



GOVERNANCE & PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE

December 12, 2022

2022 MUNICIPAL ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

The Clerk recommends:

1. **THAT CLK Report No. 33-2022 be received for the purposes of information.**

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to identify the accessibility initiatives taken throughout the 2022 Municipal Election process and to make this report publicly available. The completion of this report is a requirement of the *Municipal Elections Act*.

2. BACKGROUND

The 2022 Municipal Election was held on October 24, 2022. For the 2022 Municipal Election Council opted to vote by internet, as well as paper ballots with tabulators.

Section 12.1 (3) of the *Municipal Elections Act* requires the Clerk to prepare a report within 90 days after Voting Day about the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities and to make the report available to the Public.

In accordance with section 12.1(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Clerk prepared a plan prior to Voting Day regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities, and, to make the plan available to the Public. The plan was posted to the Township website for viewing and was also provided to all candidates upon filing their Nomination Papers with the Clerk.

3. OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

Municipal elections are the foundation of the local democratic process and are held every four years in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*.

The Clerk for the Township of North Dumfries administers the Election for the positions of Mayor and Council, in addition to administering elections for school board trustee(s) in all four of the local school boards. The Clerk of the Region of Waterloo administers the nomination

process for the office of Regional Chair and provides candidate information to the Township Clerk for voting purposes.

The Township established an Election Accessibility Plan that was reviewed by the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC). Staff referred to the Plan throughout the election process and made adjustments, as deemed necessary.

This report constitutes the Post-Election Accessibility Report required by the plan and section 12.1 of the *Municipal Elections Act*.

Staff took into consideration a number of different aspects throughout the Election planning process. Early in the Election process, staff reviewed feedback received from the 2018 Election to assess where improvements could be made and correct issues that were identified following the 2018 Municipal Election. Staff also consulted with the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) once the Election Accessibility Plan was prepared to gather their input and feedback into the 2022 Election planning.

Providing Multiple Voting Options

Providing more than one voting option to the electors as to how they can cast their ballot allows electors to choose what works best for them. Internet voting greatly assisted voters who may have mobility issues, or cannot travel to and from a polling location to vote in person. This voting method allowed electors to vote anytime, anywhere using an electronic device with an internet connection, whether the elector is coping with an illness, working days or nights, has a disability or has difficulties with the logistics associated with travel. The internet voting period extended over a period of fourteen (14) days, including Election Day.

In addition, Internet voting allowed electors to vote using accessibility features like screen magnifiers, brightness or high contrast views, screen readers, or any other assistive device they may use at home, as well as use translation software if they are more comfortable reading a different language.

Staff heard from many electors who noted that internet voting was easy to use, took very little time to complete their vote selection and allowed electors franchise their vote without having to leave their home.

In addition, voting in person using paper ballots was also an option for voters. This voting method allowed those who may not be comfortable using technology, or who may not have access to internet/technology to visit a voting location to vote in person. The Township provided two (2) advance polls in all four (4) wards in addition to voting in-person on Election Day.

Offering these two different voting methods provided more options to electors on how they could cast their vote and provided options for seniors and those with disabilities on what method would work best, given their specific situation.

In Person Voting Locations

The *Municipal Elections Act* requires that all voting places are to be accessible for electors with disabilities. To ensure locations selected met this requirement, staff reviewed all locations being considered to ensure they met a set of standard requirements. Some of the items for consideration by staff at the various voting locations included:

- Availability of accessible parking spaces
- Paved/flat parking lot/surface to get in and out of the voting location
- Accessible route to the entrance and through voting location with no obstacles
- Ample signage throughout the voting location
- Wide entrances/easy to open doors
- Good lighting throughout
- Ample space to provide chairs for people to rest, allow a wheelchair to easily navigate

All Election staff (internal and external) received accessibility training that included support persons, service animals, review of physical disabilities, hearing impaired, deafness and hearing loss and speech impairments, cognitive disabilities and mental illness. All Election staff were trained to assist voters with a disability upon request and informed to ensure notepads could be provided to increase communication to assist electors who were hard of hearing or had a hearing impairment.

One comment received from an Election staff worker was that the table set up for voters to go behind to vote wasn't pulled far enough away from the wall in the design layout that was established. The Election staff worker did resolve this concern by readjusting the location of the voter table to increase the amount of room available between the table and wall for electors. There were instances at one voting location in particular, where staff had to pull the chairs out from behind the voter table to accommodate wheelchairs, canes and some who preferred to stand while voting. These accommodations were able to be made by staff quite easily.

There was feedback received from some electors who visited an in-person voting location that they were happy that the Township had offered an in-person voting option. Many of the electors who made this comment were of an older age group and some indicated that they were intimidated by the technology behind voting online.

Communication Initiatives

There were some comments made related to communications that could be linked to accessibility for all voters:

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- it was difficult to input the voting website URL exactly as written, comment was made whether it was possible to shorten or customize the voting website URL; and
 - in person voting locations were set up to be ward specific (eg. Ward One resident had to attend their Ward One voting location to vote in person). The voting location set up at the North Dumfries Community Complex (Township Administration Office) received a lot of voters who had to be redirected, as they were at the incorrect voting location to vote in person.

Staff spent considerable effort on communications, but are aware that this is an area that is constantly evolving and could always be further improved. Clerk's staff will continue to accept feedback about election accessibility.

Candidate Initiatives

All candidates were provided with a copy of the Township of North Dumfries Accessibility Plan upon filing their nomination papers with the Clerks Division.

Township staff also ensured that election information for candidates were available in alternative formats upon request.

Post Election Feedback from the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC)

At their meeting following the Election on October 27th, GRAAC had a general round table discussion to provide feedback into where improvements could be made related to accessibility surrounding the 2022 Municipal Election. This feedback was not specific to North Dumfries alone, but general feedback experienced by the various Members who live across Waterloo Region.

The feedback received can be summarized as follows:

- having too many candidates on the ballot can be a barrier to some people
- GRAAC supports a mail in, or Internet voting option to address those who have mobility issues
- process of voting in itself can be overwhelming to some – it is good to offer different options for people
- some signage seen wasn't your typical yellow "vote" signage – concerns that lack of signage, or signage that differed from typical election signage could be a problem to those with visual disabilities (Township of North Dumfries used yellow VOTE signage at all in-person voting locations)

Post Election Survey

Staff are currently undertaking a post Election survey to gather input about the 2022 Municipal Election.

One question being asked on the survey asks which voting method they are most likely to use to cast their vote in a future Election and one option that could be selected is for those requiring accommodations to be able to register with the Clerks Division. A potential scenario could be that an Elections Official would visit your home to add/amend your information on the voters' list and/or allow you to cast your ballot using any voting method from your home.

A report will be presented at the January 30th Council Meeting that will include the results from the survey that is being conducted.

Staff will continue to encourage feedback related to accessibility initiatives and/or barriers encountered surrounding the 2022 Municipal Election and will ensure it is documented accordingly to support the 2026 Municipal Election.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

5. ATTACHMENTS

None.

For further information on the contents of this Report, please contact Ashley Sage, Clerk, at 519-632-8800 ext. 122 or via email at asage@northdumfries.ca

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Respectfully Submitted By:



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