

**To: David Creery, Chief Administrative Officer**

**From: Bill Tigert, Election Coordinator**

**Re: Accessibility Report for the 2022 Municipal Election**

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### **AIM**

To advise Council of the accessibility measures taken for the conduct of the 2022 Municipal Election.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Municipal Elections Act has accessibility requirements built into the legislation to ensure that all Ontarians have the ability to vote on Election Day. Section 12.1 (1) states that a clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

As such, subsection 45 (2) requires the clerk to ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. Additionally, subsection 12.1 (2) requires the clerk to have a plan in place regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affects electors and candidates with disabilities.

This plan was received by Council at the June 16, 2022, regular Council meeting. Finally, subsection 12.1 (3) requires the clerk to prepare a report within 90 days after voting day confirming the success of the removal of the barriers identified in the plan. This report seeks to fulfil the statutory requirements as mandated through the Act.

### **COMMENTS**

Pursuant to the above noted sections of the Act, the following measures were taken to prevent barriers at the polling locations:

- Prior to Election Day, Unifor Hall, Oxford Auditorium, Goff Hall, Cowan Park Sportsplex, and the Rock Community Church were all subject to a comprehensive accessibility review. The advanced poll location at City Hall also underwent an accessibility assessment.
- The review process entailed election staff to complete a detailed accessibility checklist to ensure that the environment in the proposed voting locations was free of barriers. The checklist included accessibility features pertaining to parking, walkways and ramps, loading zones, entrances and exterior doors, lobby, hallways and corridors, interior doors, fire exits, elevators, washrooms, and the voting room at all five polling locations.
- Election staff roved to a number of retirement homes and the hospital, as required under legislation, within the community on Election Day. This included Cedarview Gracious Retirement Living, Woodingford Lodge, the Woodstock Hospital, Caressant Care Woodstock, Oxford Gardens Retirement Residence, and Park Place Retirement Residence.

- All residents within these facilities were given advanced notice and had an opportunity to cast their ballots without having to leave the facility.
- Election staff attended on patients at their bed side in the hospital to ensure that those who could not physically leave their bed had the opportunity to cast their ballot.
- Changes made to the Act in 2016 included prohibiting landlords or condo corporations from limiting the ability of their tenants/owners from displaying election campaign material during the municipal election. As such, similar to 2018, the City of Woodstock did not use apartment buildings as voting locations on Election Day given its inability to ensure the neutrality of the voting location. Instead, the City offered six days of advance voting at City Hall. This included the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend, four days of the polls being open from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., and one day of the polls being open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- An accessible tabulator was available throughout the Advance Poll at City Hall and on Election Day at Goff Hall. This tabulator was equipped with an accessory component for individuals with accessibility challenges.
  - The tabulator provides standard voting and accessible voting simultaneously on a single piece of equipment. The optional accessible voting ballot marker provided electors with disabilities a private and independent method of casting their ballot.
  - Using the ballot marker device, the elector is provided with a handheld vote selector or paddle device, or sip-and-puff device along with a set of headphones to navigate through an audio version of the ballot. They then are able to make their selections and cast their vote. An attached printer then marks the elector's ballot, and this ballot is indistinguishable from other ballots marked by hand.
  - The elector is able to use audio instructions to navigate their way through the ballot. Making their choices using their selected vote selecting device, they are able to make their selections for the applicable offices.
  - Once finalized the ballot is printed and as noted will be indistinguishable from a ballot marked by hand. This feature ensures elector confidentiality. Should the need arise for election officials to inspect ballots, they will not be able to determine which ballots were made by the Ballot Marker Device, thereby maintaining voter secrecy.
  - During the 2022 election, one elector opted to use the accessibility device. During the process of voting one minor error was discovered and then was easily remedied. At the end of the voting process the elector indicated their satisfaction with being able to vote independently. Family members who attended with the elector, in the event of assistance being required, also expressed their satisfaction with the ability to vote without assistance from another individual.
  - Overall, the accessibility feature was a value added to the City's election process.

- Chairs were placed in the hallways of voting locations so individuals could sit in the event of line-ups.
- Election staff and support person(s) were permitted to assist electors with marking their ballot on the elector's request and with their consent.
- The "vote anywhere" method assisted electors with choosing the most convenient voting location that suited their needs within the City on Election Day.
- Letter sized magnifiers were made available at all of the voting locations.
- All voting locations were along bus routes, and transit and paratransit were available while polls were open. Council, early in 2022, made the decision to facilitate access to the polls by providing free transit on Election Day.
- In accordance with Regulation 429/07 Customer Service for persons with disabilities, all election staff were provided training on the following:
  - Assistive Devices;
  - Service Animals;
  - Support Persons;
  - Communication and Terminology;
  - Notice of Service Disruption; and
  - Feedback

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Woodstock City Council receive the Accessibility Report for the 2022 Municipal Election as information.

*Authored by: Bill Tigert, Election Coordinator*

*Approved by: Amy Humphries, City Clerk*

*Approved by: David Creery, Chief Administrative Officer*