

You may have to prove citizenship to vote in Markham

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

In the last local election, Markham clerk Sheila Birrell didn't have a lot of confidence when she asked people to declare in writing they were eligible to cast a ballot.

While she had no proof some people were playing fast and loose with the system, Ms Birrell wanted to do something to ensure the integrity of the vote.

"I could feel in my gut, but I had no proof," she said. "But in my heart of hearts, I didn't

think it was good enough."

Recent reports have cast suspicion on voter rolls across the province, alleging as many as one in five voters are not confirmed Canadian citizens.

Preliminary voter lists are compiled by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation from information about who owns property in Ontario, along with tenant statistics for apartments with more than seven units, according to Larry Hummel of MPAC.

"Our numeration process really is a year-round activity, while the elections are every four years," Mr. Hummel said, adding the corporation sends out nearly half a million occupancy questionnaires annually to compile age and citizenship information.

The corporation also works with Elections Canada and Elections Ontario, cross-checking names and their electoral status.

That initial list is subsequently provided to municipal clerks.

Unlike the census to which you must respond by law, the corporation's questionnaires are voluntary, Mr. Hummel said.

He has concerns about how many files that can't be confirmed as Canadian citizens.

"People are still sitting on their numeration forms," he said.

"I guess if there's one message to get out, it is get those forms back to us."

For decades, it has been common if a voter cannot be

confirmed as Canadian citizen, he will be declared one by default in the government records.

But this wasn't good enough for Ms Birrell.

When Markham compiles the town's eligible voter list this time around, those who are identified as having unknown citizenship status will have to prove they're entitled to a ballot on voting day.

And it is all by the books, Ms Birrell said.

"Under the (Elections) Act, you can pretty much set up any process you want," she said. "This is just an attempt to live within the spirit of the legislation."

A couple of different situations can play out.

• If you're on the list, but government records have your citizenship listed as unknown, you'll need to produce proof of Canadian citizenship — a birth certificate, baptism certificate, Canadian citizenship certificate with a photo ID. Failing that, you don't get to vote. Sworn written declarations won't be accepted.

• If you're not on the voter's list, you'll need proof of citizenship with a photo ID and proof of residency — tax bill, credit card statement, utility

bill. Again, you won't be able to swear an oath in writing.

• If you're on the list and shown as being Canadian, you'll need photo ID and lacking that, a sworn declaration.

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The same rules will apply for online voting.

So how do you know you're on the list?

It will be available for viewing during business hours between Sept. 1 and Nov. 13 at the Markham Civic Centre and libraries across town.

For more information, log on to markham.ca

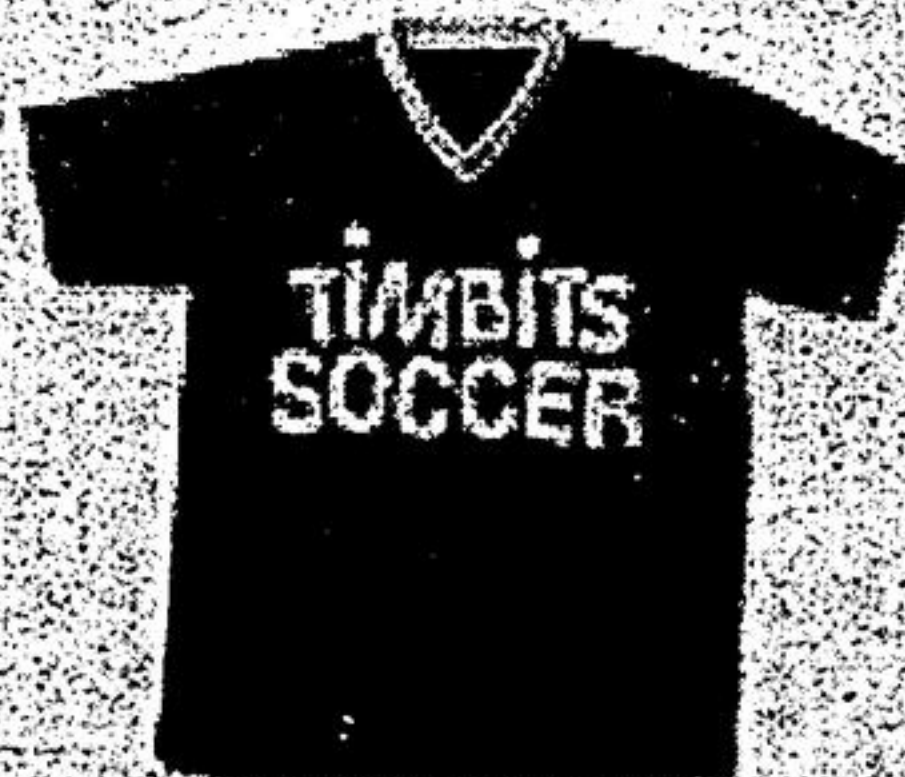
The election takes place Nov. 13.

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