



Committee of the Whole Report

Report Number: CLK2023-001
Meeting Date: January 10, 2023
Title: 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Report
Description: Municipal Elections Act Section 12.1(3)
Author and Title: Cathie Ritchie, City Clerk

Recommendation(s):

That Report CLK2023-001, **2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Report**, be received; and

That this recommendation be brought forward to Council for consideration at the next Regular Council Meeting.

Department Head: _____

Financial/Legal/HR/Other: _____

Chief Administrative Officer: _____

Background:

The municipal election is to be conducted in a manner that shall ensure that candidates and electors with disabilities have full and equal access to all election information and services, including the designated voting area at municipal facilities. The election shall be conducted in a manner that ensures that persons with disabilities are able to vote independently and privately with access to voting assistance if required.

Legislation

The Municipal Election Act, (MEA), 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) of the MEA requires that the clerk shall 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) of the MEA requires that within ninety (90) days of voting day the Clerk who is responsible for conducting the election shall make public a report regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect elector and candidates with disabilities.

In February 2022 Council adopted a 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan. This Plan was used in the 2022 Municipal Election in conjunction with the City's current Accessibility Policy, Plan and IASR Standards.

City Council approved the method of vote for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. City Council determined that internet and telephone voting would be utilized as the sole methods of vote for the entire voting period of this election. As in 2018, this decision greatly enhanced the overall accessibility of the election, as it allowed electors to cast their electronic ballot using a telephone, smartphone, tablet, or laptop anytime from 9:00 a.m. Friday, October 14, 2022 to 8:00 p.m. Monday, October 24, 2022.

Rationale:

The focus of the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services offered to all electors and candidates in the 2022 Municipal 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.

Planning

In preparation for the 2022 Municipal Election, staff reviewed the relevant legislation and implemented a number of initiatives to ensure compliance. The Clerk prepared an accessibility plan including a feedback form and site accessibility checklist regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. The draft plan was provided to the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee to receive feedback. There were no additional recommendations provided. Council adopted the plan on February 8, 2022 and made the plan available to the public prior to the commencement of voting by posting it on the City's website and providing a copy to all candidates.

Technology

The Clerk's staff worked in collaboration with the electronic voting system service provider, Scytl, to evaluate the system and ensure that it was fully secure and accessible for persons with disabilities.

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.

Assistance and Help Centres

Voting Help Centres were setup throughout the City as an additional service to those who did not have access to the voting technology or required additional voting assistance. Locations were chosen by assessing the ease of access, available connectivity, adequate hours of operation and staffing compliment. Assessment of space audits utilizing the Site Accessibility Checklist was conducted by Election Staff utilizing the Site Accessibility Checklist. Kiosks and public access computers were available for online voting at Election Help Centres located within designated Public Libraries, Municipal Service Centres and City Hall during normal hours of operation.

In addition, City Hall was open the two Saturdays from 9:00am to 1:00pm prior to Election Day and until 8:00pm October 24th. All Municipal Service Centres and the Lindsay Library were open until 8:00pm October 4th. During the election voting period, 12 long-term care/retirement homes were attended for voting purposes. On voting day, they were re-visited along with Ross Memorial Hospital palliative care to ensure all residents had the opportunity to vote.

The City received testimony through social media from persons impacted directly or indirectly with a disability, stating that telephone and internet voting provided them with the ability to cast their ballot from home. Further, that voting may not have been possible due to restrictions in mobility or lack of transportation. Voting from home allowed increased rights of privacy to electors with disabilities who may find voting at traditional paper based voting locations more difficult.

Voters' List

Access to the voters' list was available electronically through the city website by accessing VoterLookup and then through VoterView. Electors could check to see if they were on the voters list, submit prescribed forms for additions, deletions or corrections. Municipal Service Centres and City Hall provided assistance through the helpline and in person. Specific to candidates, the VoterView Candidate Access Portal granted candidates the access to download the Voters' List electronically.

Communication and Access to Information

The City's 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.

Election information was communicated through various channels and alternate formats in addition to the city website including emails, social media, radio, billboard, mail inserts and newspapers. Voter Information Letters were mailed out to eligible electors on the Voters' List. Several electors who did not receive the Voter Information Letter were able to be added to the voters list and receive their letters electronically. Three election information sessions were hosted by Clerk's Services staff in an accessible location for all voters, candidates, media, and third parties wishing to attend. A session was livestreamed and available for persons unable to attend the session in-person. For election-related inquiries, all residents were able to call the election helpline, Clerk's Services directly or email to the election help desk.

Conclusion

The Clerk's Services and Election Team ensured that electors who required accessibility services were provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2022 Municipal Election. Council's adopted 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was fully implemented and adhered to.

Future Considerations

The City of Kawartha Lakes Clerk's Division 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.

Other Alternatives Considered:

N/A

Alignment to Strategic Priorities

An Exceptional Quality of Life - enhance accessibility.

Removing barriers and improving accessibility to services, supports the principles of the Strategic Plan of Service Excellence.

Financial/Operation Impacts:

There are no financial considerations at this time.

Consultations:

City Clerk's Division
Municipal Election Staff

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