

What can be expected for a Kanata North by-election

How Ottawa Municipal elections and by-elections work

Monday, September 27, 2021

Summary

If the Ottawa City Council chooses a by-election to fill the vacant Kanata North council seat, based on recent Municipal elections and by-elections in Ottawa. While technically (as of 27 Sept 2021), there are approx. 13 months left in the current term of office, pragmatically, the by-election route substantially reduces the impact that a by-elected Councillor can have:

- The earliest a by-election campaign is likely to start is 1 Nov, 2021. The likely election date would be 31 Jan 2022 (3-month election cycle)
- The full Municipal election will start on 1 May 2022 (nominations open for Oct 2022 vote, a 6-month election cycle). This effectively allows for only three months (1 Feb to 1 May) of full council work for a new Councillor before the fall campaign starts.
- This also means Kanata North is without direct representation for an additional four months (now to 1 Feb 2022)

Note: the Cumberland by-election (Oct 2020) – held during COVID-19 rules - only had 24% voter turnout

Elections

Technically, there 14 months left (Oct 1 2021 to Dec 2022) in the current Ottawa City Council term. Existing Councillors will continue to void on routine issues up to Nov 30, 2022.

However, in past elections, the City does not schedule any major decisions or projects after May 1 of an election year– the date that formal candidate nominations start for the fall election and the effective first day of campaigning. The election date is typically around 22 Oct.

So effectively, City Council is in campaign mode for 174 days (just under 6 months).

Voter turnout for the 2018 Municipal election was 47% of eligible voters

By-elections

The process to replace a vacant seat on Council starts with the recommendation to City Council by the City Clerk (Rick O'Connor) as to which option they recommend – appointment, by-election or delegate to Councillors in adjacent Wards. Mr. O'Connor has

stated he will make his recommendation on 13 Oct on either appointment or by-election. City Council then has 60 days to act to appoint or announce a by-election.

Cumberland by-election – Oct 2020

With the most recent by-election (Oct 2020 to replace Stephen Blais in the Cumberland Ward under COVID-19 rules), Council approved the by-election on 10 Jul 2021, nomination would open (start of campaign) on 21 Aug 2020 and an election on 5 Oct 2020.

Timelines:

- In 2020 Council provided 3 months from the announcement of the Cumberland by-election until the vote:
 - ◇ The decision on the by-election date was initially postponed by approx. 2 months due to COVID-19
 - ◇ 10 Jul to 21 Aug (6 weeks) for potential candidates to consider if they wished to run and time to organize a campaign
 - ◇ 22 Aug to Oct 5 (6 weeks) to campaign prior to the vote
 - ◇ Voter turnout for the Cumberland Municipal by-election was 24% of eligible voters

Kanata North by-election – Jan 31, 2022?

Timelines - Building on past Municipal elections and by-elections:

- Applying the same timelines to 2021 for a by-election Kanata North, we are potentially looking at the 1 Feb 2022 until a by-election Councillor is in Office
 - ◇ Recommendation for by-election by the City Clerk is scheduled 13 Oct 2021. Assume Council moves quickly and a by-election is announced 1 Nov 2021
 - ◇ 3 months to the – by-election – Jan 31, 2022

Given that the full Municipal election starts on 1 May 2022 (nominations open for Oct 2022 vote), this effectively allows for only 3 months of meaningful council work for a new Councillor.

This also means Kanata North is without direct representation for an additional four months (1 Oct 2021 to 1 Feb 2022)