

Staff Report to Committee of the Whole of the Town of Perth



Date Presented: January 10, 2023
From: Susan Beckel, Director of Legislative Service/Clerk
Subject: Post 2022 Municipal Election - Accessibility Report
Report Number: 2023- COW-1.6

For Information Only: Yes
Delegation: No
Presentation: No
Attachment(s): No

Recommendation:

As recommended by the Committee of the Whole, be it resolved that the Council of the Town of Perth receive for information the Post 2022 Municipal Election - Accessibility Report, as presented in Report 2023-COW-1.6.

Executive Summary:

This report is presented to inform Council of the variety of tools, equipment and procedures that were implemented during the 2022 Municipal Election to make the process for electors as accessible as possible.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan 2016-2030:

N/A

Background/Discussion:

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended (MEA), requires the Clerk to have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities and to ensure that all voting places are accessible to electors with disabilities.

The MEA also requires the Clerk to 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.

This report provides an overview of the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan and highlights how barriers were identified, removed and prevented in the conduct of the 2022 Municipal Election.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was enacted in 2005 with the goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025. The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR) sets accessible standards in the areas of Information and Communication, Employment, Transportation and Design of Public Spaces.

Accessible Election Objectives:

The 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was established to highlight measures that the Town of Perth (hereinafter "the Town") will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates.

These objectives include:

- That the Voter Revision Centre and Help Centre are accessible.
- That persons with disabilities are able to independently vote.
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all election information.
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector and/or candidate.
- That electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available.

Overview of Voting Method and Voting Period:

The 2022 Municipal Election was conducted over an 8 day voting period (October 17th to 24th, 2022) as a voter-anywhere, vote-anytime, paperless voting election. Eligible voters were not required to attend a specific voting place to vote, but could vote remotely by telephone from anywhere in North America, online 24 hours a day from anywhere with access to the internet or at the Voter Help Centre located on the first floor of Town Hall during hours of operation. Voting using a computer, tablet or smart phone or telephone provides persons with disabilities with accessibility opportunities consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity. Persons who have assistive devices set up in their homes could use them to assist with casting a ballot privately and independently.

Telephone Voting

Eligible electors could vote using a touch-tone telephone, and the toll-free telephone number, date of birth and PIN number provided in their Voter Information Letter to access the audio ballot. Barriers may be identified as low volume, use of language that is not clear or plain and confusing or unorganized menu options.

Areas for improvement with telephone Voting:

- Some voters reported having trouble following the instructions for telephone voting given the number of candidates listed and the requirement to select up to five (5). The telephone voting system did provide the option to repeat the instructions, or the list of candidates.
- Low volume and the speed of the voice prompt for instructions was also raised as a concern by a few voters.

Internet Voting

Eligible voters could vote online using a smart phone, tablet device, or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software, along with their date of birth and PIN to access the internet address provided in their Voter Information Letter.

The voting system used has been reviewed against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2) and adheres to those standards at AA level, so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is also compliant with the

guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternate ways of representing information. Given this, voters with disabilities, who have assistive devices in their homes or offices that allow them to use a web enabled device (PC, laptop, smart phone, gaming system, etc.), are able to vote online using tools and devices they are comfortable with.

Areas of Improvement with Internet Voting:

- Ensuring voters are aware that at any point in the voting process that they can exit and return to their voting session using another method or visit the Voter Help Centre if further assistance is required and the session will pick up where they left off.

Revision Centre/Voter Help Centre in Town Hall

For those individuals without means to vote via telephone or internet, or who required the assistance of an Election Official, a Voter Help Centre was open to provide in-person internet voting opportunities using a laptop computer. A Revision Centre was also open for voters who needed to be enumerated or who needed to amend their information for voting.

Municipal Staff reviewed the areas within Town Hall for barriers that affect voters and/or candidates with disabilities, and determined that the courtroom on the main floor would be used for the Voter Help Centre. This space provided easy access, just inside the main doors to Town Hall. Hours of operation during the Voting Period were 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. from October 17th - 21st, 2022; 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on October 22nd, 2022 and 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on October 24th, 2022.

During the Voting Period, approximately 155 persons attended the Voter Help Centre to vote, 97 of which requested assistance with voting.

Accessibility features included:

- Accessible entrance with ramp, wide doorways and automatic door openers
- Directional signage (large print) placed within the Town Hall.
- Four (4) touch screen computers were provided which allowed for persons to vote without having to use a mouse.
- Four (4) voting stations were created with enough space to allow individuals who use a wheelchair or scooter to access them.
- Election Officials were present and authorized to provide assistance in answering questions, and/or with voting as requested.
- Parking spaces in front and at the side of Town Hall were marked and monitored for election parking, in addition to the accessible parking spaces.
- Voting assistance was provided. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could take a "Friend of the Voter Oath" administered by an Election Official in order to grant them authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the privacy screen.
- Election Officials wore buttons identifying them as those that could provide assistance.

Future Considerations:

- Review enumeration/Voters' List amendment procedures to determine if accessibility for voters can be improved.

Election Communications

Voter Information Letters were written in plain language providing all required information relating to voting. General information regarding the Municipal Election was also provided using various

mediums and formats, including notices placed in the local newspaper, dedicated Elections web page on the Town's website, regular messaging through the Town social media channels, tax bill inserts, radio, the notice banner on the home page of the Town's website, and 3 mobile billboards. How to vote by telephone and internet videos were linked on the Elections web page as well.

Special Voting Provisions

Election staff visited one retirement residence to provide onsite access to online voting via touch screen laptops. This eliminated the need for those residents to attend the Voter Help Centre to vote if they did not have access to a telephone or the internet.

Due to a COVID-19 outbreak, Town Election Officials were unable to attend another retirement residence to provide on site voting for residents; however, Town staff worked with the residence staff to ensure that residents were enumerated and had the ability to vote.

Conclusion

By allowing persons with disabilities to vote from any location and by different methods, there is an increase in the capability for the voter to vote without any assistance. This provides persons with disabilities the same independence and privacy in participating in the election as other voters. If persons with disabilities do require assistance in the voting process, this was available at the in-person Voter Help Centre as well as by telephone through the Voter Help Line throughout the voting period. Any feedback regarding the accessibility of the voting system has been noted and communicated to the service provider.

Options:

Option 1: Recommended

As recommended by the Committee of the Whole, be it resolved that the Council of the Town of Perth receive for information the Post 2022 Municipal Election - Accessibility Report, as presented in Report 2023-COW-1.6.

Option 2: Not Recommended - Do not receive the report.

Financial Considerations:

2022 Budget

Applicable Policy/Legislation:

Municipal Elections Act

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Others Consulted:

Directors

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Beckel, Director of Legislative Service/Clerk

Approved by,

Michael Touw, CAO