

An Overview of the Alternate Approval Process

There are several different ways for local governments to gather feedback from the public. One effective tool is the alternate approval process, as outlined in the *Community Charter*. This process helps regional districts and municipalities measure public approval for matters such as new bylaws, new borrowing arrangements, and changes to existing services. It works by giving residents the opportunity to vote against or oppose these matters (It may be more familiar to some people as a “counter petition”, as it was previously known under the *Local Government Act*.) Today, the alternative approval process is a common way for councils and boards to find out the wishes of the public. It’s also an efficient legislative mechanism that can be used to obtain the assent of the electorate without the expense of a referendum.

What is the alternative approval process?

The alternative approval process is a tool that municipalities and regional districts use to measure the approval for decisions through a public voting format. However, unlike referenda, the alternate approval process does not rely on voters showing up to cast their vote in favour of a certain matter. Rather, it is used to measure the number of people within a specific area who are opposed. The authority for a local government to adopt a bylaw, within the alternative approval process, is granted if fewer than 10% of eligible electors in the area covered by the alternate approval process vote against the bylaw by submitting elector response forms.

Who gets to take part in the alternative approval process?

People who live in or own property in the physical area to which the proposed action applies may be able to take part in the process. Individuals may only submit one elector response form each.

How does the process work? How do I take part?

For any item that will be decided through an alternative approval process, the public will be notified at least two weeks in advance through advertisements or notices placed in local newspapers. Each notice provides information on the matter to be approved, as well as the time and location where people can sign their name against the matter using a response form. Electors have 30 days after the second newspaper advertisement to submit response forms. After 30 days, the chief election officer counts the number of electors who have submitted forms. If this group makes up more than 10% of the total number of eligible electors in the area that will be affected, then the matter is considered opposed by the public and the local government will have to conduct a referendum if it still wishes to proceed. If less than 10% of the people in the area submit forms against the matter, then the matter is considered approved and the local government can adopt the bylaw.

Visit <http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/pathfinder-rd.htm> for more information about regional district services and elector approval or contact the Comox Valley Regional District office at 600 Comox Road, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 3P6 or by telephone at 250-334-6000 or toll-free at 1-800-331-6007 or by e-mail at administration@comoxvalleyrd.ca.

James Warren
Corporate Legislative Officer
www.comoxvalleyrd.ca