing or revoking a proxy, and how proxyholders may participate in meetings. Municipalities may wish to consider:

- how proxies may be established and revoked;
- circumstances where proxies may or may not be used; and
- how a proxyholder may participate in a meeting including voting, speaking, or asking questions on behalf of the appointing member.

If a municipality chooses to allow proxy voting, it would be the role of the municipal clerk to establish a process for appointing and revoking proxies. Municipalities may also wish to consider addressing proxy voting in their code of conduct or other local policies to help ensure that votes are appropriately cast and that the local process is followed.

Once a proxy has been appointed, the appointing member could revoke the proxy using the process established by the municipal clerk.

## Limitations

Limits to the proxy appointment process are set out in legislation. These include:

- A proxyholder cannot be appointed unless they are a member of the same council as the appointing member:
  - For upper-tiers, this means that a proxyholder has to be a member of the same upper-tier council as the appointee, regardless of lower-tier membership;

- A member cannot act as a proxyholder for more than one other member of council at a time;
- An appointed proxy is not counted when determining if a quorum is present;
- A member appointing a proxy shall notify the municipal clerk of the appointment in accordance with a local process established by the clerk; and
- When a recorded vote is taken, the clerk shall record the name and vote of every proxyholder and the name of the member of council for whom the proxyholder is acting.

Council member absence rules still apply. This means that a member's seat would become vacant if they are absent from the meetings of council for three successive months without being authorized to do so by a resolution of council.

## Accountability and Transparency

Members appointing proxies or acting as proxyholders are required to follow existing accountability and transparency requirements. For example, a member may not appoint a proxy or serve as a proxyholder on a matter in which they have a pecuniary interest under the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*. Municipalities may also want to consider transparency measures such as:

- communicating to the public who has appointed a proxy and who is serving as a proxy;
- publishing meeting agendas in advance so that proxies can be appointed, if needed, and potential conflicts of interest can be identified; and
- allowing members to participate electronically when not able to attend meetings in person rather than appointing a proxy.

For more information about existing accountability and transparency requirements, including the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, codes of conduct and the role of the local integrity commissioner, please see the [Municipal Councillor's Guide](#).

## Contact

If you have questions regarding how these new provisions may impact your municipality, contact your local Municipal Services Office with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

- **Central Municipal Services Office**  
Telephone: 416-585-6226 or 1-800-668-0230
- **Eastern Municipal Services Office**  
Telephone: 613-545-2100 or 1-800-267-9438
- **Northern Municipal Services Office (Sudbury)**  
Telephone: 705-564-0120 or 1-800-461-1193
- **Northern Municipal Services Office (Thunder Bay)**  
Telephone: 807-475-1651 or 1-800-465-5027
- **Western Municipal Services Office**  
Telephone: 519-873-4020 or 1-800-265-4736

## Additional Resources

- Municipal Act, 2001: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25>
- The Ontario Municipal Councillor's Guide: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-municipal-councillors-guide-2018>