

From: ["van Dyk, Donny"](#)

To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)

Date: 8/13/2026 9:23:35 AM

Subject: Memo - Plebiscite Question for October Municipal Election

Attachments: Memo to Mayor Council - Plebiscite Question - August 13 2026.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see the attached memo from Jason Twa. This memo provides a response to a question we received from a Councillor regarding the process to add a plebiscite question on the ballot of the October municipal election.

Should you have any questions, please contact Jason Twa at 604.873.7998 or Jason.Twa@vancouver.ca

Thanks,
Donny

Donny van Dyk (he/him)

City Manager

City of Vancouver



The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x̱m̱əθḵʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

MEMORANDUM

August 13, 2026

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: City Leadership Team
Donny van Dyk, City Manager
Mellisa Morphy, Acting Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

FROM: Jason Twa
City Clerk

SUBJECT: Plebiscite Question for October Municipal Election

QUESTION:

What is the process to add a plebiscite question on the ballot of the October municipal election, what is in and not within Council's authority, and what are the logistical considerations?

SHORT ANSWER:

In order to have the vote on the question coincide with the general election, Council must hold a special meeting and by by-law adopt a "yes" or "no" question on an issue it wants the electors' opinion on. Council has broad authority over the subject matter of the question, and the results are non-binding. Adding an assent question to the October election would increase complexity, timing pressures, and costs, but would still be significantly more cost-effective and likely achieve higher voter turnout than holding a separate vote at a later date.

DETAILED RESPONSE:

A. Process to Add a Question

While the *Vancouver Charter (VC)* does not expressly provide for a "plebiscite", section 184 does authorize Council to ask voters their opinion on a question posed by Council:

184. The Council, for its own information, may submit for the opinion of the electors any question with which the Council has or desires to have the power to deal.

To put a question on the ballot for the October municipal election, Council must approve a question. As the legislation is ambiguous on whether the question must be adopted by by-law or resolution, we recommend setting out the question in a by-law to minimize the risk of challenge.

Given that the next scheduled Council meeting is not until October 27, 2026, Council would need to hold a special meeting to adopt a by-law requiring that an assent question be put on the ballot for the October 2026 general election.

The Procedure By-law provides that a special Council meeting may be held on the date and time specified by either the Mayor, or a majority of Council members. The notice of a special Council meeting should include the nature of the business to be transacted and the way the meeting is to be conducted by electronic or other communication facilities.

The VC provides that voting on a question under s. 184 must be conducted in accordance with the ordinary rules about voting in a City election (VC s. 130(c)) and that the vote on a question may be held at the same time as the City's general election.

In accordance with section 136.1 of the VC, separate ballots must be prepared for each question that is to be voted on. Accordingly, a question under s. 184 must be on a separate ballot.

B. Council's Authority

Section 184 provides Council with broad jurisdiction over the subject matter of the question. The subject matter may be within Council's jurisdiction, or it may be something Council wants jurisdiction over.

Section 184 requires that Council submit a "question" to the voters. The question posed to the voters must be capable of a "Yes" or "No" answer, and the ballot must allow the electors to indicate assent or dissent by marking "Yes" or "No" (VC s. 136.1(1)(b)).

We recommend that the question be clear. A question that is unclear, vague or confusing, defeats the purpose of s. 184, which is to gauge the opinion of the electorate on a particular question.

Questions posed under section 184 are merely advisory, and the results do not bind Council (or anyone). Further, should the voters approve a question regarding powers Council wishes to have, the results do not grant Council any powers.

While, in our view, Council has broad jurisdiction over the subject matter of the question, there is always potential for a legal challenge asserting that Council exceeded its jurisdiction under s. 184, including a court application to halt the process through injunctive relief.

C. Logistical Considerations

As staff are well advanced in their planning and preparation for the upcoming general election in October, the addition of an assent question presents some potential logistical challenges and additional costs, including:

- An increase in the time it takes each voter to vote due to an additional ballot, particularly given the already lengthy ballot, which potentially increases wait times.

Potential Mitigation:

- Add more voting booths at voting places;
- Place assent voting ballots in ballot boxes at voting places for later tabulation with high speed tabulators (additional costs for more ballot boxes and transfer cases; additional costs in programming tabulators);
- Voter Information Cards (VICs) have already been printed and there is insufficient lead time to re-print in order to inform voters of an assent voting question.
Potential Mitigation:
 - Add an insert into VIC mailings to inform voters of the assent question (additional printing/paper costs and mailing costs due to increased weight).
- Training material for election staff does not contemplate additional processes and procedures for an assent question:
Proposed Mitigation:
 - Processes and procedures must be updated and amendments made to training materials (additional staff cost);
- Additional storage space and security will need to be implemented for the large number of assent question ballots (additional costs); and
- In order to prioritize resources for election results, there will likely be delay in providing results to the assent question.

In addition to specific mitigation costs referenced above, there will be various additional costs incurred by including an assent question, including communication costs to inform voters about the assent question, increased vote by mail costs (due to the increased weight of the packages with an additional ballot), and increased staff costs for addressing various issues relating to the inclusion of an assent question.

The most significant additional cost will be for the purchase of additional ballot paper and printing of the assent question ballots. We estimate that should an assent question be added to the October election, it would increase the costs of the election by approximately 4%-6% (\$400,000 - \$550,000).

We note that significant costs would be saved by bringing forward the assent question for the upcoming general election rather than conducting an entirely separate election process at some later date after the general election. As well, it's reasonable to expect better voter turnout during the general election than a separate election process at which the only item on the ballot is an assent question.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Jason Twa
City Clerk

604.873.7998 | jason.twa@vancouver.ca