



To: Council
From: Loriann Harbers, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Date of Meeting: January 25, 2023
Subject: 2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Report

Background:

Pursuant to Section 12.1 (3) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, S.O. 1996, c.32, as amended, the Clerk shall, within 90 days of the election, prepare a report identifying measures taken to remove and prevent barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

The Clerk, as Returning Officer, took every effort to reduce barriers on several levels with regards to the planning and undertaking of the 2022 Municipal Elections.

These include:

- voting electronically through an online voting solution;
- by paper ballot at an accessible location in the municipality during the advance voting period;
- by paper ballot at four accessible locations in the municipality on Election Day; and
- addition of an advance poll at a local retirement home.

The 2022 Election built on the efforts of the past with electronic voting. An opportunity to cast a ballot from the comfort and convenience of a familiar setting, complete with the tools, equipment and/or software that assist citizens with disabilities in their day-to-day activities is addressed with internet voting. This method of voting was also used in the 2003, 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018 municipal elections.

Accessible customer service training received by Township staff was also beneficial for election officials assisting candidates and electors.

Discussion:

The *Municipal Elections Act*, as amended, states the following:

*"12.1(1) Electors and candidates with disabilities
A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8
(8)*

12.1(2) Plan re barriers

The clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

12.1(3) Report

Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

41(3) Variations for electors with visual impairments

The clerk shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as he or she considers necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without the assistance referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 52 (1). 1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 41 (3); 2001, c. 32, s. 30 (1).

45(2) Accessibility

In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (23)."

Customer Service and Information Sharing - Providing Tools to Assist

Township staff and staff hired specifically for the 2022 Elections were provided with Accessible Customer Service training as part of the overall election training event. This training was invaluable in providing strategies to identify and eliminate barriers in the provision of services. The role of election official was carried out by the Clerk with assistance of Township staff. Election officials play a central role in assisting electors at the Voter Help Centre or on the telephone. All election staff signed an official oath consistent with municipal election protocol to secure and safeguard the integrity of the election process.

Advertising of the 2022 Elections and methods of voting to be conducted in the October municipal election began in February. Information was distributed to residents via tax bill inserts, local newspapers, township website, social media, and Canada Post. In addition, candidates were provided with the Township's Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan and were made aware of the alternative methods of voting during filing procedures with the Clerk and the candidates training event.

Voting Method - Access through E-Voting

E-voting combined with everyday tools like computers, tablets, telephones and other aids can present opportunities for persons with disabilities to vote, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

The voter interface developed by the supplier of the e-voting solution (Intelivote Systems Inc.) used by the municipality in the 2022 Elections took into consideration accessibility standards and usability guidelines to facilitate the voting process for everyone.

The Intelivote System was created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is compliant with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information, such as with audio. Abiding by this standard ensured voters with a disability, with existing web aware technology, could connect to the voting website and interact with the voting system.

Using the e-voting system, disabled persons are given the opportunity to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for disabled persons who have mobility restrictions and/or have a difficult time with transportation due to physical disabilities. Travel to a physical polling location would no longer create a hardship or barrier to them.

Enabling persons with a disability the opportunity to vote from any location, with the ability to choose alternate voting methodologies (internet or paper) increases the opportunity for these individuals to participate in the election without assistance. This level of independence affords them an increased level of privacy while casting their ballot without the usual involvement of a friend or relative, which may otherwise compromise their secret ballot.

Voting Places – Town Hall, Rothwell Osnabruck School (Lancer Centre), Newington Fire Hall, St. Andrew West Fire Hall

Accessible facilities were established as Voting Places for the 2022 Elections to allow residents to vote via paper ballot. Each facility was inspected in advance ensure compliance.

Voter Help Centre, Town Hall

The municipality hosted a Voter Help Centre from Wednesday, October 19 to Friday, October 21, between the hours of 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Saturday, October 22 and Sunday, October 23 between the hours of 10:00 am and 3:00 pm and on Monday October 24, between the hours of 8:30 am and 8:00 pm, where all members of the public, including persons with a disability, could visit or call to get assistance with their voting process. Town Hall is fully accessible. Election officials were trained to provide assistance if requested.

Woodland Villa, Long Term Care Facility

A Voting Place was operated at Woodland Villa on Friday, October 21 from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm with touch screen computers. Due to an outbreak, select Woodland Villa staff were provided elections training and assisted the residents at the facility.

Sunset Cove Retirement Residence

Election staff operated a Voting Place at Sunset Cove on October 20 from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm with touch screen computers. Election staff were trained and assisted the residents at the facility when required. In addition, staff attended at the facility in September to assist residents with confirming their information on the Voters' List and to provide information of the upcoming elections and a demonstration.

Prepared by:

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