



Staff Report LS-2022-057
General/Finance Committee
December 14, 2022

TO: Councillor Mazan and Members of General/Finance Committee
AUTHOR: Cheryl Hollows, Manager of Legislative Services / Deputy Clerk
SUBJECT: 2022 Accessible Election Report

RECOMMENDATION

None. For information only.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Township's municipal election accessibility plan.

BACKGROUND

Legislation

The Municipal Elections Act (MEA) requires the preparation of an accessibility plan, as well as a report on the effectiveness of said plan, 90 days after a municipal election. The intent of the plan is to prevent and remove barriers that may affect electors and candidates with disabilities. The requirement for such a plan is part of the Province's vision to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities by the year 2025.

ANALYSIS

Township Election Accessibility Plan

The Township's Municipal Election Accessibility Plan is attached as Appendix "1" and was prepared in accordance with the MEA. It outlines the actions to be taken to ensure that candidates and electors were able to participate in the 2022 Municipal Election. The Plan was made available to the public at the municipal office and online. As new opportunities are identified or become available, the plan will be improved and updated.

Assessment

This report focuses on and evaluates the actions taken for the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that could affect electors and candidates with disabilities to participate in the election. A summary of these measures and their effectiveness follows.

i) Internet and Telephone Voting

Internet and Telephone voting enabled Electors to cast votes from anywhere in the world with telephone or internet service on October 17, 2022 starting at 10:00 am up to October 24 at 8:00 pm. Travel to polling stations was therefore not required. This ensured that all electors had an extensive period of time to cast their vote using an accessible and convenient method. Voters were also able to use devices/software that they owned and were familiar with on their computer or mobile device in order to cast their vote. Telephone voting allowed voters to cast their votes using any point-to-point telephone connection (home, cell).

The flexibility of Internet and Telephone voting presented opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the election while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

Voting assistance was also available at the Election Help Centre located at the Township Municipal Office with the assistance of an Election Official or a support person of their choosing. At the Election Help Centre, the voting method was via internet or telephone. The Election Help Centre was open during regular office hours and on additional extended hours up to the close of voting.

The election software supported a minimum WCAG 2.0 Level A accessibility standards. Text size options, as well as view options (colour print, black on white print or white on black print) were provided.

ii) Voter Information Letter

Eligible electors received a Voter Information Letter (VIL) containing instructions on how to vote online or by telephone providing the website address or phone number along with the access information required. Accessible features of the VIL were the use of black text on white paper to achieve optimum colour contrast, minimal use of italics or underlining, left-aligned text, and minimum print using 12 point in Arial Font. Voters were able to request their VIL in an alternate format.

iii) Election Help Centre

A site audit of the Election Help Centre was conducted in order to ensure that it was accessible to all electors. Every effort was made to ensure that the identified election help centre was accessible using the following considerations; exterior paths of travel, parking, entrances, fire safety, emergency preparedness, signage, accessible washrooms, noise and lighting.

Township staff, including those appointed as Deputy Returning Officers and Elections Officials, and those who worked at the election help centre, completed the following required training pursuant to the AODA:

- Accessible Customer Service;
- Integrated Accessibility Standards; and
- Ontario Human Rights Code as it relates to people with disabilities.

iv) Support Persons and Service Animals

Appointed Election Officials were available to assist an elector who required assistance in casting their vote after the completion of the oral oath. If an elector did not desire assistance from an Election Official, they were permitted to be accompanied by a designated support person and/or a friend to provide assistance following the administration of the oral oaths. Election Officials or Deputy Returning Officers administered the oral oaths.

Electors requiring the assistance of a service animal were permitted to bring their service animal into the election help centre. No requests were received.

v) Unexpected Service Interruptions

Pursuant to section 6 of the Township's of Muskoka Lakes Accessible Customer Service Policy, in the event of an unexpected service interruption, notice would be provided (where applicable) as quickly as possible.

vi) Election Feedback

As outlined in the Township's Accessible Customer Service Policy, a member of the public may provide feedback regarding Election accessibility to the Clerk, or designate. None was received.

ALTERNATIVES

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conduct of the Municipal Election is funded through the Township's election reserve fund that receives an annual allocation through the Clerks Department operating budget.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal: Sustain and Enhance Public Services and Infrastructure

Action: Assess the Township's current service delivery models and identify opportunities for modernization, digitization, and enhanced customer service engagement.

COMMUNICATIONS

This staff report was distributed to Council and all those registered to receive notification through the meeting agenda electronic notification system, and was published on the Township's website in accordance with the Township's Procedural By-law.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix "I" - 2022 TML Election Accessibility Plan

PREPARED BY

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