



ACTION REQUEST – Clerk

To:	Mayor and Members of Council
Date of Meeting:	December 11, 2018
Subject:	2018 Municipal Elections Accessibility Report

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive and adopt the Accessibility Report for the 2018 Municipal Election.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Municipal Elections must provide the public with equal access and an equal opportunity to cast a ballot. The Clerk, as Returning Officer, took every effort to reduce barriers on a number of levels with regard to the planning and undertaking of the 2018 Municipal Election, and built on the efforts of the past with regard to electronic voting.

Utilizing telephone and internet voting gave disabled persons in our community an opportunity to cast a ballot from the comfort and convenience of a familiar setting, complete with the tools, equipment and/or software that assists them in their day to day activities. This method of voting was also used in 2003, 2006, 2010 and 2014 municipal elections.

Accessible customer service training received by Township staff was also a great benefit for election officials assisting candidates and electors. Voter participation in the Township of North Dundas increased when electronic voting was instituted.

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of this report is to inform Council on efforts to identify, remove and prevent barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities, pursuant to Section 12.1(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, S.O. 1996, c.32, Sch., s.1(1), as amended.

The following changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* were introduced by the provincial government in late 2009:

“12.1(1) Electors and candidates with disabilities

A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

12.1 (2) Report

Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall submit a report to council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.”

Customer Service and Information Sharing - Providing Tools to Assist

All Township staff and elected officials received accessible customer service training in late 2009. This training was invaluable in providing strategies to identify and eliminate barriers in the provision of services. The role of election official was carried out by the Clerk with assistance of Township staff. Election officials play a central role in assisting electors at the Voter Help Centre. All election staff signed an official oath consistent with municipal election protocol to secure and safeguard the integrity of the election process.

Advertising of the 2018 Municipal Election and the method of voting to be conducted in the October municipal election began in January. Information was distributed to residents via local newspapers, Township Website, Community Notice Boards and Canada Post. In addition, candidates were made aware of the alternative method of voting during filing procedures with the Clerk.

Voting Method - Access through E-Voting

E-voting combined with everyday tools like computers, tablets, touch tone telephones and other aids can present opportunities for persons with disabilities to vote, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

The voter interfaces developed by the supplier of the e-voting solution (Intelivote Systems Inc.) used by the municipality, took into consideration accessibility standards and usability guidelines to facilitate the voting process for everyone. The Intelivote System was created and operates a system that meets the Web Content Accessibility Initiative (WCAG-2 AA) requirements.

These accessibility requirements, architected into the solution, assist persons with disabilities and an aging population. The system complied with the guidelines as defined by the World Wide Web Consortium technologies website principles. These guidelines cover a variety of initiatives including the organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information over the web. Abiding by this standard ensured voters with a disability, with existing web aware technology, could connect to the voting website and interact with the voting system.

As an example, voters were offered the opportunity to make an audio selection of some of the security features required when entering a voting session via the web. This support afforded visually impaired voters the opportunity to successfully navigate the login security CAPTCHA challenge required to cast their ballot.

Persons with disabilities could access the e-voting services over the telephone, both mobile and land line. Communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Barriers may come in the form of low

volume, the use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menus and menu options. The e-voting system was designed and implemented with the following telephone voting functional criteria taken into consideration:

- The telephone e-voting service is offered on all types of touch tone telephones and wireless devices.
- Clear natural language is used and is offered in English and French
- Menu options are clear and easy to follow, advising when to select options and providing confirmations of voter selections.
- Standard volume is used to allow for adjustments dependent on the telephone or device of the user.

Persons with disabilities could also use the TTY (Teletypewriter) service to access e-voting services. It is required by law that the Relay service be confidential and not disclose any information from conversations and no record-keeping of conversations be stored.

Persons who are deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing could have made use of the Internet to cast their ballot in the election with little to no assistance. Persons, who have a vision loss disability, including total blindness and legal blindness, had the ability to use the telephone to cast their ballot for the election. The e-voting system addresses other types of disabilities (intellectual, learning, mental health) as described in the website accessibility requirements and telephone operating functions.

Using the e-voting system, disabled persons are given the opportunity to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for disabled persons who have mobility restrictions and/or have a difficult time with transportation due to physical disabilities. Travel to a physical polling location would no longer create a hardship or barrier to them.

Enabling persons with a disability the opportunity to vote from any location, using more than one method, (telephone or internet) increases the opportunity for these individuals to participate in the election without assistance. This level of independence affords them an increased level of privacy while casting their ballot without the usual involvement of a friend or relative, which might otherwise compromise their secret ballot.

Voter Help Centre 636 St. Lawrence Street:

The municipality hosted a Voter Help Centre from Wednesday October 17 to Monday October 22 between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. On Saturday and Sunday, the Voter Help Centre was open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and on Election Day from 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. where all members of the public, including persons with a disability, could visit or call to get assistance with their voting process. The Township Office is fully accessible. Private customer stations were set up with telephone and Internet access. Election officials were trained to provide assistance if requested.

Outreach to Dundas Manor, Garden Villa and Nor-Dun Senior Support Centre:

The e-voting system was also designed to accommodate the older population in the community. Internet and telephone voting allowed election staff to travel to senior citizen homes to assist in the voting process to ensure participation of residents. The Township brought a large touch screen computer with oversized print to improve the visibility for residents with reduced vision to complete their voting. Additionally, computers in secure staff offices were also available for resident use. Clients of the Nor-Dun Senior Support Centre travelled by bus to the Voter Help Centre to vote.

OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

In general, e-voting offered electors choice in the way they were able to cast their ballot. The flexibility and choice afforded electors with disabilities, using the Internet or a telephone, positively impacted their accessibility. The e-voting system combined with election staff support provided an equal and dignified opportunity for electors to cast their ballot.

1. **Adopt the Report as presented** – Recommended.
2. **Do not adopt the report as presented** – Not Recommended.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS:

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Accessibility was taken into account in the technical requirements outlined in the Request for Proposal for e-voting services, as well as for equipment and supply needs.

OTHERS CONSULTED:

SDG Clerks

ATTACHMENTS - NIL

PREPARED BY:



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Municipal Clerk**

REVIEWED & APPROVED BY:



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