



2014 Post-Election Accessibility Report

Objectives

The 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed with the intention to highlight measures that the Town would be implementing to ensure equal and equitable election practices for electors and candidates. Accessible Election objectives included consideration:

- **That all voting place locations be accessible;**
- **That persons with disabilities be able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;**
- **That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;**
- **That persons with disabilities have the opportunity to fully participate in the 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election as an elector, candidate and/or election official; and**
- **That efforts be made to ensure that electors with disabilities be made aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Town's website and social media.**

The following report identifies the actions and initiatives taken during administration of the 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers.

General Accessibility Considerations

The 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election was conducted over an eight-day voting period (October 20 – 27, 2014) as a vote-anywhere, vote-anytime, paperless election. Voters were not required to attend a specific voting place location based on their eligibility to vote, and instead could vote at any of the provided voting place locations during hours of operation or remotely by telephone or online 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Such provisions supported increased accessibility, convenience and sustainability throughout the voting process.

Voting Place Locations

Staff conducted site reviews of all 17 different locations where voting opportunities were to be provided (Town facilities, schools, Long-Term Care and retirement facilities), in relation to accessible routes, entrance, egress and parking criteria. Trial voting place location set up was facilitated to assist with determining appropriate spatial and technology arrangements and site set-up diagrams were created for each location to ensure consistent set-up. Throughout the voting period, rest area seating was provided for, doors were maintained unobstructed and all technology cords were taped down to prevent tripping hazards.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Set up voting place location with greater space between voting stations and privacy screens. Separate tables to allow for access to behind the voting screen from either side, avoiding voters having to pass behind voting screens. Such congestion was caused by last minute additional technology requirements to increase the number of voting stations.*

Accessible Routes

All voting place locations were accessible via Durham Region Transit. Supplementary large print signage on the exterior/interior routes and access points was used to identify the voting place location.

Entrance & Egress

Entrance routes to all voting place locations were unobstructed and provided appropriate width for mobility device entry. All but one voting place location was equipped with an automated power door opener, and all voting place locations were provided with multiple wooden door stops to prop open doors to the voting place location and access/egress routes. During peak voting times, election staff and by-law officers triaged line-ups and helped maintain order and access to and from the location.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Conduct voting place location site audits multiple times throughout the year/season to ensure infrastructure is maintained in good repair – minor pathway repair was required at the Kinsmen Heritage Centre in fall 2014 to remove potential tripping hazards.*

Parking

Designated accessible parking spaces were provided at all voting place locations. Parking volume issues were identified during peak voting periods at high-traffic voting place locations that may have impeded accessible parking/access.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Ensure required accessible parking signage is provided for in compliance with legislation – accessible parking sign missing at Kinsmen Heritage Centre on Election Day.*
- *Review opportunities to designate additional temporary accessible parking spaces at high-traffic voting place locations and/or designate fewer, but larger, voting place locations and investigate parking alternatives.*

Voting Methods

The 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election contracted Intelivote Systems to provide eVoting services. Such methods created increased convenience, accessibility and independence of voting from anywhere in the world via telephone and internet.

Telephone Voting

Persons with disabilities and those who did not wish to use internet voting options, were able to access eVoting over the telephone. Intelivote Systems Inc. created a telephone voting service that was offered on all types of touchtone phones and wireless devices. The service used clear, English language and menu options were presented in an organized and easy-to-follow order, advising voters when to select options and provide confirmation of one's selections. Standard volume levels were used to allow for adjustments depending on the user and device. Telephone voting could also be used via TTY (Teletypewriter) Services. Bell Relay service operators are required by law to maintain confidentiality and not disclose any information from conversations, nor keep any records of such.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *A few voters who called in on the Voter Helpline and members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee identified minor confusion relative to the format in which to enter one's qualifying date of birth (i.e. 01/01/2015 vs. 01/01/15).*

Internet Voting

Eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online using a number of personal devices, including but not limited to tablets, computers, smart phones and gaming systems, alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software required. Such methods supported independent, private and convenient voting anytime throughout the eight-day voting period and eliminated the need to visit a voting place location in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those with mobility impairments.

Intelivote System Inc. provided a service compliant with World Wide Web Consortium website principles (organization, functionality, readability and alternative ways of representing information). The system was also created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0 Level A) so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee noted that there were too many confirmation screens before moving on to vote for the next contest; fewer screens could be less confusing. A completion screen was also requested for future, to know when one's online voting session is complete.*

In-Person Voting Options

For those voters without means to access telephone or online voting opportunities, or those who sought assistance from trained election officials, 10 election day voting place locations and 7 locations available during the advance voting period were open to provide access to laptops, internet connectivity and election staff. Each location was also equipped with one 23" touch screen monitor kiosk which provided larger screen imaging, and required lesser keyboard dexterity to complete an online ballot. All voting place locations were provided with magnifying sheets, and laptop screen content could be enlarged by the user depending on visual requirements.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Utilize more touch screen kiosks for future elections; they were very well received by older adults and those who were not comfortable using laptop computers, as they are similar to bank machines.*
- *Eliminate the date of birth year drop down list and allow for manual entry; too much scrolling was required.*

Special Voting Provisions

Staff visited a total of five Long-Term Care facilities and retirement homes to provide onsite access to online voting via laptops and a touch screen kiosk. This eliminated the need for those residents to attend a voting place location if they did not have access to a telephone or internet. Bedside voting was available upon request.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Seek opportunities to include additional retirement facilities/municipal housing locations where voters may benefit from additional assistance (ex. Hubbard Station, Post Hill etc.).*

Voting Assistance

For those voters who visited a voting place location in person during the eight-day voting period, several

methods of assistance were provided on request. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by service animals at all locations pursuant to provincial legislation and the Town of Ajax Corporate Customer Service Standards. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could be administered the "Friend of the Voter Oath" by an election official in order to grant them authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the privacy screen. Election Officials were authorized to provide assistance to any voter on request, with casting their online ballot.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Election Officials recommended having a more visible identifier (other than button) for election staff; perhaps t-shirts or lanyards.*
- *Ensure that Election Officials, specifically Revision Officers, have sufficient space to provide assistance at their table (i.e. perhaps provide an accordion folder for all relevant forms for each officer) leaving more table space clear.*
- *Place a copy of the ward map at each Revision Officer's location so that those with mobility impairments do not need to repeatedly get up to check the large wall map.*

Election Officials

Over 100 election staff were involved in the 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal Election, representing the diverse Ajax community through their language skills, cultures and abilities.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the E-Vote Officer and Revision Officer positions was managed through an accessible online application form through the Town's election website. Applicants took part in group interviews and accommodation requests were encouraged throughout the recruitment process (application form, communication, interview, training, election day).

Training

Election staff received training on health and safety, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the provision of accessible customer service to persons with disabilities in the context of the municipal election and voting place locations. Training was delivered in multiple formats including online and in-person, large group and low-ratio sessions.

Communications

Promotional Materials

A notation relative to "availability of alternative formats on request" was included on print publications. Web content on www.ajaxvotes2014.ca was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A requirements. A variety of communication formats were used (print, social media, online, signage and video).

An election infographic was designed using limited text, to break down communication barriers and visually explain the voting process and relevant information.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- While staff manually captioned many election videos, greater commitment shall be taken to ensure that captioning is provided for **ALL** election-related video posted publically online (promotional/instructional); captioning should be included in the specifications of contracted video service.
- Include notation relative to “availability of alternative formats on request” on Voter Information Letter.

Election Helpline

An Election telephone Helpline (905-619-2529 ext. 8683 VOTE) was set up from spring 2014 up to Election Day, providing recorded information relative to a variety of election topics. Live assistance from Election staff was provided during office hours. This provided another means of information for those who did not access the election website.

Outreach

Staff hosted a multi-cultural media night, delivered presentations to the Ajax Welcome Centre, and met with the St. Andrews Seniors Centre and Town Advisory Committees to promote increased accessibility and convenience of the new online and telephone voting methods.

Staff liaised with the Ajax Public Library Board during preparation for the Candidate Debate Series, providing information on how to set up accessible meeting space, provide communication supports on request, and the need for video captioning.

Notice of Service Disruption

Notice of Service Disruption posters were provided to all voting place locations to be posted in the event of temporary disruptions to service onsite (power failure, elevator out of service, etc.). The posters provided information on alternative voting services and contact information.

Feedback

Additional feedback regarding the accessibility of the Town of Ajax Municipal Election can be submitted through regular mail, email, telephone, facsimile, or by using the Town’s Customer Feedback Form, which is available to all staff at all service counters in Town facilities and via the Town’s website.

Phone: 905-683-4550
TextNet: 1-866-460-4489
Fax: 905-683-1061
Mail: Elections - Town of Ajax, 65 Harwood Ave. S., Ajax, ON L1S 2H9
Email: accessibility@ajax.ca

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THE VOTE**

