

Municipality of Chatham-Kent 2022 Municipal and School Board Election Post-Election Accessibility Report

Introduction

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent is a community of communities that respects the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities and strives to promote a barrier-free and inclusive community.

The focus of the Post-Election Accessibility Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services provided to all electors and candidates during the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. This report outlines the actions taken to identify, remove, and prevent barriers that affect voters and candidates with disabilities and how these actions affected their voting experience.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent will continue to learn, develop, and adjust our approaches in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Reviewing accessibility issues and initiatives, removing barriers, and preventing them is an ongoing process.

Governing Legislative and Policy Framework

Under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, (The Act)* the Municipal Clerk is legislatively responsible for conducting Municipal and School Board Elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to participate fully in the election. The Act 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 Clerk is also required, within 90 days after a regular election, to prepare a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and make the report available to the public.

In addition to the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the Clerk must also comply with the requirements of the following legislation:

- The *Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990* provides that all persons have the right to equal treatment without discrimination, including on the basis of disability, and that persons with disabilities be provided with accommodation short of undue hardship.
- The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* was enacted in 2005 and sets out clear goals and timeframes for making Ontario accessible by 2025. Under the AODA, private and public sector organizations across

Ontario are required to comply with Regulations established by the Province. These Regulations include the Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standards.

- o The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR) brings together accessible standards for Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation, and Design of Public Spaces under one regulation and harmonizes the requirements common to each standard. Each of the standards articulates specific requirements and compliance deadlines, which will be phased in across Ontario between 2011 and 2025.

In addition, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent has prepared an Accessibility Plan that highlights the planned strategies for identifying, removing, and preventing barriers within the community.

Election Preparation

To ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, staff reviewed the legislation and implemented a number of initiatives in preparation for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. As required under the Act, the Clerk prepared a plan for the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. Specifically, the proposed plan was provided to the Chatham-Kent Accessibility Advisory Committee (ACC) in order to ensure that needs were being met.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent's 2022 Municipal and School Board Election Pre-Election Accessibility Plan highlighted the planned strategies and actions for the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers in the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Following the development of the plan, the Municipal Clerk continued to monitor the relevant legislation, standards, and deadlines as well as look at relevant court decisions to ensure any changes to the Pre-Election Accessibility Plan were incorporated into the implementation of the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

Strategies and Actions for the Identification, Removal, and Prevention of Barriers

Method of Vote and Voting System

Municipal Council approved the method of voting for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election on May 10, 2021. It was determined by Municipal Council that online voting would be utilized for advance voting similar to the 2018 election. This decision greatly enhanced the overall accessibility of the election, as it allowed electors to cast their ballot using a smartphone, tablet, or laptop anytime from Sunday, October 3, 2022 at 10:00 am to Sunday October 16, 2022 until 10:00 pm.

Administration worked closely with Dominion Voting Solutions Inc. to evaluate the voting system, ensure that it was fully accessible, and secure for persons with disabilities. As part of the accessibility features built into the system, Electors with disabilities had the option to enlarge the font size, adjust the colour contrast, and have the security text read aloud. Additionally, they were able to use their personal assistive technologies to interact with the voting system anywhere and a demo of the voting system was available on the Municipality of Chatham-Kent's election website.

In addition, online voting allowed electors to cast their ballot from home, providing a greater level of privacy to electors with disabilities who may have difficulty voting at traditional paper-based voting locations due to the fact that they had no need for assistance from others to vote. As many as 7,366 voters casted their ballot online during the election.

Additionally, an Accessible Voting Ballot Marker Device with add-on components, which included a headset, a hand-held controller, a paddle device, and a sip-and-puff device, was available for electors unable to negotiate paper ballots during the three days of advance voting at the John D. Bradley Centre as well as on Election Day at the WISH Centre in Chatham.

Staff Training

Election Officials were required to attend a training session conducted by the Clerk's office. During the training sessions, there was a discussion of best practices on how to assist voters in voting locations, including those with disabilities, as well as accommodations and special support services for those with special needs.

Some Election Officials were Municipality of Chatham-Kent employees. One of the key reasons the Clerk chose to use internal staff as Site Managers is because they received formal accessibility training upon hiring, which includes training on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. This formal accessibility training outlined the customer service standard and how to serve persons with disabilities. It is also important to note that information pertaining to the customer service standard and serving persons with disabilities was included in the Election Worker training and presentation. The Election Worker training specifically contained accessibility guidelines and tips for interacting with persons with a variety of disabilities.

Voting Locations

As part of the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, a variety of voting locations were offered and it was ensured that accessibility was a key consideration when choosing voting locations. In terms of site selection, staff conducted site visits at each voting location before confirming their use in the election in accordance with an accessibility checklist. The purpose of this was to ensure that each facility had a barrier-free path of travel from the parking lot and the sidewalk, a barrier-free path of travel inside the voting location, barrier-free parking, a door operator or accessible door,

adequate lighting, and adequate slopes and surfaces.

On Election Day, Monday, October 24, 2022, Election Officials set-up Voting Locations at hospitals, retirement homes, and long-term care homes to provide voting opportunities specifically for residents.

Election Officials conducted final accessibility checks prior to the opening of all voting locations to ensure that they were set up in a manner that was accessible. They prioritized the identification of voting location access routes and entrances by providing appropriate internal and external signage, ensuring that voters with accessibility needs were directed to the accessible voting entrance through prominent signage, and making the accessible entrance the same as the main entrance where possible. Staff also ensured that all Election Officials responsible for setting-up voting locations were aware of legislative accessibility requirements in the event that last-minute changes needed to be made to voting locations. The Election staff would also be available to attend the vehicle with a ballot should an elector not be able to leave their vehicle for any reason.

During the entire voting period, personal assistive devices were permitted in all voting locations, such as wheelchairs, walkers and service dogs. Voters with support persons or service animals were welcomed and assisted at each stage of the voting process, including being greeted at the door, amending their information on the Voters' List, and casting their ballots. Election officials, who were sensitive to the needs of each voter and recognized that certain voters required special attention, treated all voters with dignity and respect. While forms and oaths were printed in large font, magnifying sheets were also present to assist voters with low vision and Election Officials read and signed oaths upon voters' requests.

Information and Communication

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent considered accessibility in all information and communication strategies for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Upon requests from persons with disabilities, staff provided copies of election documents, or the information contained in the document, in a format that took into account the person's disability.

The municipal election website was designed to be both informative and accessible. All information for voters, candidates, and third parties was placed in distinct sections on the website and they were directed to access all documents and forms through the website in an effort to promote accessibility and transparency. The information available online used clear and simple language and was continuously updated to reflect the most recent election developments and information.

Additionally, the website was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A guidelines. It allowed for personal assistive technologies to be utilized with the website and for users to adjust the website font within the browser's functionality to aid them in reading the

information. Notably, the election website contained an accessible voting section that outlined the various accessible voting locations and accessible features of the electronic voting system.

Election information was communicated through various channels and alternate formats including regular candidate emails, social media, and radio, billboard, newspaper, and advertisements. Voter Information Notices were mailed out to all eligible electors on the Voters' List as well as an insert put into tax bills explaining where and when to vote in the election and how to have elector information on the Voters' List amended.

In the event of disruptions to electoral services or unforeseen circumstances that affected the accessibility of voting locations, a process was in place to facilitate notification.

Conclusion

It was the goal of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent to ensure that electors within the municipality who required accessible services were provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Additionally, the staff also worked hard to ensure that the nomination and registration process was as accessible as possible for candidates and third parties.

The 2022 Municipal and School Board Election total voter turnout was 30.56%. Detailed debriefings have been conducted with all Election Officials, and the Municipal Clerk will take into account staff feedback regarding accessibility issues in preparation for the next election for the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.