

REPORT NUMBER: 2019- 007

DATE SUBMITTED TO COUNCIL: January 14, 2019

RE: 2018 Municipal Election Accessibility Report

PREPARED BY: Annette Simonian, Clerk

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive the Elections Accessibility report for information.

REPORT:

In accordance of the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

Accordingly the Clerk as per section 12.1 (2) was required to provide an Accessibility Plan and make it available to the public prior to the election. In addition, as per section 12.1 (3) the Clerk is required to submit a report to council within 90 days after voting day on the actions undertaken to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to electors with disabilities seeking to vote in the 2018 municipal election.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) have direct and indirect requirements on municipal elections. Those requirements and how they were addressed is discussed in this report.

Identification of Barriers

The Township's staff and election officials understand that persons with disabilities may have different needs and as such endeavoured to ensure that these needs were met when designing the election process so that every elector and candidate had an opportunity to fully participate in the 2018 municipal election.

A barrier is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society. An individual's right to engage in civic issues and exercise their democratic right to vote is a big part of full inclusion. By providing alternative voting methods the Township has addressed barriers to the voting process and provided an equal and dignified opportunity of electors to cast their ballot with little or no assistance. By offering electors the choice of voting electronically through the Intelivote system, election officials were able to provide accessibility to persons with disabilities in the community where otherwise it might have been difficult or cumbersome in a traditional election.

Removal and Prevention of Barriers

In terms of providing appropriate information and removing barriers to voting the following was accomplished:

Information and communication

- Ensured that all election information was made available in an alternate format upon request to take into account the person's ability.
- Advertised all relevant information for voting methods, times and voting help and voting locations via website, local newspapers and various local fairs.
- electors were able to take advantage of accessing information on demand and performing activities in a convenient and effective method.
- Election officials were made aware of the feedback process established in the Customer Service Policy for persons to provide feedback on the way the Township provides goods and services to persons with disabilities.
- Established an elections email for receiving feedback which could be received in person or over the phone during open hours at the help center.
- Questions and concerns were addressed as soon as possible.
- Provided the Candidates with the 'Candidate's Guide to an Accessible Election.
- Election official training included Accessible Customer Service Training as related to the requirements set out in the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy.
- As established in the Customer Service Policy, if an incident that impacted access to the voting place or the temporary unavailability of accessible voting technology occurred during the election period the Clerk was ready and able to provide notification to the public via the website, at the physical location and when possible in the local media.

Voting Location & Voting Help Centre

- The Municipal office is a fully accessible building and therefore was ideal for a voting location.
- Service animals and support persons were permitted in the voting location.
- The voting location parking lot has designated accessible parking for persons with disabilities.
- The municipality provided a Voter Help Centre where all residents, including those with a disability, could visit or call for assistance with the voting process.
- A computer Kiosk was offered at the municipal office as well as public computers at the Library (which is fully accessible) for the advanced polling period for residents who did not have access to a computer.
- Established a procedure to accept EL15 with an original signature by mail.

Voting methods & times

- The election period commenced October 15, 2018 and closed Monday October 22, 2018 at 8:00pm for a total of 8 days of voting opportunity using alternate voting methods to assist electors with disabilities.
- e-voting
 - persons with disabilities and older people with changing abilities due to aging can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web.

- provided the opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote over the internet and participate in the election without assistance and therefore providing an increased level of independence and privacy while casting their vote.
 - the voting system used complied with the guidelines of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
 - The voting system met the Web Accessibility Initiative requirements and was compatible with other accessible technology.
 - the system presented alternative ways of representing information on the web including an audio selection to navigate through the security feature.
 - voting confirmations were provided at the end of each voting session.
 - Voting stations were available throughout the voting period for electors who did not have access to a computer and iPads were rented to provide a touch screen alternative to the e-voting.
- telephone voting
 - provided opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote all types of touch phones and wireless devices including cell phones and smartphones including land line phones and participate in the election without assistance and with an increased level of independence and privacy while casting their vote.
 - telephone voting was provided with language and menu options that were clear and easy to follow.
 - phone volumes could be adjusted to suit the user.
 - confirmations of voter selections were provided.
 - Telephone voting capable with the TTY service for users.
 - paper ballots
 - large print with appropriate contrast and easy to read formats were provided
 - magnifying glass was available to assist electors to read instructions and ballots.
 - provisions for assisted voting at the voting place as required by the *Municipal Act* were permitted.

Staff training

- Election officials were provided a training brochure on how to provide effective customer service to persons with disabilities.
- Throughout the Election Day, election officials made voters aware that magnifying sheets were available.
- Elections workers were available to assist voters navigate the electronic voting options as well as at the voting location when needed.

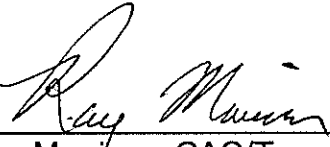
SUMMARY

Internet and telephone voting offered electors with disabilities a choice in the way they were able to cast their ballot that positively impacted accessibility as travel to a physical polling location was no longer a barrier.

The Clerk and elections staff strived to ensure that the Township's commitment to creating and maintaining a fully accessible and inclusive community for all residents was provided throughout the 2018 Elections process.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.



Ray Morrison, CAO/Treasurer



Annette Simonian, Deputy Clerk