



POST-ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY REPORT

THE CORPORATION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF HASTINGS HIGHLANDS
2018 MUNICIPAL AND SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION

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1.0 Introduction

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands is a community that respects the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. We were committed to promote a barrier-free and inclusive community in making the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election accessible by working to accommodate the needs of electors by removing these 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 and School Board Election. This report outlines the various initiatives undertaken during the course of the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and how these actions impacted their voting experience.

2.0 Governing Legislative and Policy Framework

Under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (The Act) the Clerk is legislatively responsible for conducting Municipal and School Board Elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to participate fully in the election. The Act requires the Clerk to have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities and to ensure that all voting places are accessible to electors with disabilities. The Clerk is also required, within 90 days after a regular election, to prepare a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and make the report available to the public.

3.0 General Accessibility Considerations

In preparation for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election, staff reviewed the relevant legislation and implemented a number of initiatives to ensure compliance. Significantly, as required under the Act, the Clerk's Department prepared a plan regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and made the plan available to the public before Election Day by posting it on the Municipality's website.

4.0 Strategies and Actions for the Identification, Removal and Prevention of Barriers

4.1 Method of Vote and Electronic Voting System

On April 19, 2017, Council approved an alternative method of voting for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Council determined that electronic voting would be utilized as the method of voting for the first time for this election.

The Election was conducted over an fourteen-day voting period (October 9 – 22, 2018) as a vote-anywhere, vote-anytime, paperless election. Voters were not required to mail back a vote-by-mail kit as in previous elections, and instead could vote at the municipal office, deemed a Voter Help Centre during hours of operation or remotely by touch-tone telephone or online 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world using a smartphone, tablet or laptop. Such provisions supported increased accessibility, convenience and sustainability throughout the voting process.

Moreover, Electronic voting provided the electors with the ability to mark their ballot from home at their convenience. This allowed increased rights of privacy to electors with disabilities whom may find

voting at a traditional paper-based voting location more difficult or need assistance with mailing a vote-by-mail kit. This format gives the ability to vote with little or no assistance required from others.

The Clerk's Department worked closely with the contracted electronic voting system service provider, Intelivote Systems Inc., to evaluate the system and ensure that it was fully secure, keeps its servers in Canada to satisfy legal requirements by Canadian election officials, which stipulates the vote must be kept secret and is accessible for persons with disabilities. Electors with disabilities could use their personal assistive technologies to interact with the electronic voting system anywhere and a demo of the electronic voting system was available on the Municipality's website.

4.2 Election Officials

Leading up to the election, an Election Accessibility 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.

Election Officials participated in a hands-on voting location simulation where they rotated scenarios acting in the various Election Day roles, including Revision Clerks and Helpers. This was extremely beneficial as it demonstrated to Election Officials how and when to offer assistance to voters at each stage of the voting process. Scenario-based training also allowed Election Officials to practice scenarios specific to persons with disabilities, including voters in a wheelchair or bringing a service animal or a support person to a voting location as well as voters having visual and mobility disabilities and requiring assistance in reading and signing oaths.

All Election Officials were Municipality of Hastings Highlands employees and had previously received formal accessibility training, which includes training on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. This formal accessibility training outlined the customer service standard and how to serve persons with disabilities.

4.3 In-Person Method of Voting with or without Voting Assistance

For those voters without means to access touch-tone telephone or online voting opportunities, or those who sought assistance from trained election officials, a 14-day voting place location at the municipal office was available to provide access to laptops, an iPad, internet connectivity and election staff.

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election ensured that accessibility was a primary consideration in choosing where voters could cast their electronic ballot. This was critical to ensure that the Municipal office building had a barrier-free path of travel, with no obstructions to the entrances, designated barrier-free parking spaces at grade, and entrances equipped with automatic door openers. There was adequate lighting and signage was posted to inform electors of the Voter Help Centre location. Election Officials made electors aware of the availability of assistance for persons requiring same at the dedicated voting booths. Election Officials were positioned to greet electors as they came in to the Municipal Office during the voting period and into the building on Election Day and assist them as may be necessary.

During the entire voting period, personal assistive devices were permitted at the Voter Help Centre, such as wheelchairs and walkers. Support persons and service animals were welcomed and assistance was offered to voters at every stage of the voting process, including being greeted at the door, making any necessary amendments to their information on the Voters' List, and casting their electronic ballot. Election Officials treated all voters with dignity and respect, being sensitive to the individual needs of voters and recognizing that some required unique attention. While forms and oaths were able to be printed in large font, a magnifier was also present to assist voters with low vision and Election Officials could read and sign oaths upon voters' requests. Numerous chairs were available for voters to sit at if they had to wait. It is important to also note that there was a mix of both a touchscreen laptop and laptops with a mouse and a touch screen iPad at the Voter Help Centre in an effort to offer various accessible technologies to voters. Touch screen stylus pens were available for electors requiring assistance with tapping the screen of the touchscreen laptop or iPad.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Set up voter help centre location with greater space between voting stations and privacy screens, possibly in Emond Hall enacting a shorter voting period, as election staff would need to remain there each day during office hours and would not be able to be in the office to take Voter Help Line telephone calls.*
- *Separate tables to allow for access to behind the voting screen from either side.*
- *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.*
- *Election Officials recommended having a more visible identifier (other than button) for election staff; perhaps t-shirts or lanyards.*
- *Utilize more touch screen kiosks for future elections; they were well- received by older adults and those who were not comfortable using laptop computers, as they are similar to bank machines.*
- *Reduce the amount of 'captchas' (common web technique used to help ensure that your respondents are real humans and not a program written to spam your survey) required on the iPads that were in kiosk-mode, as there were too many security questions and most electors found it difficult and cumbersome to get through them.*

4.4 Internet Method of Voting

Eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online using a number of personal devices, including but not limited to tablets, computers and smart phones alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software required. Such methods supported independent, private and convenient voting anytime throughout the 14-day voting period and eliminated the need to visit the Voter Help Centre 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:

- *Several voters who called in on the Voter Helpline identified minor confusion related to accessing the voter website. Once clarified by the Election Official that the issue was with the browser on their device or computer and not with the voting website address itself, they were sent the link to the website or were directed to the municipal website where a link was placed to the voting website. The voter*

information letter did instruct electors to access the voting website via Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, etc.

- After completion of entering the PIN, a notification screen advising the elector that the voting session will be secure was suggested for the future.
- In regards to the School Board Trustee race, an acclamation message was provided to voters after they clicked on the School Board Trustee race. Some found it confusing as they then had to tap or click on the 'go back' button after they read the message. Consideration will be given in the next election whether we can provide that message on the home screen so voters can simply read the message with less tapping and/or clicking with the mouse.
- A completion screen was also requested for future, to know when one's online voting session is complete.

4.5 Telephone Method of Voting

Persons with disabilities and those who did not wish to use internet voting options, were able to access electronic voting 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:

- Several voters who called in on the Voter Helpline identified confusion related to the format in which one must enter their next selection (two-digit number) for the Councillor race following their first selection in succession before finalizing their ballot with the # sign key. The # sign key "submits their ballot" when they should have continued to select their next two-digit number corresponding to the next Councillor they wanted to choose.
- Therefore, need for clearer and further instructions and to **not** finalize their ballot with the # key after their first selection, as they had correctly done in choosing only one candidate for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor race.
- Perhaps starting with the Councillor race first for the telephone system, followed by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor race would remove the voter's tendency to press the # key in error after making only one selection.

Number of Electors who voted at the **Voter Help Centre: 291 / 10.78%**

Number of Electors who voted via **Internet** (not at Voter Help Centre): **1951 / 72.2%**

Number of Electors who voted via **Telephone: 459 / 12.27%**

4.6 Communications

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands considered accessibility in all information and communication strategies for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Upon requests from persons with disabilities, Elections staff were prepared to provide copies of election documents, or the information contained in the document, in a format that took into account the person's disability. Specific to candidates, Intelivote's Candidate Access Portal granted candidates the ability to access the Voters'

List electronically throughout each day of the voting period. This prevented candidates from having to physically attend to obtain their copies of the Voters' List.

The Municipality's election website was designed to be both informative and accessible. All information for voters, candidates, and third parties was placed in distinct sections on the website and they were directed to access all documents and forms through the website in an effort to promote accessibility and transparency. The information available online used clear and simple language and was continuously updated to reflect the most recent election developments and information.

Election information was communicated through various channels and alternate formats including emails, social media, newspaper and radio. Voter Information Letters were mailed out to all eligible electors on the Voters' List as well as newsletters inserted with the tax bills explaining where and when to vote in the election and have elector information on the Voters' List amended. For election-related inquiries or feedback, all residents were able to contact the Clerk's Department directly via telephone or through a designated email. 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. The Clerk will continue to receive feedback through the election email address.

In the event of disruptions to electoral services or unforeseen circumstances that affected the accessibility of voting locations, a process was in place to facilitate notification. For example, if the Clerk needed to declare an emergency, information regarding the extension of voting hours and voting locations would be updated in real-time on social media, the Municipality's election section of the website, posted on the front window of the municipal office, broadcast to the local radio stations and communicated to all Election Officials present at the voting location.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *Include notation relative to "availability of alternative formats on request" on Voter Information Letter.*
- *Provide the telephone code for each candidate on Voter Information Letter.*
- *State clearly the three methods of voting instead of the word 'electronic' on Voter Information Letter.*

5.0 Conclusion

It was the goal of the Municipality of Hastings Highlands Clerk's Department to ensure that electors within the Municipality who required accessibility services were provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Election staff also strived to make the nomination and registration process as accessible as possible for candidates.

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election total voter turnout was 38.2% which exceeded the provincial average of 37.6%. Remarkably, the highest voter turnout by age group was the 70's age group with a voter turnout of 55%.

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands Clerk's Department will continue to learn, develop, and adjust our approaches in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Debriefs have been conducted with all Election Officials and both resident and staff/council feedback regarding the accessibility of the election will be considered by the Clerk's Department in preparation for the next Municipal and School Board Election.

6.0 Feedback

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

- Telephone: 613 338-2811 ext. 277 or toll free in ON 1-877-338-2818
- Email: election@hastingshighlands.ca
- In person: 33011 Hwy 62, Maynooth, ON
- Mail: 33011 Highway 62, Box 130, Maynooth, ON K0L 2S0

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.

Suzanne Huschilt

Deputy Clerk