

Introduction

The Municipality of West Perth was committed to making the 2018 Municipal Election accessible by working to accommodate the needs of electors by removing barriers to vote for persons with disabilities.

The focus of the Post-Election Accessibility Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services offered to all electors and candidates in the 2018 Municipal Election. This report outlines the various initiatives undertaken during the course of the 2018 Municipal Election regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

Post-election Reporting

In accordance with section 12.1(3) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the Clerk shall provide a report, within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with accessibility needs. The report will be available to the public and posted on the Municipality's website in an accessible format.

Leading up to the election, an Election Accessibility Plan (the "Plan") was developed. The 2018 Plan guides the provision of election related services to persons with disabilities. The Plan was designed to respect the dignity and independence of electors and candidates, and ensure that practices and procedures are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

The following are the various initiatives undertaken by the Clerk's Department during the course of the 2018 Municipal Election:

1. The telephone voting system provided an option for electors with a visual impairment or mobility issues who could not otherwise attend the Voter Help Centre. The internet voting system also allowed many individuals with mobility issues to remain at home or even in the hospital and still vote. The telephone system will need to be reviewed in the next election to ensure that the instructions are clear and concise.
2. The internet voting system also provided options to assist those with visual impairments. The font size could be enlarged and the colours could be changed for greater contrast. In addition, the site itself was designed for ease of use for individuals using a screen reader (choice of font, contrasting colours, etc.).

3. As mentioned previously, some touch screens were available at all Voter Help Centres. These touch screens could be manipulated to zoom in or enlarge the text for individuals who were visually impaired. Magnifiers and telephones were also available at all Voter Help Centres. It would be recommended to provide only touch screens in the future.
4. Many individuals noted that it was much easier to touch the screen when voting rather than trying to precisely mark a paper ballot.
5. Computer stations were available at the West Perth Library from October 15th - October 19th and at the Municipal Office on Election Day for those electors who did not have internet access and did not wish to use the telephone voting. The Help Centres were barrier-free with no obstructions to the entrances, designated barrier-free parking spaces at grade, and entrances equipped with automatic door openers. Signage was posted inform electors of the designated Voting Stations.
6. Accessibility was also a significant consideration when determining the locations of the Voter Help Centres. The Municipal Office and West Perth Library was used as the front door is an accessible entrance and individuals could vote easily and privately in the front office. Site visits were conducted at each location to arrange the Voter Help Centre in the most accessible manner possible. Signage was used at each Voter Help Centre as appropriate.
7. The fact that there was a Voting Period rather than a single voting day also made voting more accessible for individuals as large line-ups were avoided and people were not forced to stand for long periods of time or face large crowds.
8. VoterView was also available through the Municipality's website enabling electors to search the Voters' List from his or her personal computer or mobile handheld device.
9. Election information was communicated through various channels and alternative formats including emails, social media, newspaper, newsletters, and the Municipal website. For election related inquiries or feedback, all residents were able to contact the Clerk/Returning Officer via telephone or through a designated email. The Clerk will continue to receive feedback through email.
10. The Returning Officer, Assistant Returning Officers and the Elections Officials were trained in the accessible customer service standards.
11. Election Officials contacted retirement and long term care homes to determine mutually convenient dates to attend at their facilities to assist residents get added to, or make changes to, the Voters' List and to use Designated Voting Stations with internet access. Staff visited Ritz Lutheran Villa on October 16, 2018 and Mitchell Nursing Home on October 17, 2018 to assist those residents with voting.

Some Electors did require assistance from the Assistant Returning Officials or the Election Officials. These strategies should be reviewed, updated and revised prior to the next election to ensure the next election is as accessible as possible.

Feedback

Public feedback about the manner in which election services were provided to persons with accessible needs may be submitted to the Clerk through a variety of methods:

Telephone: 519-348-8429 ext.224

Email: cpreston@westperth.com

Mail or in person: 169 St. David Street, PO Box 609, Mitchell, ON N0K 1N0

The feedback process provides election staff with an opportunity to take corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences, address training needs, enhance service delivery and provide alternative methods of providing election services.

Carla Preston

Returning Officer/ Clerk