

Municipality of Chatham-Kent 2018 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 endeavours 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 offered to all electors and candidates in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. This report outlines the actions taken regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affected electors and candidates with disabilities and how these actions impacted their voting experience.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent will continue to learn, develop, and adjust our approaches in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The review of accessibility issues and initiatives and addressing barrier prevention and removal is an ongoing practice.

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.
 - 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.

Additionally, the *Municipality of Chatham-Kent's Accessibility Plan*, highlights the planned strategies for identifying, removing, and preventing barriers within the community.

Election Preparation

In preparation for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election, staff reviewed the relevant legislation and implemented a number of initiatives to ensure compliance. Significantly, as required under the *Act*, the Clerk prepared a plan regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. Notably, the proposed plan was provided to the Chatham-Kent Accessibility Advisory Committee (ACC) to confirm that needs were being met.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent's 2018 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 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. After the plan's development, the Municipal Clerk continued to monitor the applicable legislation, standards, and deadlines and look to relevant court decisions to ensure that any new requirements were incorporated in the Pre-Election Accessibility Plan and considered in the implementation of the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election.

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

4.0 Method of Vote and Voting System

On April 10, 2017 Municipal Council approved the method of vote for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Municipal Council determined that online voting would be utilized for advance voting. 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 Monday, October 1, 2018 at 10:00 am to Monday October 15, 2018 till 10:00 pm.

The Municipal Clerk's staff worked closely with the voting system service provider, Dominion Voting Solutions Inc., to evaluate the system and ensure that it was fully secure and accessible for persons with disabilities. Electors with disabilities had the option to use the system's built-in accessibility features to enlarge the font size, adjust the colour contrast, and have the security text read aloud. As well, they could 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.

Significantly, online voting provided electors with the ability to cast their ballot from home allowing increased rights of privacy to electors with disabilities who may find voting at traditional paper based voting locations more difficult, as they had the ability to vote with little or no assistance required from others. Online voting from home proved to be particularly effective as 9,787 voters cast their ballot online.

In addition, for the three days of advance voting at the Chatham Municipal Office and on election day in Chatham an Accessible Voting Ballot Marker Device with add on components including headset, hand-held controller, paddles device, sip-and-puff device were available for electors who could not negotiate a paper ballot.

4.1 Staff Training

Election Officials were mandated to attend a training session hosted by Clerk's staff. These sessions highlighted best practices on how to assist voters in voting locations, including voters with disabilities, and the accommodations and special services available to assist voters.

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 Manual and training session presentation. The Election Worker Manual specifically contained accessibility guidelines and tips for interacting with persons with a variety of disabilities.

4.2 Voting Locations

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election offered a variety of voting locations to ensure that accessibility was a primary consideration in choosing where voters could cast their ballot. In terms of site selection, staff used an accessibility checklist to conduct site visits of each voting location prior to confirming their use in the election. This was critical in ensuring that each facility had a barrier-free path of travel from the parking lot and sidewalk, barrier-free path of travel inside the voting location, barrier-free parking, door operators or accessible doors, adequate lighting, and adequate slope and surface.

On Election Day, Monday, October 22, 2018, Election Officials set-up Voting Locations at hospitals, retirement homes, and long-term care homes to provide voting opportunities specifically for residents.

Before the opening of all voting locations, Election Officials performed final accessibility checks to ensure that the locations were set-up in an accessible manner. 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 and walkers. Support persons and service animals were welcomed and assistance was offered to voters at every stage of the voting process, including being greeted at the door, making any necessary amendments to their information on the Voters' List, and casting their ballot. Election Officials treated all voters with dignity and respect, being sensitive to the individual needs of voters and recognizing that some required unique attention. 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.

4.3 Information and Communication

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent considered accessibility in all information and communication strategies for the 2018 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 explaining where and when to vote in the election and have elector information on the Voters' List amended.

Furthermore, the Election Team worked with persons with disabilities and community advocates to disseminate election information to persons with disabilities. A meeting with Community Living and long-term cares homes were attended by Election Officials to present key information regarding the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election and showcase accessible voting technology.

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 accessibility services were provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Staff also strived to make the nomination and registration process as accessible as possible for candidates and third parties.

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election total voter turnout was 45.44%, exceeding the provincial average of 37.60%. Debriefs have been conducted with all Election Officials and staff feedback regarding the accessibility of the election will be considered by Municipal Clerk in preparation for the next Municipality of Chatham-Kent Municipal and School Board Election.