Oakville votes

2022 Municipal Election

2022 Municipal Election
Accessibility Plan – Final Report
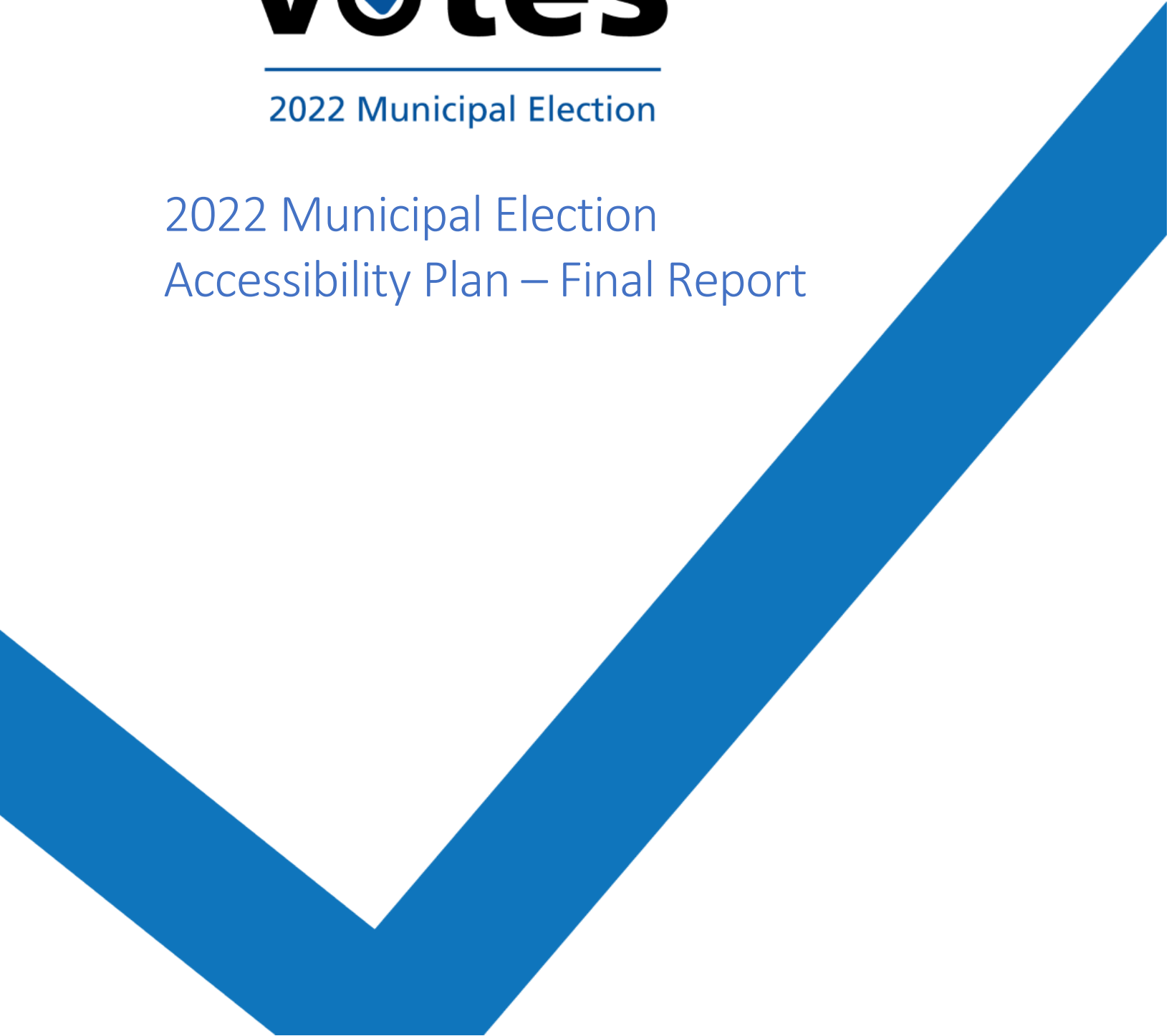
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Mission Statement

To provide all candidates and electors with equal opportunity and to ensure a positive involvement in the electoral process.

Goal

To establish objectives and actions to ensure the needs of electors and candidates of all abilities have been addressed.

Corporate Policy

The Corporation of the Town of Oakville (town) is committed to eliminating barriers and providing accessible programs, services and facilities towards achieving Council's vision to be the most livable town in Canada. This includes building an inclusive community where all individuals have equal access to the town's services, programs and facilities in a manner that is integrated and promotes dignity and independence.

Legislation

Municipal Elections Act, 1996, (the *Act*) as amended

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.
2) 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.
3) Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

Section 45 (2)

In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Post-Election Report date

December 2022

Should you require this information in a different format, please let us know.

Definition of Disability

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005 defines "disability" as follows:

(a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,

(b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,

(c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,

(d) a mental disorder, or

(e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

Objectives

1. Review the election process to identify barriers through consultation.
2. Remove barriers identified through effective communication and information for candidates and electors.
3. Ensure all voting locations are physically accessible.
4. Ensure equal opportunity for all electors to vote as independently as possible.
5. Ensure all election officials receive the required training, incorporating accessible customer service training, to provide a positive voting experience.

1. Consultation

Consultation with individuals and groups provide greater knowledge and understanding in conducting elections that are accessible to all. Reviewing the election process and consulting with individuals and groups ensures the goals and actions in providing services to persons of all abilities and backgrounds are relevant and implemented effectively and establishes actions that provide accountability and ensure accessibility initiatives are implemented.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

The accessibility initiatives for the 2022 municipal election were presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) for review and comment in June of 2022. Feedback was solicited from the group on accessibility initiatives not identified in the plan and to raise awareness of the upcoming municipal election.

Other groups

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) was consulted in 2014 to review the equipment. The same equipment reviewed by the CNIB in 2014 in this consultation was used for the 2018 and 2022 municipal election.

Staff attended senior recreation facilities, long-term care facilities, and retirement homes in advance of voting dates to provide relevant voting information and to collect accurate and up-to-date elector information.

Information was provided to various groups through communication material sent to recreation and fitness centers within Oakville, including libraries. Election information was also issued to community groups, diversity-related groups, youth organizations, seniors groups, and more. Additional engagement opportunities were explored with the Halton Multicultural Council.

Post-election Evaluations

Post-election evaluations, which included accessibility initiatives or concerns, were conducted with staff to solicit feedback on all areas of the election and continually improve our process. The survey to the supervisors and election officials included a rating system for the location, accessibility, parking availability and additional comments about the locations accessibility. While there were no concerns raised in regard to barriers as all locations were physically accessible, a few responses will initiate a review of several locations to improve its accessibility if used for a future elections with regards to distance and navigation to the voting location rooms.

2. Communications and Information

Effective communication initiatives for candidates and electors is critical in ensuring election information is accessible, as well as ensuring all documentation and information is available in alternative formats upon request.

Website

All relevant election information pertinent to both candidates and electors was posted to the election website (elections.oakville.ca). All information provided included accessible links and was offered in alternative formats, including paper copy, when requested. The majority of the web content was posted as text-based content only; accessible PDFs were posted where possible. Results, including past election information, are provided on the website and also on the town's Open Data portal.

Candidates

Candidates were provided supplementary information to ensure a positive campaign for both candidates and electors. Resources were provided relating to running an accessible campaign. The following resources were provided on the town's election website:

- the town's Candidate Guide;
- the Candidate's Guide to Accessible Elections, produced jointly by the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerk's and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Province;
- the provincial accessibility website;
- Oakville's Inclusions Lens Guide; and
- the town's Accessible Customer Service handbook.

Multiple candidate information sessions were held in 2022 which covered the candidate accessibility requirements and the legislation related to candidates with a disability.

All documentation and forms were available in large print, if required, to assist visually impaired and were offered in alternate formats upon request. Where possible, forms and documents required to be posted in PDF format were provided as accessible PDFs.

3. Voting Locations

In accordance with legislation, all voting places were physically accessible to all electors.

Accessibility Checklist

An established accessibility checklist was reviewed and updated for election personnel to use when conducting site visits of each voting location.

The comprehensive checklist ensured each facility had:

- working door operators / accessible doors;
- barrier free parking;
- accessible ramps and thresholds;
- a barrier free path of travel from the parking lot;
- adequate lighting;
- seating, should the distance of travel from the entrance to the voting location require it.

Site Visits

Site visits were conducted of all voting locations, including parking lots and paths, to ensure full physical accessibility. As part of the accessibility plan, location owners (Town, school boards and churches) were notified should any accessible modifications be required. None were required.

Signage

Where required, staff ensured that all voting locations and access areas were clearly identified and that any particular accessibility requirement (i.e. use of an elevator) had clear signage. Accessibility parking signs were allocated to voting locations that required more accessible parking closer to voting location entrances.

Voting location set up

Staff were instructed to ensure all voting locations were set up to ensure maximum accessibility. In 2014, a member of the Accessibility Advisory Committee assisted in reviewing a mock voting location set up to assess maximum accessibility (i.e. distance between voting booths, height of tables, etc.). The same set up established in 2014 was utilized for 2018 and 2022,and was taught during our staff training.

Vote anywhere within your ward

On voting day, eligible electors could vote at any one location within their ward. Offering this voting model provided flexibility for electors and enhanced the accessibility of elections to all involved. This voting model was implemented in 2014 and was offered again for the 2018 and 2022 election.

Voting location with accessible voting equipment

Town hall was used as our central voting location on all our advanced voting days in addition to voting day. This location was physically accessible and offered accessible voting equipment. On voting day, any eligible elector could vote at town hall regardless of their ward.

Service Animals / support persons

Service animals were permitted in all voting locations. Election staff were instructed not to question or ask for supporting documentation to verify a service animals' authenticity.

Support persons were able to assist individuals in the voting process, as required, providing they took an oral oath of a friend or a translator, administered by an election official.

Election staff training incorporated information and processes related to service animals, support persons, and interpreters.

Emergency Notices / Accessibility information

While no last-minute voting location changes occurred, a process was established to facilitate this notice, should an emergency occur.

In addition to social media outlets, information was made available on the following web pages: [Accessibility (oakville.ca)](oakville.ca) Accessibility (oakville.ca)

4. Accessible Voting Opportunities

Ensures equal opportunity for all electors to vote as independently as possible.

Accessible voting equipment

We provided accessible voting equipment and proper instructions on using the equipment in the manner suitable for the voter.

Accessible equipment was made available at town hall for all advanced voting in addition to voting day. The equipment was supplied with the capability to provide for an audio ballot with the use of the following devices: Braille control, hand or foot paddles, and a sip and puff device. The voter had the ability to choose the device used.

Staff from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (C.N.I.B.) assisted in 2009 by providing feedback and testing of accessibility components of voting equipment during the RFP stage. Representatives tested accessibility components and confirmed that they were accessible for those with visual impairments and individuals in wheelchairs. The same accessible voting technology was used in 2014, 2018 and for the 2022 municipal election.

Procedures were provided on the town's website and available in print at town hall. Election staff that were trained on accessible voting equipment were present on site when the use of the equipment was requested.

The accessible equipment was used by one voter for the 2018 municipal election. A ballot was marked successfully using the audio tactile device and the ballot was accepted by the tabulator. Once accepted by the tabulator, the ballot marked by the accessible device could not be identified from hand-marked ballots. While the accessible voting equipment was made available to voters for the 2022 municipal election, it was not used.

Advance voting opportunities

Advance voting opportunities were provided prior to voting day including both evening and weekend options at multiple locations. The full list of advance voting opportunities was listed on the town's website and provided elector information notices.

Notice of advance voting and the town hall voting day location was provided to electors through various methods, including Oakville transit, with public notices, newsletters, advertisements, and social media.

Curbside voting

All voting locations offered curbside voting as an alternative voting method to entering a voting location. In most circumstances, supervisors were given notice prior to an elector showing up to vote. However, all supervisors were advised to be prepared regardless of voter notice. The election staff was responsible for meeting the elector in the parking lot, confirming voter identification and eligibility, then bringing a ballot to the car in a secrecy folder. Once the voter had marked their ballot the election official asked the voter to wait while they process their ballot in the vote tabulator. Once accepted, the voter was given confirmation to leave. Members of the election team received positive feedback from electors who used this service. Voters complimented the process, describing the service as both easy and efficient.

Drive Thru Voting

Oakville offered a drive thru voting option at Oakville Trafalgar Community Centers' parking garage that permitted voters to cast their ballot from the comfort of their own car. Election staff were instructed to confirm voter identification and eligibility and hand the ballot to the voter in a secrecy folder. Once the voter had marked their ballot the election official asked the voter to wait while they processed their ballot in the vote tabulator. Once accepted, the voter was given confirmation to leave. The drive thru had clear directional signage identifying where the elector may vote, and we employed additional staff members to this location to assist with voter inquiries and traffic flow. Members of the election team received positive feedback from electors who used this service. Voters complimented the process, describing the service as efficient, and asked that it is offered again in future elections.

Assisted voting

A friend, companion, support person, or election official, may assist a voter in the voting process. Election staff were trained to offer this option to any voters who attended the voting location with another person or required assistance. Any individuals assisting a voter, other than an election official, were required to take an oath of a friend or a translator to assist an elector.

Proxy voting

Proxy voting is a legislated option for voters who wish to appoint another eligible elector to vote on their behalf. There were approximately 50 proxies issued for the 2022 Oakville municipal election. Proxy voting information was provided to voters through notices and on the town's website. Staff was trained on informing voters of the processes of proxy voting and how to process a proxy vote. Election staff encouraged voters' who were unable to vote during advanced voting and voting day to use a proxy to vote on their behalf. Proxies were highly encouraged to make an appointment at town hall during advanced voting because once the proxy had been approved, they could immediately take their proxy to vote downstairs in the

town hall voting location. While proxy voting was highly encouraged during advanced due to shorter wait times, proxies were also accepted on voting day.

Resources available to electors

Magnification screens were made available at all voting locations. We also offered Language Line information to all supervisors at each voting location if a voter required a translation. Additionally, when election staff were hired to work the election, we asked them in their applications to indicate if they spoke any languages in addition to English. In the event someone required a translation at a voting location we had election officials who have taken their oath to assist the voter when needed.

Language-related resources were included on all key materials (i.e. the interpretation services available via ServiceOakville), including tax bill inserts, voter guide/handout, news releases.

Transit

Transit passes were made available for electors who required assistance getting to a voting location.

Reduced hour voting locations

In accordance with section 45(7) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, resident only voting opportunities were provided at institutions and retirement homes. Voting was provided to institutions which had 20 or more beds occupied by persons who are disabled, chronically ill or infirm and a retirement home which had 50 or more beds occupied. Resident only voting was provided on a reduced hours basis for 1 to 4 hours (depending on size of facility and number of residents) to allow eligible residents of the facility the opportunity to vote in their own home. This included voting at the Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital.

Election staff provided bedside voting where required.

Due to the pandemic, we gave each facility the option to work as election officials. Members of the election team created a schedule for election material drop off and pick up times. Interested staff attended in person training and processed voters in the facility where they worked. This added an element of safety and comfort for the residents. All election staff assigned to a location followed established protocols such as rapid covid-19 testing. We offered reduced hour voting at 21 locations on voting day. 10 facilities staffed their own internal workers for the election and 11 facilities did not have enough staff to work so we staffed with Halton regional workers. Election workers that we staffed, were notified that upon entering long-term care and retirement homes that they will be required to adhere to all established COVID-19 protocols. It included COVID-19 screening, vaccination policies, masking, physical distancing, and any other protocols. Election workers (internal staff and external) were provided with the appropriate personal protective equipment which included masks, gloves, sanitizers, goggles, etc.

Vote from Home Program

A new pilot program was offered in the 2022 election called the vote from home program. This was introduced to enhance the town's commitment to creating accessible voting for all electors, allowing them to vote independently from their home. The vote from home service was designed to provide a service for electors who cannot leave their homes due to illness, injury, or disabilities.

Two election officials were deployed to the homes that requested the vote from home and provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). This included: N95 masks, sanitizers, booties, etc. There were protocols in place for homes that had a COVID-19 outbreak.

The vote from home service was offered by scheduled appointments during advanced, however last minute requests were accommodated on voting day.

For the 2022 election, the program was successfully utilized by roughly 20 voters.

5. Staff Training

Comprehensive staff training was critical in ensuring legislative requirements and the town's accessibility goal was met. All election officials who worked were required to attend a mandatory training session. While the training sessions varied based on the position, all election official training incorporated an accessible customer service component.

Accessible Customer Service handbook

The Accessible Customer Service handbook was provided to all election officials.

Training

The following material was presented to all staff during the election official training to ensure staff were trained on how to offer accessible customer service:

- Never assume an individual needs assistance, always ask
- Monitor voter concerns and ensure their needs are met, i.e., if an individual with a walker is in a long line, staff are to observe, and if it is felt that the elector is having difficulties, offer a chair and ensure that their place is saved in line
- Offer magnifiers; ensure voters know they are available, if required
- Watch for language difficulties and work with voters in ensuring they are comfortable and understand the process. Election officials were able to act as interpreters if possible and if the voters wanted the assistance
- Ensure voters were aware of where the accessible facilities are (when applicable) and instructed information officers and safety monitors to assist and/or direct them should the voter request it
- How to identify a service animal and to not ask questions pertaining to documentation or a reason why the service animal is required
- Maintain a friendly and approachable demeanor
- Check the access doors frequently and ensure all voters can easily enter the building
- Ensure signage to the location is adequate and identifies the best route
- Ensure voters who have self-identified as curbside voting are met in a timely manner
- Ensure the minimum required distance of 6 feet is kept between the tables used for privacy screens
- If required, ensure that there is seating for rest spots leading from the entrance to into the voting location room

Feedback received

Feedback on all areas of the election process was welcomed and appreciated. Feedback on accessibility was particularly important as indicated by the plan.

A web page on oakville.ca is dedicated to receiving feedback on accessibility initiatives. The established town page was utilized and linked from the elections accessibility page to allow the election team to ensure efficiencies of service:

www.oakville.ca/residents/accessibility.html and http://elections.oakville.ca/accessibility.html

The Town Clerk welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes can improve the delivery of an accessible election. This document reports how the Town of Oakville acted on the established plans of ensuring an accessible election for all involved. Feedback on improvement in areas that may be identified as requiring improvement with respect to administering the election is welcomed and will be carefully reviewed in the planning and implementation of future elections.

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