



Town of Parry Sound

2014 Municipal Election

Accessibility Plan Report

1. Introduction

The plan, provided to Council on October 21, 2014 specifically addressed the accessibility requirements in relation to the 2014 Municipal Election in the Town of Parry Sound.

On December 17, 2009, Bill 212 was enacted to amend various provisions within the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (MEA). These amendments came into force and effect on January 1, 2010. In relation to accessibility issues, a number of provisions are mandated for the 2014 Municipal Election. The Clerk responsible for an election must:

- Have regard for the needs of electors, candidates and election officials with disabilities
- Ensure that voting places are accessible to persons with disabilities
- Submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of election barriers that affect persons with disabilities

The Town of Parry Sound has made great efforts in promoting a barrier free community. This commitment has been echoed in the recent implementation of accessibility standards to improve the provision of customer service to people with disabilities. In an effort to ensure that the 2014 Municipal Election is consistent with the core principles of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility planning document was developed in order to identify measures to be taken and reported to Council following the election.

2. Objectives

The plan was intended to highlight measures that the Town will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives include:

That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection.

That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates.

That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate, or election official.

That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper articles and ads, flyers to all households, the Town's Sound Opportunities Newsletter, contact and provision of media tools to community groups who assist persons with disabilities, as well as the Town's website.

3. Development of the Plan

The Plan is a "living" document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise.

In order to develop the plan, several steps were taken in order to ensure that the statutory requirements were met and a feasible implementation plan was in place. During the development of the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan, the following steps were implemented:

Review and analysis of documents, policies and other supporting materials from AMCTO, neighboring municipalities, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and other various stakeholder groups.

Establishment of staff training standards and practices directly related to the Election to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in a positive customer service environment, and ensure that all Election Officials recognize that a voter's needs shall be accommodated.

Consultation and meetings with the 2014 Election Team to substantiate that the Plan would meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

4. Voting Methods

The 2014 Town of Parry Sound Municipal Election worked with Intelivote Systems Inc. to provide eVoting services to eligible voters. This included the convenience and independence of voting from anywhere via telephone or internet October 14 – 27, 2014 Voting Period.

Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids presented accessible opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity.

The Intelivote Voting System provided voters with the capability to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for persons with disabilities who may have mobility restrictions, visual impairment, and/or have a difficult time with transportation. Additionally, persons who have assistive devices set up in their homes could now use them to assist with casting a ballot privately and independently.

By allowing persons with disabilities to vote from any location and from a selection of methods, there is an increase in the capability for the voter to vote without any assistance. This provides persons with disabilities the same independence and privacy in participating in the election as other voters.

4.1 Telephone Voting

Eligible voters voted using a touch-tone telephone, and the telephone number and PIN number contained in their Voter Information Letter to access an audio ballot. Communications barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Barriers may be identified as low volume, use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menu options.

The Intelivote telephone voting application provided the following:

Service on all types of touch tone phones and wireless devices

Clear, plain language.

Menu options that were easy to follow, advising when to select options and provision of confirmation of the voter's selections.

Standard volume is used to allow for adjustment dependent of the telephone or device being utilized.

Voters were also able to use the TTY (Teletypewriter) service to access eVoting services. TTY users would have experienced full confidence when using the TTY service integrated with the Intelivote Systems voting application by phone. TTY operators received training and are required by law to maintain confidentiality of the information disclosed. No record-keeping of conversations were stored.

Voters would also have access to a telephone Relay Service at (1-800-855-0511).

Steps were:

1. Tell the operator your name, the name of the person you are calling, and the number you wish to reach.
2. The operator will make the call for you. You speak to the operator as if you were talking directly to the person you are calling. For example, say : Hi, how are you doing:" Do not say: "Tell him I said hello."
3. Remember to say "Go Ahead: when you finish speaking, so the person on the other end will know it is their turn to speak.
4. If you normally speak very quickly, the operator may ask you to speak more slowly so your message can be typed while you are speaking. There will be brief silences as the operator types to the TTY user and the user replies.

More information was available at www.bell.ca/specialneeds/

4.2 Internet Voting

Eligible voters were able to vote online, using a smart phone, tablet device or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software, along with their PIN and qualifying information, to access the internet address provided in their Voter Instruction Letter.

The Intelivote System was created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is compliant with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information, such as with audio.

Intelivote has taken measures and has been proactive in accommodating persons with disabilities facilitating their comfort with the availability of eVoting services. Additionally, the Intelivote system has full compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

In performing regular internal auditing against WCAG-2 and Section 508 standards Intelivote ensures the application is addressing the needs of disabled participants at all times. The Voter Module is coded with XHTML transitional document type and conforms to all W3C web standards. The Module also supports and is compatible with other accessible technologies such as screen reader software.

4.3 Kiosk Voting

The Town of Parry Sound provided 2 Kiosks in the municipal office, instead of one, where those who did not have access to the internet were able to cast their vote. On voting day, October 27th, there were 4 Kiosks available for internet voters instead of the 2 originally planned. The Public Library had a number of computers available for the use by the public. Both sites continue to be wheelchair accessible. Georgian Bay Software kindly offered the use of their training area and computers for those who wished to vote by internet but had no access to a computer.

The Municipal Office had magnifiers available. The office main entrance area was free of all unnecessary items, boxes etc. to ensure that a wheelchair had complete mobility should a person with a disability choose to use the Kiosk Voting area. The parking lot continues to have reserved parking for people with a disability and is paved for easy wheel chair negotiability.

5. Voting Assistance

5.1 Support Person/Friend of the Voter

Pursuant to the Town of Parry Sound Customer Service Policy, Section “Support Person”, people with disabilities were permitted to be assisted by a support person. If a person with a disability utilizes the Voter Kiosk at the Municipal office to cast their vote, a designated support person and/or ‘Friend of the Voter’ will be administered an oath of secrecy/confidentiality by an Election Official prior to providing any such assistance.

5.2 Service Animals

Pursuant to the Town of Parry Sound Accessible Customer Service Policy, Section “Service Animals”, individuals that required service animals would be permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at any of the Kiosks at the municipal office. None attended our office.

5.3 Election Officials

Voters with a disability utilized the Voter Kiosks at the Municipal office to cast their vote and upon request, Election Officials were available to assist any voter who required assistance in casting their online ballot. All individuals working in the capacity of an Election Official are formally appointed as such and administered an oath of secrecy prior to voting day. There were numerous cases of Election Officials assisting voters at the Kiosks.

5.4 Care Facilities/Services

A number of care facilities and services for people with disabilities are located in the Town of Parry Sound--Belvedere Heights Home for the Aged, Lakeland Long Term Care, West Parry Sound Health Centre, The Friends, Community Living, Serenity Seniors Residence, District of Social Services Administration Board (which looks after the apartment buildings of Georgian Sunset Court, 22A Belvedere Avenue and Church Street) and Beaucrest apartments as well as the Regional Disability Advisory Committee and RISE. In order to facilitate the voting process, all of these groups were provided literature and posters for distribution amongst their residents and clients in February, April and July of 2014. Town electoral staff offered to provide 1 day on-site enumeration services to those in residence who have a disability preventing them from attending the municipal office if they are not on the voters list. No one requested on-site enumeration services however some facilities provided a support person or a friend of the voter to assist those who wished to vote.

6. Communications

The 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was available on the Town of Parry Sound Website in accessible document format. It was noted that Alternative formats could be made available upon request.

6.1 Election Materials

The Town was required, as per the Accessible Customer Service Standard, to provide a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability upon request. No requests were made.

Alternate Formats

Alternate formats are other ways of publishing information besides regular print. Some of these formats can be used by everyone while others are designed to address the specific needs of a user.

If requested the Town was prepared to come to an agreement with the person with a disability to determine format to be used for the document or information.

In the event the information was not generated by the Town or is supplied by a third party, the Town would have made every effort to obtain the information from the third party in an alternate format and/or would have attempted ill attempt to assist the Elector by providing assistive equipment.

General Election Materials

Large Print – Printed material generated by the Town was provided in a Ariel font, minimum 12 point, and was available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger upon request.

Website – Information generated by the Town on the website in relation to the election was be compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A, and allow for assistive software to be utilized. In addition, website font had the ability to be adjusted within the browser's functionality to aid the user in reading the information.

6.2 Service Disruptions

From time to time and/or for unforeseen circumstances beyond the Town's control, temporary service disruptions may be experienced. If there had been a temporary accessible service disruption, Election Officials were prepared to commit to making reasonable efforts to ensure that services would have been reinstated as quickly as possible and that alternative services would have been provided where feasible. There was one service interruption during the day during the advance voting period but Intelivote had it back up and running within 30 minutes.

If the service disruption had gone on longer then the Town would have provided reasonable notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by persons with disabilities.

Notice of these temporary disruptions would have been provided in a conspicuous place and manner at the respective locations and information would have also been posted on the Town website. This notice would have included information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of voting during the advance vote or on Election Day, *notices of disruption* would have been posted in real time:

- on the Town's website and election website
- at the site of the disruption
- where applicable, a media advisory would have been issued

As it was the disruption was short and services were back up and running within 30 minutes.

7. Application

All election officials received internal training to exercise their duties, including content relative to Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act accessibility standards, the Ontario Human Rights Code and health and safety practices.

Candidates also had to have regard to the needs of electors with disabilities.

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario released several quick reference documents to assist candidates with accessible elections considerations:

- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings](#)

8. Election Feedback

Pursuant to Section 4.6 of the Town of Parry Sound Accessible Customer Service Policy any individual has the opportunity to submit feedback regarding the provision of accessible customer service. This feedback can be submitted through regular mail, email, telephone, facsimile, or by using the Town's Customer Feedback Form, which is available to all staff, at all service counters and via the Town's website. Feedback about the manner in which election services were provided would have been addressed using the same method.

The Town received some telephone calls of a few frustrated electors regarding the telephone method for voting but most complaints were due to not listening to instructions and responding where asked. In all instances staff provided immediate response and assistance. However, specifically no feedback regarding accessible customer service was received.

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All feedback pertaining to accessible election services would have been forwarded to the Chief Electoral Officer for response. In addition, staff working at Town facilities would have been able to complete the feedback form for submission on behalf of a person with a disability. Response to all feedback would have been within one business week.

9. Reporting

Pursuant to Section 12.1 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, within 90 days after voting day, the Town Deputy Clerk is submitting this report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.