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Town of Aurora
Information Report
No. CS23-029

Subject: 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Report

Prepared by: Gregory Peri, Accessibility Advisor

Department: Corporate Services

Date: May 2, 2023

In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any Member of Council may request that this Information Report be placed on an upcoming General Committee or Council meeting agenda for discussion.

Executive Summary

This report provides Council with information regarding the identification and removal of barriers to accessible voting in the 2022 Municipal Election. The report specifically speaks to;

- The implementation of Internet Voting led to the most accessible Municipal Election possible
- The Accessibility Advisor visited each voting location prior to Election Day to ascertain the facilities' accessibility gaps

Background

Section 12.1 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* mandates that the Clerk 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. The plan that was created is attached to this report as Attachment 1.

The same section further mandates that the Clerk 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. A detailed review has been prepared by Accessibility Advisor Gregory Peri and can be found as Attachment 2 to this report.

Analysis

The implementation of Internet Voting led to the most accessible Municipal Election possible

One of the most often noted features of Internet Voting is the accessibility it provides voters. Aurorans with disabilities were able to vote from their homes using the same technology (i.e., screen readers, voice command, etc.) that they would use to complete tasks like online banking and shopping. Voting online ensured that residents with disabilities retained their independence and dignity by having equal opportunity to vote as other members of the public did. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (A.O.D.A.)* speaks to equal opportunity for residents with disabilities and when it comes to elections, this is best realized through internet voting.

The Accessibility Advisor visited each voting location prior to Election Day to ascertain the facilities' accessibility gaps

The Accessibility Advisor, along with other election staff, visited every voting location to determine where doorstops and other extra supports should be placed. This resulted in Staff receiving no complaints regarding accessibility on Election Day. Election Day and advanced poll staff were also provided an accessibility kit with helpful tools that could be used should someone require accommodation at a voting location.

Further to this, staff had previously eliminated specific voting locations from the 2018 Municipal Election due to the lack of accessibility they offered, and therefore not returned in 2022.

Advisory Committee Review

None.

Legal Considerations

This report has been prepared in accordance with Section 12.1 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*. The Town is required to prepare this report within 90 days after voting day in a regular election and make this report public.

Financial Implications

None.

Communications Considerations

The Town will inform residents about the information contained in this report by posting it to the Town's website as well as on the Aurora Votes 2022 page.

Climate Change Considerations

None.

Link to Strategic Plan

This report supports the strategic goal of monitoring and updating the Accessibility Plan to ensure compliance with A.O.D.A. (*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*).

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. Council provide direction.

Conclusions

Staff are proud of the accomplishments related to accessibility and the 2022 Municipal Election. Barriers were identified, mitigation strategies were proposed and executed well which created equal opportunity for all Town of Aurora residents to vote in the 2022 Municipal Election.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - 2022 Accessibility Elections Plan

Attachment 2 - 2022 Post-Elections Accessibility Report

Previous Reports

None.

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on April 13, 2023

Approvals

Approved by Techa van Leeuwen, Director, Corporate Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer



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Town of Aurora
**Attachment 1 - 2022 Accessibility
Elections Plan**
Corporate Services

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Introduction

The Town of Aurora is committed to providing equitable treatment to all people by identifying and removing barriers to accessibility. The Town of Aurora Municipal Election Accessibility Plan addresses the specific accessibility requirements in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), as amended.

The Elections Accessibility Plan is built to strengthen the Town's commitment to improving accessibility for all, and ensures that electoral services are accessible to all electors and candidates.

The Town of Aurora is dedicated to the continuous improvement and development of our approach to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. This plan will be updated and improved as new opportunities are identified or become available. The review of accessibility issues, initiatives and addressing barrier prevention or removal is an ongoing practice.

Municipal Elections Act, 1996

The Town Clerk is responsible for the proper legislative and administrative conduct of the municipal election in the Town of Aurora. The legislative requirements under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, include:

- Section 12.1 (1) places responsibility on the Clerk to have regard to the needs of the electors and candidates with disabilities. Accessible Customer Service Standards must be followed when conducting a Municipal Election.
- Section 12.1 (2) requires that the Clerk 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.
- Section 12.1 (3) requires that within ninety (90) days after voting day 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.
- Section 41 (3) states that 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 assistance.
- Section 45 (2) states that in establishing the locations of voting places, the Clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Objectives

The Election Accessibility Plan was developed by the Town's Accessibility Advisor and is intended to highlight measures that the Town will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives include:

- That all voting locations are accessible;
- That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election official; and,
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Town's website and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

Development of the Plan

This Plan is an active document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise. During the development process of the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan, the following steps were implemented:

1. Staff training standards and practices directly related to the Election were established to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in a positive customer service environment, and ensure that all Election Officials recognize that in every way possible a voter's needs are to be accommodated whenever possible; and,
2. Following the Election, a report will be prepared on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

Definition of Disability

- a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b) condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;

- d) a mental disorder; or
- e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

Disabilities can take many forms, both visible and invisible. The following criteria were considered in the development of this Plan:

- Policies and procedures must be consistent with the principles of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* and must respect the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities;
- Access to electoral services must be integrated and equitable;
- Initiatives should address and accommodate a wide range of abilities; and,
- The Town of Aurora customer service policy for providing services to people with disabilities must be followed throughout the election process.

Accessibility Training for Election Officials

The Town of Aurora will hold mandatory training sessions for all staff and volunteers carrying out election duties. Staff and volunteers will complete Accessible Customer Service Training and specific Election Training to help serve people with disabilities and educate themselves on the special services available to assist electors. Training will include:

- How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities;
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person;
- Explaining the voting method;
- How to use voting equipment and assistive devices to deliver election services;
- How to provide accessible customer services and what to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services;
- Creating a barrier free voting location; and,
- Providing voter assistance, if required.

Communications and Information

As per the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, the Town of Aurora will provide electors information in a format that takes into account a persons disability. Information and forms will notify candidates and electors that the information is available in an alternative format upon request. Once a request has been made formats may be agreed upon between the elector and the Town Clerk, or their designate.

Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions

Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the Town's control, the Clerk shall provide public notice on the municipal website and in the local media should a temporary

disruption in the delivery of election information or services occur. The notice shall include the reason for the disruption, the expected duration and an explanation of alternative methods of delivering the information or service.

In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of Voting Locations during the advance vote or on the Election Day, Notices of Disruption will be posted in real time:

- On the Town's website and election website;
- On Facebook;
- On Twitter;
- On Instagram;
- Posted at the site of disruption

Accessible Voting Locations

To ensure that voting locations are accessible to electors, an Accessibility Site Inspection Checklist was created for voting locations. The checklist has been prepared to assist in the evaluation of each voting location.

The Accessibility Site Inspection includes the assessment of the following:

- Exterior paths of travel
- Accessible parking
- Accessible entrances
- Interior paths of travel
- Elevators (if applicable)
- Barrier free washrooms
- Facility signage and information systems

A comprehensive accessibility audit of each voting location has been conducted to ensure that each voting location is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Designated parking for persons with disabilities

Designated parking for persons with disabilities will be provided in close proximity to the entrance of the Voting Location where possible. Accessible parking spaces will be clearly marked and will be on firm and level ground. Routine checks will be made to ensure all entrances remain barrier free through the course of the day.

Accessible Routes

Each location will have a route marked for entry into the voting location and into the voting area within the location. The voting area will be identified with clear and understandable signage.

Entrances and Exits

All entrances to the Voting Location will be easy to access and barrier free. Every effort will be made to ensure that the door into the interior Voting Area is wide enough for a wheel chair, scooter, other assistive device or service animal to pass through safely and easily. Should doors into the interior Voting Area not be accessible the doors shall remain propped open for the duration of the voting location hours. Routine checks of the entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the day.

Interior Voting Area

Access to the interior voting area and voting booth shall be level and easily traversed. Any doormats or carpeting shall be level with the floor to prevent potential hazards. All voting areas shall be well lit and seating will be made available at various stages of the voting process.

Accessible Voting Booths

Accessible voting booths will be available at each Voting Location. Voting booths will be low in height and have a wide area to allow for individuals who use mobility or assistive devices to vote independently and privately. A large print "Notice of Ballot" poster shall be displayed in close proximity to the voting booth. Magnifying sheets will be made available to assist any individual with visual impairments, upon request.

Accessible Voting Technologies (online)

In this system, voters are able to vote from the comfort of their homes through secured internet services. This method provides for easy voting for voters with any disabilities. Internet voting will be available from October 14, 2022 until October 23, 2022.

Voting Assistance

Persons with differing abilities may be accompanied by a support person within the voting location. In addition, an Election Official in each voting location can assist the voter in casting their vote. Prior to entering the voting booth, the Election Official shall consult with the person with the varying ability to determine the extent to which they need assistance and the best way in which this assistance can be provided. Wherever possible the Election Official will explain the accessible technologies available and confirm the elector's preferred method to vote. This may include actually marking the ballot as directed by the person with the varying ability.

Service Animals

Anyone requiring the use of service animals is permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at all designated voting locations.

Support Person

A support person may accompany a person with a disability in order to help with communications, mobility, personal care or medical needs. The support person, upon the completion of an "Oath of Secrecy", may accompany the elector behind the voting screen to assist the elector in the voting process.

Emergency Information and Procedure

Election staff will be aware of the emergency evacuation procedure and plans at their designated voting location. They will be informed on how to assist staff and electors with disabilities in the event of an emergency

Voting Methods

The Town of Aurora will be offering the traditional method of voting using a paper ballot that's counted by vote tabulators as well as internet voting. Paper ballot voting will be available on the following dates and times:

- Saturday, October 15, 2022 – 12 p.m. – 6 p.m. – Aurora Senior's Centre
- Sunday, October 16, 2022 12 p.m. – 6 p.m. – Aurora Senior's Centre
- Monday, October 17, 2022 4 p.m. – 8 p.m. – Aurora Senior's Centre
- Tuesday, October 18, 2022 4 p.m. – 8 p.m. – Aurora Senior's Centre
- Wednesday, October 19, 2022 4 p.m. – 8 p.m. – Aurora Senior's Centre
- Monday, October 24, 2022 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. – Local polling station

Internet voting will be available from October 14 at 10 a.m. to October 23 at 12 p.m. Please note that internet voting will not be available on Election Day.

Feedback

The Town of Aurora welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes need to be considered and ways in which the Town can improve the delivery of an accessible Election. This Accessibility Election Plan is a living document and will continue to undergo changes. Please provide us with your feedback so we know how to best provide an accessible election. Feedback on this Plan can be submitted through the following channels:

Telephone: 365-500-3172
Email: accessibility@aurora.ca

In person or Mail: Aurora Town Hall, Corporate Services
100 John West Way, Box 1000, Aurora, ON, L4G 6J1

Additional Resources

Please visit the Town's website for more information on the [2022 Municipal Election](#) and the [Town of Aurora Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#).



Objectives

The Election Accessibility Plan was developed by the Town's Accessibility Advisor and was intended to highlight measures that the Town implemented to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives included:

- That all voting locations were accessible;
- That persons with disabilities were able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
- That persons with disabilities had full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;
- That persons with disabilities could fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election official; and,
- That efforts were made to ensure that electors with disabilities were aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Town's website and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

General Election Information

The 2022 Town of Aurora Election was conducted over an 10-day voting period (October 14 - 24, 2022). The Town of Aurora offered both traditional methods of voting using a paper ballot counted by vote tabulators as well as internet voting. Voters were required to attend a specific voting location based on their municipal address, or were able to vote online from October 14 – 23. Internet voting was not available on Election Day.

Identification of Barriers

The Town of Aurora is committed to providing excellent customer service to all residents and visitors, and treating everyone with dignity and respect. To make the 2022 Town of Aurora Election accessible there had to be recognition of the diverse needs of all potential voters, including the needs of people with disabilities.

Highlights:

- Implemented previous Accessibility Advisory Committee recommendations on election accessibility initiatives.
- Gathered comments and recommendations from the municipality's Accessibility Advisor on methods to meet accessibility needs.

- Accessibility Advisor developed a voting location audit and completed all audits for voting locations.
- Accessibility tools kits were provided for Advanced Voting and Election Day at each location.
- Provided additional temporary accessible parking spots at locations that required them.
- Continued internet voting, which made it accessible to vote for a large majority of residents.
- Worked with long term care homes and retirement homes to conduct on-site voting for residents.

Moving Forward:

- Consideration for equipment or a voting booth to be set up for those with sensory processing issues, such as being highly sensitive to noise.
- Create elections map per voting location, specifically schools, to assist with accessibility flow, traffic flow, parking and site setup. Work with school administration to confirm these plans to ensure involvement with all interested parties.

Communication and Information

A goal for the 2022 Election was to increase use of the accessibility initiatives available. Internet Voting and the Election Accessibility Plan were both posted on the Town of Aurora's website to provide voters an opportunity to participate in a more accessible and convenient method of voting. The availability of alternative formats on request was ensured in communication initiatives and information for candidates and electors to break down barriers.

Highlights:

- Posted all information on the election website to ensure information was presented and accessible in an easy to navigate manner, using clear language.
- Ensured communication initiatives and information for candidates and electors was available in alternative formats.
- Provided multiple communication channels for persons with disabilities to interact with staff including the election website, newspaper advertisements, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, phone, teletypewriter (TTY), fax, email and in person.
- Established a web link dedicated to receiving feedback on the Municipal Election and Accessibility, in addition to having a printed feedback form available at all voting locations during Advanced Voting and on Election Day.
- Conducted outreach to community agencies supporting voters with disabilities to market disability support available for Advanced and Internet Voting.

Moving Forward:

- Consideration to provide captioning on all election related video posted publicly online.
- Continue to include notion relative to “availability of alternative formats on request” on Voter Information Letter and all promotion materials.
- Provide detailed accessibility information about each voting location through the election website.

Voting Locations

Staff conducted site visits of all potential voting locations to ensure full accessibility to the best of our ability. As the Clerk does not have the power to compel building owners to ensure that accessible amenities are installed, finding fully accessible locations are a challenge. Accessible routes, entrances and parking were all important portions of the accessible checklists when voting locations were chosen.

Highlights:

- Conducted site visits and follow ups at all voting locations.
- Where full accessibility could not be achieved we put in extra support such as door wedges, extra election staff for assistance, etc.
- Provided a fully accessible central voting location during Advanced voting.
- Addressed accessibility concerns with the School Boards and put in extra support as needed.
- Provided appropriate and additional signage at voting locations.
- Permitted service animals and support persons in all voting locations.
- Set up processes to facilitate notification of any last minute voting location changes, should an emergency occur (Disruption of service notices available for all voting locations via the Accessibility Advisor).
- Ensured designated or reserved parking for persons with disabilities at each voting location.
- Replaced locations that were identified as inappropriate or too challenging for accessibility reasons.

Moving Forward:

- Continue to monitor the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations and include any established building standards into voting place inspection checklists.
- Consideration to build maps for all voting locations to be available online.
- Provide additional accessible signage as required.

- Consideration for additional temporary accessible parking spots at locations with limited parking spots.

Voting Methods

The 2022 Town of Aurora Municipal Election offered both internet voting and in-person paper ballot options. Having the option to vote in a variety of methods increased accessibility, convenience, and independence, while allowing voters to vote from anywhere as long as they were connected to the internet. Voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online using personal devices alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software required.

Voters who preferred traditional methods of voting had both the Advanced Voting period as well as the actual Election Day available to them. Assistance from trained election officials and accessibility tool kits were available at all voting locations.

Highlights:

- Accessibility tools kits were provided for Advanced Voting and Election Day at each location.
- Processes were in place at each voting location that allowed a support person or election official to assist a voter with marking their ballot, if needed.
- Promoted Advance voting opportunity and internet voting for electors with disabilities.
- Traditional paper ballot with large text were used at all voting places (magnifying sheets available if needed).
- Accessibility Advisor visited each voting location to speak with Managing Deputy Returning Officers for any accessibility related feedback.

Moving Forward:

- Continue to investigate new technologies available and alternative forms of voting to better meet the needs of electors with disabilities.
- Continue with internet voting to meet the needs to electors that are home-bound and hospital-bound.

Election Officials

As an equal opportunity employer, the Town of Aurora abides by all current legislation relating to individual rights to employment, and are committed to recognize and celebrate diversity, talent and expertise that make each person unique. In preparation for the 2022 Election alternative formats were available through the Human Resources department for those interested in applying to be an election worker.

To provide a fully accessible voting experience for persons with disabilities, successful election officials had to understand the importance of providing excellent customer service to all voters. All election staff received training on the provision of accessible customer service to persons with disabilities in the context of the municipal election and voting place locations.

Highlights:

- Provided accessibility customer service training for all election staff prior to Election day.
- Provided tips on providing accessible customer service to all voters in training and manuals.
- Provided accessibility manuals and guides to election staff.
- Directed election staff to observe electors during discussions with them, and if it appeared that the voter was having difficulty with a language barrier to offer assistance where available (via gesture, demonstration or pictures).
- Encouraged election staff to approach an elector if it appeared that the elector required assistance to get around in the voting location. Offered assistance to help, did not assume an individual needed help.
- Election staff was trained to identify a service animal and followed the Municipality's Accessible Customer Service Policy #63.
- Ensured that voters who would self-identify as needing transportation or transfer assistance from the vehicle to voting location were accommodated.

Moving Forward:

- Continue to build awareness of the importance of Human Rights, accessible customer service and how to best service persons with disabilities.
- Continue to review and enhance training sessions to ensure voting place staff are provided with tools and resources needed to provide excellent customer service to all voters.

Feedback

The Town of Aurora is committed to providing customer service to all of our citizens. We value all of our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs. Voters and candidates were encouraged to provide feedback on accessibility if any areas of improvement were identified. A web link was dedicated to receiving feedback on the Municipal Election and Accessibility, in addition to having a printed feedback form available at all voting locations during Advanced Voting and on Election Day.

Additional feedback regarding the accessibility of the Town of Aurora Municipal Election can be submitted through regular mail, email, telephone, or by using the Town's [Accessibility Feedback Form](#), which is available to everyone via the Town's website.