

2018 Town of Ajax Post-Election Accessibility Report

The 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure that proactive accessibility considerations were included in the planning and implementation of the 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections. The Plan identified actions to be taken to ensure equal and equitable election practices not only for electors, but for candidates and election staff as well. Objectives included:

- That all Voter Assistance Centre locations be accessible;
- That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection, and that assistance be available if requested;
- 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 be able to fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election staff; and
- That efforts be made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the local newspaper, election communications, Town of Ajax website, and social media.

The following summary identifies the actions and initiatives taken during planning and delivery of the 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections, as they relate to the prevention, identification and removal of barriers.

General Considerations

The 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections were conducted over an eight-day voting period (October 15 – 22, 2018) as a ‘vote anywhere, anytime’ paperless election. Electors were not required to attend a specific polling location based on eligibility to vote, and instead were encouraged to vote remotely by telephone or online, 24 hours a day from anywhere convenient to them. Those individuals requiring assistance or with limited access to telephone or internet voting were able to attend one of three Voter Assistance Centres, regardless of their ward of residence, and could cast an online ballot from any location.

Voter Assistance Centres (VACs)

In selecting and planning voting locations, Staff conducted several onsite reviews of all potential VACs (3 main at the Town’s community centres; 7 special voter assistance centres at retirement/long-term care/older adult housing residences) in relation to accessible routes, ingress and egress, parking, floor plan, and technology criteria. A trial Voter Assistance Centre was set up to assist with determining appropriate spatial and technology arrangements and detailed site diagrams were created for each location to ensure consistent set-up and voter experience. Rest area seating was provided at all locations, entryways were unobstructed and all technology cords were securely covered to prevent tripping hazards.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- Voter assistance centres were set up with increased space between voting kiosk tables to accommodate mobility devices and strollers.
- In addition to tabletop privacy screens, 6' x 8' pipe and drape screening between each kiosk table was set up to increase the privacy of voting. This configuration eliminated the need for voters to have to pass behind a voter casting their vote in order to access the second kiosk at the table.
- Each VAC had designated "Accessible Kiosks" which offered a wider area of access to the kiosk for persons with assistive devices such as wheelchairs or scooters.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- Election officer and voter feedback indicates that rental chairs did not provide a lot of ergonomic support for staff and voters. It is recommended that chairs with arm rests and sturdier backs be considered for 2022 equipment rentals.
- Due to the volume of technology cabling present at each voter assistance centre, it is recommended that rubber matting be rented/purchased to cover cords and wiring to further increase safety and avoidance of hazards.

Accessible Routes

All voter assistance centres were accessible by Durham Region Transit. Supplementary large print signage on the exterior and interior routes and access points was posted to identify the voter assistance centre.

Ingress and Egress

Entrances and exits to all voter assistance centres were unobstructed and provided appropriate width for mobility device access. Where automated door operators were not present (special voter assistance centres), wooden door stops were used to prop open doors.

Parking

Designated accessible parking spaces were available at all Voter Assistance Centre locations. No parking volume issues were reported or observed, including at the sites where parking lot construction was underway (Ajax Community Centre).

Voting Methods

For the 2018 Election, the Town contracted Simply Voting to provide internet and telephone voting services. The continued implementation of online and telephone voting methods built upon the increased convenience, sustainability, and accessibility initiated in the 2014 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections. Voters were granted the independence of voting at a time and place convenient and accessible to them, via telephone and internet.

Telephone Voting

Individuals who may not have been comfortable voting online or may not have had access to the internet were able to vote using the telephone. The Simply Voting telephone voting service accommodated telephone voting via all types of touchtone and wireless telecommunication devices. The system incorporated clear English and French language menu options, which were presented in an easy-to-follow order. Voters were advised when to input their selection and

confirmation of choices and a final confirmation was reviewed prior to ballot submission. A total of 1,935 electors cast their ballot via telephone voting, representing 7.5% of all ballots cast.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- Two phone numbers were available, one being a local number and the other a toll-free number. Some voters were confused as to which number to call to access telephone voting, as the local number occasionally appeared as a long-distance number to some callers depending on where their cellular device was originally registered. It is recommended for 2022 that the toll-free telephone number be prioritized on the Voter Assistance Letter, and the local number be characterized as a secondary number.

Internet Voting

Through internet voting, eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online via a number of personal devices including but not limited to tablets, desktop computers, smart phones and other internet-connected devices with a web browser, alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software one may require. The internet voting method supported independent, private and convenient voting, anytime, even from the comfort of one's home, or while on the go, throughout the eight day voting period. Internet voting eliminated the need for many voters to attend a Voter Assistance Centre in person in order to vote. This is an added benefit to those with mobility or transportation difficulties.

Simply Voting provided a service compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system.

A total of 23,699 electors cast their ballot via internet voting, of which 20,172 were cast remotely and 3,527 were cast onsite at a VAC. Suggestions for improvement listed below were communicated to Simply Voting to enhance their platform's accessibility in future elections.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- A composite ballot format was implemented, which eliminated the number of screens and clicks a voter was required to navigate in the interface before confirming and submitting their online ballot.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- Simplify the 'success' message received after a voter has successfully cast their ballot
- Clarify and simplify some of the data entry fields on the online voting interface, such as the PIN and date of birth fields
- Review colour contrast when setting up the online voting interface

In-person Voter Assistance

For those voters without access to telephone or online voting opportunities, or who sought assistance from Election Staff, 3 large Voter Assistance Centre locations were open for two days each in advance of Election Day, as well as for the full Election Day. At Voter Assistance Centres, voters were provided with access to internet voting kiosks and Election staff. Each location was set up with 30 internet voting kiosks and 14 revision stations.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- Large touchscreen monitors and styluses, in addition to mice and keyboards, were used at all 90 kiosks within the three main Voter Assistance Centres, allowing a lesser level of dexterity required to complete an online ballot.

Special Voter Assistance Centres

Staff visited 7 locations identified as older adult housing, retirement residences, or long-term care facilities to provide special voter assistance centre onsite access to online voting via touchscreen kiosks and mobile tablets. Set up of these Special Voter Assistance Centres eliminated the need for those residents to attend an off-site Voter Assistance Centre if they did not have access to internet or a telephone.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- In addition to print materials posted at all Special Voter Assistance Centre locations, Election staff set up Revision Clinics at the 2 newer retirement home facilities and both seniors clubs, to assist with enumeration of the Voters' List and to provide advance information about the internet and telephone voting methods to residents
- House-call/in-person visits were accommodated for several electors who were unable to physically attend a voter assistance centre. These individuals required assistance with being added to the voters list before they could be issued a voter PIN to vote independently from home.

Customer Service

For those voters who attended a Voter Assistance Centre in person, several forms of assistance were available. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a variety of supports including service and therapy animals and assistive devices, all in accordance with provincial legislation and Town customer service policies. 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 staff member. Issuance of the oath granted the support person the authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the kiosk and privacy screen. Election staff were authorized to provide assistance to any voter on request, including with the physical casting of an online ballot, with the voter's consent.

Election Staff

The Election staff compliment for the 2018 voter assistance centres included 9 Voter Assistance Centre Managers (3 per site), 42 Revision Officers (14 per site), and 54 E-Vote Officers (18 per site), representing the diverse Ajax community through their language skills, election experience, culture and abilities.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the E-Vote Officer and Revision Officer positions was managed through an accessible online application process extended by invitation to the Town's advisory committee members, volunteer portal registrants, and 2014 Town of Ajax Election staff. Applicants took part in group interviews and accommodation requests were encouraged through the recruitment process (application form, communication, interview, training, deployment, etc.).

Training

Election staff received online and in-person training specific to their role that included content on health and safety, the Ontario Human Rights Code, Diversity and Inclusion, and the provision of accessible customer service to persons with disabilities in the context of the municipal election. Training was delivered in multiple formats including online and in-person, in large group and low-ratio settings.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- Instead of time/date specific online webinar training delivery, a portion of election staff training was delivered online through the Town's online training platform, allowing training to be rolled out for self-guided, convenient completion.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- Simplify the Oath of Elector and use plain language to improve clarity

Election Helpline

An election telephone helpline (905-619-2529 ext. 8683/VOTE) was set up to provide live assistance to callers during office hours. This provided another means of information who did not have access to the election website. During the voting period, the hours of service were extended into the evenings and weekend.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- While live assistance was available during regular office hours and extended hours during the voting period, Investigating remote access for staff (from home) is recommended to improve service availability further.

Communications

All print publications relating to the 2018 Election included a notation regarding availability of alternate format on request. Web content on the Election website www.elections.ajax.ca was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements. A variety of communications methods were used (print, social media, signage, and video). An election infographic was designed to provide a visual explanation of the voting process.

Improvements Implemented in 2018

- A member of the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee participated in the print ad campaign promoting the accessibility of the election.
- Social media posts promoted the 2018 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan.
- Staff participated in an expanded number of events and Revision Centres to promote the 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections and the increased accessibility and convenience of online and telephone voting:
 - Trailfest (new)
 - Canada Day events at the Ajax Waterfront (new)
 - Music in the Square
 - Grand Opening of Pat Bayly Square (new)
 - Medallion (73 Bayly) Revision Clinic (new)
 - Chartwell Harwood Revision Clinic (new)
 - Westney Gardens Revision Clinic (new)

- Community Centre Revision Clinics
- Welcome Centre Revision Clinic (new)
- Ajax Seniors' Centre Revision Clinics

Opportunities for Improvement in 2022

- While the main election informational video was captioned, greater commitment should be made to ensure that captioning is provided for all election-related video posted publically online, including candidate debates. Captioning should be included as a specification in any outside videography contract.

Notice of Service Disruption

Notice of Service Disruption templates were provided to all voter assistance centres 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 2018 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board 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.

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