



**City of Kingston
Information Report to Council
Report Number 15-136**

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Cynthia Beach, Commissioner, Corporate & Strategic Initiatives
Resource Staff: John Bolognone, City Clerk
Date of Meeting: January 6, 2014
Subject: 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan

Executive Summary:

The 2014 City of Kingston municipal election was held on Monday, October 27, 2014. In accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, Section 12.1 (1), “a clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.” Throughout the election process, the Election Team developed the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan, to incorporate all initiatives implemented to help eliminate barriers for electors and candidates. This Plan was seen as a living document, and was updated regularly.

In accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, Section 12.1 (2), “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.” Upon Council receipt, this document will be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Recommendation:

This report is for information purposes only.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Cynthia Beach, Commissioner,
Corporate & Strategic Initiatives**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Lanie Hurdle, Community Services	Not required
Denis Leger, Transportation, Facilities & Emergency Services	Not required
Jim Keech, President and CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desiree Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required

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Options/Discussion:**Background**

In accordance with section 12.1 (1) of the Municipal Elections Act, “a clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.” Throughout the election process accessibility was considered in every aspect, from developing a RFP to lease a vote tabulation system, to determining what supplies should be sent to each voting location. The 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed to document the initiatives implemented to help eliminate barriers for electors and candidates. The Plan was a living document, and was updated regularly.

In 2014 a review of the municipal election accessibility plan was undertaken, which consisted in a review of the 2010 plan, a benchmarking exercise involving several municipalities and a review of current City of Kingston accessibility policies and procedures. Upon review, a new accessibility plan was drafted for 2014. The mandate of the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan is “to ensure that every elector is provided with the opportunity to vote independently in the 2014 Municipal Election”. The revised accessibility plan has been organized by theme, including communication, voting locations, accessible voting equipment, and election worker training. A draft of the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was circulated to the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) on September 2014 for comment and review, and subsequently provided to local stakeholders as well. In December 2014 the Election team brought forward an updated plan to MAAC for discussion, and some of the comments presented at the meeting were incorporated into the final plan.

The Municipal Elections Act requires that “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.” The final version of the Plan is attached as Exhibit A to this report. Upon Council receipt, the Plan will be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Notice Provisions:

Not Applicable.

Accessibility Considerations:

The *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, Section 12.1(1) which states that “A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.”

Financial Considerations:

Not Applicable.

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

Cheryl Hitchen, Manager, Social Policy & Strategic Community Development

Exhibits Attached:

Exhibit A - 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan



2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan - Draft

Prepared by:
John Bolognone, City Clerk and Returning Officer
2014 Municipal Election Office
December, 2014

This document is available in alternate formats upon request. Call 613-546-0000 or email contactus@cityofkingston.ca

Mandate

To ensure that every elector was provided with the opportunity to vote independently in the 2014 Municipal Election.

Introduction

In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the Act) municipal elections are scheduled every four years on the fourth Monday of October. The Municipal Election was held on Monday, October 27, 2014. City of Kingston residents were able to choose their Mayor, Councillor, Trustee, and to respond to a question on the ballot regarding gaming facilities.

The City of Kingston was committed to making the election accessible to all electors. For 2014 new voting technology was introduced to provide electors with a more methods of voting, including internet, telephone, and accessible voting equipment. There were twelve voting locations on advance voting day, October 18, 2014, and twenty-five voting locations on Voting Day, October 27, 2014. Site visits were made to each location to ensure that the site is accessible.

The City of Kingston understands the importance of accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) came into effect in 2005, and since then the City as a public organization has made strides to identify, remove and prevent barriers. The core principles contained in the City of Kingston Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was carried through into the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan. As the election process has progressed, the 2014 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan has evolved. In accordance with the Act, a report on accessibility measures implemented during the election will be presented to Council for information, and submitted to the Province 90 days from the election.

Communication

a) Use of the City Website

The City's website was used as the primary tool to communicate to the public on the election. Effort was made to ensure that the City-website is current and up to date. In addition, the website also has accessibility features, as it is compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A rating, and allows for the use of assistive software. The website font can be adjusted to the viewer's needs. In addition, the City of Kingston has an Accessibility List-Serv that can be used to issue messaging.

b) Alternative Formats

Forms and items posted on the City's website were posted in an accessible format. For those items that cannot be modified, alternative formatted documents will be provided upon request through the City's Customer Service Office.

c) Service Disruptions

If service disruptions arose during the election, the appropriate messaging was placed on the Elections homepage, on the service disruption section of the City's website, and posted to the City's social media outputs. Notice was provided in accordance with the City of Kingston's Notice of Temporary Service Disruption Policy. The notice was provided a description of the service disruption in a clear and concise manner and was

provided with an estimated time of when the disruption will be resolved. The messaging also included information on any alternative services that may be available.

In the event that a service disruption occurred on Voting Day, in addition to posting the disruption to various outputs, media releases were to be issued, and a notice sent out through the Accessibility List-Serv.

d) Feed Back Forms on Accessibility Concerns

The Election Team welcomed feedback on any accessibility concerns that may have arisen during a voter's voting experience. Staff will review all feedback received and make adjustments for future by-elections, and the 2018 municipal election. In addition, this data will be included in the City's Annual Accessibility Report.

e) Accessibility Guides

Candidates were provided with an array of accessibility guides and literature. These guides were also be posted to the City's Election Page – in the Resources section for public viewing. The following is a list of the guides, that were posted to the City's election resources webpage:

- i. AMCTO Candidates' Guide to Accessible Elections
- ii. Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation – Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication
- iii. Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices
- iv. Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation – Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings

Voting Locations

In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996 Section 45 (2) "in establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities." The City of Kingston provided poll locations that were accessible to electors with disabilities.

The Clerk's Department partnered with the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee, through its Voting Location Assessment Team, assessed public voting locations in the City of Kingston. Approximately 40 sites were considered, visited, and evaluated based on the following eight conditions:

- a) condition of the parking lot
- b) ramping into the building
- c) push bars to open doors
- d) accessible push buttons on doors
- e) location of polling area within the building
- f) lighting of the parking lot and facility
- g) accessible washroom facilities
- h) ease of movement in corridors and voting locations

The team used the City of Kingston's Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) checklist and an accessible voting location checklist that was developed in 2010 as a guideline for evaluating potential voting locations.

The majority of the polling locations that have been selected were locations used in 2010. The team did not come across any major issues with the sites that had been selected. It was also determined that if a site was not fully accessible (a minor issue) then modifications would be made, for instance installation of signage, designated parking, or a temporary ramp to provide barrier free voting location for all. It was also determined that respite seating should be available for those who use walkers or may require relief.

a) Adequate Lighting around the Voting Location

In determining voting locations, adequate lighting around the voting location was considered. The school locations selected have standardized lighting in their parked areas, which should afford for sufficient evening voting.

b) Accessible Parking at Voting Locations

All sites had designated accessible parking spaces. If there were none readily available the City worked with the various departments to ensure that temporary parking for the day has been provided in appropriate locations.

c) Access to Voting Location – Doors

During the review of voting locations, the access to the doors was reviewed and although not all of the facilities selected for voting locations included the automatic push button, most locations did have the automatic push button or a push bar on the door to allow for ease of access.

For locations that were identified with no power doors, additional staff were placed at the voting location to assist with the door, and instructed to open the door for every elector. If the weather permitted the exterior doors were to be propped open where possible. In addition, election staff enquired of voting locations whether interior doors could be adapted by removing the centre bar of the door to afford for greater access.

d) Dedicated Polling Locations

In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, Section 46, the City of Kingston placed dedicated polling locations in retirement homes and long-term care facilities that apply to the legislation. The Election Team worked with the administrator to select the optimal room in the facility, that was accessible. Dedicated voting locations were open for a two-hour period, and were available for resident use only. There are approximately nineteen nursing and retirement homes in Kingston. Deputy Returning Officers (DRO) who were hired to work dedicated poll were provided with additional training to ensure that all electors were treated with dignity and respect.

At the Polls/ Poll Setup and Layout

a) Trial Setup Voting Place

A model voting place was set up to determine the optimal layout; for example distances between tables, flow of the voting locations. Members of the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee were invited to visit the location and provide feedback to the Election Team.

b) Creating Accessible Voting Booths

Wooden blocks were used to create accessible voting booths for electors with disabilities. These blocks were used to raise voting tables to provide access by wheelchairs and enable greater accessibility. These accessible voting booths were screened off to provide privacy and were equipped with the accessible voting equipment.

c) Magnifiers

Magnifiers were placed at each poll location. The Election Team ensured that election workers were trained to provide a magnifier when requested. Workers were provided with direction as to the best way to approach electors who may possibly benefit from the use of the magnifier.

d) Easy Grip Ballot Markers

Each Polling location was provided with a Super Sharpie, which afforded for electors with dexterity challenges to be able to easily grip the ballot marking pen and mark the ballot independently.

e) Curbside Elector Support

If an elector was on the premises but not able to physically access the voting station inside the building, election workers were permitted to make external accommodations upon request. Once advised that there is a voter in the parking lot or at curbside who cannot physically access the voting station, a ballot was brought out to the voter at their vehicle.

Once the elector had completed marking the ballot, the ballot was placed in a privacy sleeve. The individual who brought the elector to the polling location was required to escort the election worker back into the voting location in order to witness the election worker inserting the ballot into the tabulator.

f) Service Animals and Support Workers

Service animals and support workers were allowed in a voting location. Support workers who are required to help their client vote were required to attest to an oath of confidentiality which was administered by the Site Supervisor or the DRO. After the oath was attested the support worker was be able to provide assistance in voting. Further, any individuals requiring assistance, for any reason could have had a friend, relative, or a site supervisor help them to mark their ballot. Any individual helping an elector are required to attest to the appropriate oath in order to be permitted behind the voting screen to provide assistance.

g) Greater Accessibility for Paper Ballots

For the 2014 Municipal Election revisions to the formatting of the paper ballot had been undertaken to enhance its accessibility. Items that have traditionally been in all caps, such as the last names of candidates were listed in title case. In reviewing the document, font size and underlining have also been identified as presenting barriers and have been reformatted.

Accessible Voting Equipment

For the 2014 Municipal Election an array of accessible voting equipment was available at all voting locations.

Accessible voting equipment was set up close to the Machine Operator's station, on an accessible table, and was made private by having its own voting screen. The Site Supervisor is the election worker who was responsible for operating the vote tabulator, and administering the accessible voting session. The Machine Operator was trained on the equipment and was able to provide assistance to the elector if required.

The following definitions and instructions regarding the accessible voting can be found in the voting procedure document:

"Accessible Voting Session" means the process by which an elector independently marks a ballot using the accessible features of the tabulator, resulting in a marked ballot produced which is tabulated by the vote tabulator.

"Audio Tactile Interface (ATI)" means the handheld controller that allows voters requiring an accessible voting session to navigate and make selections on the ballot. Audio instructions are provided via headphones to assist the voter with operating the ATI.

"Rocker Paddles" means the device that is used to navigate and make selections on the ballot by pressing color-coded Left (L) and Right (R) paddles in lieu of an ATI. Audio instructions are provided via headphones to assist the voter with operating the rocker paddles.

"Sip and Puff" means the device used in lieu of the ATI to navigate and make selections on the ballot by sipping or puffing on a straw. Audio instructions are provided via headphones to assist the voter with operating the Sip and Puff.

a) Accessible Vote Session

If an elector wishes to mark their ballot using the accessible voting equipment, the Designated Election Official shall:

- (a) proceed to the designated accessible vote area with the elector;
- (b) explain to the elector that with the accessible vote tabulator they can mark the ballot by using:
 - (i) the ATI: Audio Tactile Interface,
 - (ii) Sip and Puff device, or
 - (iii) Rocker Paddle;
- (c) explain to the elector how to proceed with marking the ballot after the elector has chosen which method to use;
- (d) advise the elector that after they have completed the accessible vote session and have confirmed their selections, the attached printer will generate a marked ballot

accordingly and the marked ballot will be fed through the vote tabulator and be deposited into the ballot box;

- (e) use the security key to activate an accessible voting session; and
- (f) leave the elector to cast their ballot in privacy while staying close to the vote tabulator in the event that the elector asks for assistance.

Once the elector has completed their accessible voting session and the ballot has been marked and tabulated, the vote tabulator will automatically return to a standard voting session.

The paper ballot is printed from a tethered printer located close to the voter. The system is able to produce unique vote marks, which will make the ballot indistinguishable from “hand-marked” ballots. In the event of a recount, the public will not be able to distinguish a ballot marked in an accessible voting session and an independent ballot created by hand.

b) Internet and Telephone Voting Systems

Internet and telephone voting was used for advanced purposes only. As per By-law 2014-120, the remote voting period began on October 14 at 12:00 a.m. and the remote voting polls closed on Thursday October 23rd, at 8:00 p.m. The remote voting afforded those who may experience difficulty accessing a physical voting location the opportunity to vote from the comfort of their own home. The remote voting options were available to all electors and based on comments received, it made voting more convenient.

Before the system was launched staff were able to review the screen shots and the messaging to ensure that the screen shots and messaging were accessible. The review was completed by a team, representing the following departments, Communications, Information Systems & Technology, the Clerk’s Department and the Manager of Social Policy and Strategic Community Development. The team suggested that the screen background and foreground colours be updated, and that some screen messages were to be updated to make the messages clearer to the user. In response many of the screens and the messaging were amended in accordance with the City of Kingston recommendations.

During the remote voting period, in addition to the Elections Team, a help desk of two Information Systems and Technology staff was established to help with enquiries regarding remote voting if it was of a technical nature. As call volumes increased, staff from the Clerk’s Department were brought in to help respond to enquiries. On the last day of remote voting the Elections Team and the Help desk were available until 8:00 p.m. to help ensure that those who wanted to vote had the support they required.

Election Worker Training

In 2014, accessibility was a major component of election worker training. Election workers were be provided information on providing customer service to electors with a disability, in accordance with provincial customer service regulations. The training focused on providing exemplary customer service to all electors. The training also aimed to remove any attitudinal barriers that election workers may have.

In addition to the customer service training, Machine Operators and Site Supervisors were trained on administering an accessible voting session and on all three accessible voting devices, the ATI, the rocker paddles, and the sip and puff.

The Election Team ensured that all Site Supervisors understood how to administer curbside voting. Site Supervisors were also tasked to monitor the voting location (entire site) and to ensure that the site is accessible; this may involve routine checks on doors, routes to voting location, and the parking lot.

Election workers also received additional accessible customer service materials to read and review, and were required to sign a compliance form indicating that they have read and understood the material.

A customer service document was provided to election employees on how to better serve all electors with disabilities, and this document is attached as Appendix A.

Stakeholder Consultation

a) Manager of Social Policy and Strategic Community Development

Throughout the election process the Manager of Social Policy and Strategic Community Development was consulted to ensure that accessibility concerns have been considered. In January the Manager was invited to the request for proposal demonstrations, and provided feedback on the vote tabulation systems, and the accessible voting equipment. In the updating of the City's election webpages and production of election related forms the Manager has been consulted, and will review the final version of the Plan before it is presented to Council.

b) Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC)

Consultation with MAAC began in June 2014 with the tabling of report number MAAC-14-003, with respect to the appointment of a Voting Location Assessment Team. A draft of the Plan was circulated to the MAAC Policy Working Group for comment. In September the Plan and a report was be presented to Committee for input, and at that meeting there was also a demonstration of accessible voting equipment.

In late September members of MAAC were invited to attend the mock-voting location set up and to provide feedback on the voting location layout, and to the vote tabulation demonstration provided on September 29, 2014. In December 2014 the Elections Team will bring forward a report to MAAC with a discussion on the 2014 Election. The feedback provided by MAAC will be reviewed and incorporated into the final version of the Plan.

c) Age-Friendly Advisory Committee

A briefing with the Age-Friendly Advisory Committee was provided to build awareness and to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to point out any concerns that older adult community may have with the electoral process.

d) Kingston Access Bus

The Election Team worked with Kingston Access Bus (KAB) to ensure that its clients who identify their destination as going to the polls to vote would receive free rides to their voting location. The Election Team worked with KAB to ensure that up-to-date information about voting locations and times were provided to ensure that KAB can optimize service delivery on advance and Voting Day.

e) Community Stakeholders

After the draft election accessibility plan was reviewed by MAAC. The plan was forwarded to a number of local organizations to attain their feedback and raise awareness of the Plan's initiatives. The following community stakeholders were consulted.

- i. Canadian Hearing Society
- ii. CNIB Kingston
- iii. Community Living Kingston
- iv. Frontenac Community Health
- v. Independent Living Centre
- vi. Ongwanada
- vii. Seniors Association Kingston Region
- viii. United Way

Suggestions for the 2018 Municipal Election

Election Team will be reviewing feedback gained from voters, Site Supervisors, and District Captains. Feedback has been received through various channels including email, phone, debrief sessions, a survey sent to the city staff who participated on advance and voting day. All feedback received will be reviewed, and included into a bring forward file that will be used for 2018 election planning.

Voting Locations

It is suggested that the list of voting sites used in 2018 be booked in early 2018. In Fall 2018 a member of the Election Team could meet with school administration to ensure that the City's expectations are understood and the accessibility concerns raised during site inspections are formally brought to the attention of the administration. Care should also be taken to ensure that voting locations are accessible by public transit.

Communications

The Elections Team are reviewing feedback from the public with respect to accessibility of the website. It is suggested that more information describing the voting process will be placed on the website and provided at the elections office and voting locations. Additionally, written instructions of all voting methods should be prepared and provided at all voting locations, and posted to the election website. Promotional materials could be produced earlier in the process to maximize their effect. In addition to supplying accessibility guides to candidates, the Election Team should include a printed copy of these guides as part of the official candidates package. AODA information as it relates to the election process should also be presented to candidates at any City initiated candidate information sessions.

Training of Election Staff

It is suggested that the Site Supervisor and Deputy Returning Officers (DRO) be provided with more expansive training, which will include more time with the DRO computers, accessible voting equipment, and the tabulators. For public election workers

the training should include more customer service instruction. It is further suggested that at least one individual be posted at each polling location fully versed in accessible customer service, and that this person be readily available and easily identified in order to help with any accessibility accommodations required at the polling location.

Appendices

Appendix A - Form 13 – Customer Focus - Electors with Disabilities Training Handout

Customer Focus

Electors with Disabilities

Electors with disabilities want the same experience that are available to others, dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

Ask every elector “may I help you”.

When interacting with an elector who has a disability it is important to acknowledge the person first and not the disability. This applies to the language we use and our behavior.

When meeting electors with disabilities you may offer assistance but always respect their independence. Their way of doing things may not be your way of doing things but it works for them. The elector you are assisting can make their own decisions.

Allow each elector the time they require to speak to you or complete their task. Be patient and speak clearly and avoid compromising their independence by assuming you know the best way to help or by interrupting or rushing the elector.

Every elector should equal opportunity to access our services and vote in an inclusive environment. If an elector is having difficulty getting into a voting location, begin by offering assistance. Be patient and courteous as some individuals may need extra time to reach their destination.

If you are offering help to an elector in a wheelchair or scooter and you are going to be talking to them for a while, consider crouching down so that both of you are at eye level. Eye contact is also important when speaking to electors with hearing disabilities, look directly at the person, speak clearly and do not cover your mouth as some electors with hearing disabilities read lips.

For some persons with disabilities, an assistive device, service animal, or support person may be essential. Do not touch move or manipulate an assistive device without receiving the owner’s permission. Never distract, interact, or feed a service animal. For support persons, regardless of their role always interact with the elector directly.

All electors have the right to a dignified voting experience regardless of ability and absolutely no one should feel uncomfortable or disadvantaged for any reason.

In every case take the time to listen to an elector’s questions and provide appropriate answers. Every elector whether they have a disability or not will benefit from your excellent customer service.