



DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

CAO/Clerks Department CL2023-01

To: Mayor Davidson and Council
Subject: Accessibility Report - Election 2022
Meeting: Regular Council Meeting - 25 Jan 2023
Department: CAO/Clerks Department
Staff Contact: Larry Wheeler, Clerk

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Township of Mapleton Council receive for information Clerk's Report CL2023-01 dated January 23, 2023 regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Municipal Elections Act, 1996

Electors and candidates with disabilities

12.1(1) A Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

Plan re barriers

12.1(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.

Report

12.1(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.

PREVIOUS PERTINENT REPORTS:

CL2019-05

CL2022-02

CL2022-07

DISCUSSION:

In 2018 mail-in balloting was identified by Council of the day as an "alternative voting system which would allow accessibility to voters who cannot attend a traditional vote polling station. Most people have access to mail, both incoming and outgoing and the vote by mail system gives people the opportunity to vote in their homes using the postage paid envelope."

In February 2022, Council resolved to adopt on-line voting as an additional method of voting for the 2022 Election, further enhancing the Township's movement towards democratic accessibility.

Clerk's Report CL2022-02 asserted that "Regardless of the alternative voting methods put in place, the Municipal Office will always be utilized as a Voter Support Station."

In April 2022, Council resolved to adopt the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan (attached). This Plan discussed accessibility considerations for both In-Person voter assistance and Internet voter assistance. The Plan also included a promise that "All services provided by the Township of Mapleton shall be delivered in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with accessibility challenges."

Two occurrences during the 2022 Election voting period can be used as examples to highlight Mapleton Township delivering on its ethos:

1) Friend of Elector Oath:

A physically challenged Mapleton resident / elector arrived at the Township Office accompanied by a designated support person, and requested assistance with the voting process. After being made comfortable in the Council Chamber by Mapleton Admin staff, the Returning Officer utilized our 'Oral Oath of Friend or Interpreter' to enable the elector concerned to vote with privacy and dignity.

2) Housebound rural elector unable to vote

A Mapleton farm resident contacted the Township Office to report that Accessibility challenges rendered the person housebound and unable to vote. The Returning Officer dispatched a Mapleton staff member to the rural property to collect the completed vote-by-mail envelope.

CONSULTATION:

Prior to authoring our in-house Accessibility Election Policy many examples of alternative municipal policies (both rural and urban) were studied to in order to provide a final product which is both modern and inclusive.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Incremental costs associated with implementing accessible election privileges to our residents are covered within the election budget.

SUMMARY:

Township of Mapleton can be proud of our implementation of two alternative voting methods (mail-in and internet), providing accessible facilities (accessible parking, electronic doors), and staff providing friendly, caring support.

In 2026 our Election Accessibility Policy will again require review and update.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION:

Municipal Infrastructure: n/a

The Local Economy: n/a

Recreation: n/a

Municipal Administration: Enhancing principles of equality, integration, and empowerment.

Financial Responsibility: n/a

ATTACHMENTS:

[Policy - Election Accessibility Plan](#)



2022

MUNICIPAL ELECTION

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

1. Purpose

The 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan supports and strengthens Mapleton's commitment and efforts to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The focus of this Plan is to ensure that electoral services are accessible to all electors and candidates, to identify and eliminate barriers for persons with disabilities, and to create a positive voting experience.

The Municipal Clerk and Election Team will continue to learn, develop, and adjust our approaches to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The review of accessibility issues and initiatives and addressing barrier prevention or removal is an ongoing practice. This plan will be improved and updated as new opportunities are identified or become available.

2. Legislative Requirement

The Municipal Clerk is responsible for conducting municipal elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to fully participate in the 2022 Municipal Election.

3. The Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended:

12.1 (1) A Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s.8 (8)

12.1 (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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

41 (3) The Clerk shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as he or she considers necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without the assistance referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 52 (1). 1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 41 (3); 2001, c. 32, s. 30 (1).

45 (2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the Clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. 2009, c.33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (23)

4. Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy

The above named policy was adopted by Township of Mapleton Council as per Resolution 2019-28-10 on November 26, 2019, and subsequently incorporated into the Mapleton Policy Manual [Sec.2 Accessibility].

This policy is intended to meet the requirements of *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07* under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and applies to the provision of goods and services to the public or other third parties, not to the goods themselves.

All services provided by the Township of Mapleton shall be delivered in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with accessibility challenges.

The requirements, guidance, and spirit of said Accessibility Policy will at all times be upheld during the 2022 Municipal Election. Additionally, this Policy in its entirety is available upon request from the Clerk.

5. Accessibility Considerations for In-Person Voter Assistance

The Clerk shall ensure the Voter Assistance Centre (Municipal Office) is accessible to both candidates and electors with disabilities. The following will be primarily considered:

- a) Entrance and Egress
- b) Parking

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to be accompanied by a designated support person. A “Friend of Elector” or ‘Vote with Assistance’ oath will be administered prior to voting, as per attached Form EL27.

6. Accessibility Considerations for Internet Voter Assistance

Through our contractor ‘Dominion Voting’ and their ‘ImageCast®’ Remote Voting technology, we believe the Township of Mapleton Council has significantly increased the accessibility service level provided to our electors. The following industry jargon has been put forth by Dominion Voting as part of their Remote Voting User Guide:

The ImageCast® Remote voting page is WCAG 2.0 Level AA accessibility standards through the use of standard HTML and JavaScript. Electors can use WCAG compliant screen readers, and ballot navigation via browser-based personal assistive devices. The voting page is compatible with Microsoft Explorer, Edge, Firefox, Safari, and Chrome, and electors can use a multitude of devices to access the Remote Voting system, including (but not limited to) personal computers, tablets, and smartphones.

Additionally, for electors who wish to vote on-line but for whatever reason desire to vote at the Voter Assistance Centre (Municipal Office) a private area will be available containing a computer, and respectful assistance from an Election Official who has formally sworn or affirmed an oath of secrecy.

Hopefully, internet voting will be received as a convenient, effective, and weatherproof method of voting from home. Certainly, the objective is to enhance the standard principles of equality, integration, and empowerment.

7. Election Feedback

The Clerk's Office naturally welcomes feedback to identify areas where refinements need to be considered, and ways in which Mapleton can improve the delivery of an accessible election.

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996 Section 12.1 (3) as amended states the following:

“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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.