

TOWNSHIP OF EMO



Post-Election Accessibility Report

2022 Municipal and School Board Election

December 23, 2022

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Township of Emo is a community that respects the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities and strives to promote a barrier-free and inclusive environment.

The focus of this Post-Election Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services provided to all electors and candidates during the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities. This report identifies issues from prior elections and recommendations for improvement. It also outlines various initiatives undertaken during the course of the 2022 election regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers.

2.0 LEGISLATIVE GOVERNANCE

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996, (The Act) requires the Municipal Clerk responsible for conducting Municipal and School Board Elections to establish policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to participate fully in the election.

Section 12.1 of 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. Prior to voting day, a plan is to be prepared to identify, remove and prevent barriers that affect voters and candidates with disabilities and made available to the public and similarly, a report is also required after voting day. Both the plan and report are to be made available to the public.

This report will be posted on the Township website and available to the public. Hard copies will be provided without cost if requested.

3.0 GENERAL ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

In preparation for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections, the relevant legislation was reviewed, including the Township Accessibility Plan and reports from prior elections and several initiatives implemented to ensure compliance. As required under the Act, a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities was prepared and made available to the public before voting day. This was accomplished in conjunction with the Elections Procedures Manual which included a section exclusively devoted to accessibility. As required by the Act, this document was made

available to the public by posting link on the Township's website. Hard copies were also available if requested.

4.0 STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR IDENTIFICATION, REMOVAL, AND PREVENTION OF BARRIERS

4.1 Communication and Information

The Township of Emo strived to be accessible in all aspects of communication and information for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Staff was prepared for requests from persons with disabilities and should a request be received could provide copies of election documents or information contained in a document, in a format that considered the person's disability. No requests for alternate format were received.

Information posted on the Township website was designed to be clear and concise using CNIB recommended font for ease of reading. Information was continually updated to reflect the most recent election developments.

Upgrades to the Township website for compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level A Guidelines are currently under way and in final stages, anticipated to be completed in the near future.

To provide an alternate platform and reach a broader audience, information was also posted on the Township Facebook page and in high profile areas throughout community.

Candidates were advised of the "Candidates Guide to Accessible Elections". A hard copy of the document was available upon request. Notation of the guide was also on the Township website and available upon request, either electronically or in hard copy.

Links were posted on Township website to various websites and organizations offering information on accessibility, such as CNIB "Accessible election guide for municipalities", etc. Continued consultation with CNIB and other accessibility organizations should continue to communication and information is consistent with accessibility needs.

As in previous years, signage was in large font and magnifying sheets available if needed. For the 2022 election, signage size was increased from legal (8½"x14")

size to tabloid (11"x17") to enable larger font size. Signs were also laminated for longevity. Magnifying sheets were requested and used in voting venues.

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 change of venue or extension of voting hours, information 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 and where possible broadcast to the local radio stations as well as communicated to all Election Officials present at the voting location.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Complete accessibility upgrades to municipal website
- Establish post-election feedback platform to provide opportunity for suggestions and improvements

4.2 Voting Location

Past practise has been to hold Advance Vote on one day in two locations within the municipality - at the Golden Age Manor and the Municipal Office. These locations were logical in the past and for the 2022 election, firstly because the Golden Age Manor is a full accessible senior apartment complex, able to accommodate any accessibility issues, and secondly, because the legislative requirement that the Clerk's Office be open from noon to 5pm on the Advance vote day is satisfied.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is noted that although the municipal office is equipped with ramp, the turning radius at the entrance is inadequate for a wheelchair to easily turn around. Additionally, maneuvering inside the building with a wheelchair would be a challenge. There are plans to move the Municipal Office to another building but due to budgetary and administrative constraints has not yet happened. If this move is made before the 2026 election, the noted issues will be eliminated. If not, although not an ideal resolution, the public should be made aware of the noted limitations and anyone with mobility issues encouraged to either vote at the Golden Age Manor on Advance Day or wait until Election Day.

In addition to the Knox United Church, which historically has for a number of years been used as the Voting Location on Election Day, the hall at the Emo-LaVallee Community Centre (ELCC) and the Emo Legion were both also considered. An on-

site inspection was conducted at each of these venues using a Voting Site Inspection Report with checklist found online and implemented for the 2022 election as a mechanism to ensure all aspects of accessibility for voting venue were considered, evaluated and addressed as necessary.

All three venues were similar in that they were centrally located and offered sufficient accessible space for voting and spatial separation for health concerns. There were, however, differences in cost and parking (see table below) that lead to favouring the Emo Legion as the Voting Venue on Election Day.

Voting locations were publicized by newsletter, on website, Facebook page and at Post Office. Signage was displayed in large font on brightly coloured paper, laminated for longevity.

Venue	Considerations
Knox United Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Level - Parking area approximately 50' from entrance - Rent - \$350
ELCC Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2nd floor accessed by elevator - Unable to confirm availability and non-conflicting use due to staffing/time constraints - Municipally owned facility - Rent - \$312
Emo Legion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Level - Parking close to entrance - High profile corner location provided multiple directional signage opportunities - Rent - \$300

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Raise public awareness on limitations at current municipal office to avoid adverse situations for electors with mobility issues.
- Consider using a municipal facility for accessibility and budgetary reasons, if available.

4.3 Voting and Voting Method

The Township of Emo utilizes traditional ballot voting method with large font usage for signage and ballots. For the 2022 election, the CNIB website was consulted to ensure ballots met accessibility standards and as a result of this research, ballots were visually enhanced using brightly coloured paper and larger easy to read font.

Although traditional voting method appears to be the most widely accepted voting method, it can be difficult for some electors to participate due to mobility or other inhibiting factors. Following the 2018 election, a recommendation was made to look into alternate voting methods. Unfortunately, staffing and time constraints hindered exploring mail-in or online voting systems for the 2022 election, although they may prove beneficial in accommodating those with visual impairment or mobility issues and are worthy of additional consideration. In addition, alternate voting methods may provide opportunity for continual advance voting which could increase elector participation.

Also noted in the 2018 report was the time-consuming process of tabulating voting results at the end of voting and a recommendation for vote tabulating equipment. For the 2022 election, no special voting or vote counting equipment was considered nor used. Election Officials did not find the manual counting of ballots to be an onerous task and expeditiously completed the count within two hours of closing of the votes.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Consider alternate voting methods to enable broader elector participation.
- Consider pre-election survey for suggestions from community regarding alternate voting methods or special voting equipment.

4.4 Staff Training

Leading up to the election, an Elections Procedures Manual prepared to ensure that practices and procedures were consistent with the principles of the Municipal Elections Act. Included in this document was a section exclusively devoted to Accessibility and outlined considerations to accessibility issues.

As part of the recruitment process, and in addition to training as noted above, all Election Official were required to take the online AODA training, thus ensuring more

awareness and sensitivity of accessibility issues as well as an understanding of how and when to provide assistance. Additionally, the informal discussion included in the training gave Elections Officials the opportunity to share their experiences and suggestions with one another, thereby improving sensitivity to different scenarios, improving confidence to handle unforeseen situations, and promoting working together as a team for a common goal.

For the 2022 election a detailed Training Guide was prepared and provided to all Election Officials to use as a reference on voting days. This proved useful in helping each worker gain an understanding of various types of disabilities that they could encounter. In addition, this pro-active approach provided an awareness and insight on how and when to approach an elector to offer assistance at each stage of the voting process.

As electors entered the voting facility, Election Officials made them aware of the availability of assistance for anyone who may require it. Signage also provided this information to electors. All electors were greeted when they entered the building on Election Day and assist offered in case it was necessary. During the voting, personal assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and walkers, were permitted. Support persons and service animals were also welcomed, and assistance was offered to voters at every stage of the voting process.

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. Election Officials were also available to read and assist with oaths upon requests. Numerous chairs were available for voters to sit at if they had to wait.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Continue use of Training Guide in conjunction with Municipal World DRO training handbook; monitor applicability and update as needed.
- Continue round table discussion in training to encourage Election Officials to share views and ideas to help one another on likely scenarios.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It was the goal of the Township of Emo 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 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. Election staff also strived to make the nomination and registration process as accessible as possible for candidates. There were no issues presented that were not able to be addressed by staff or election officials.

Consulting with various accessibility websites and organizations provided an awareness of current standards and enabled the municipality to ensure all aspects were met. There were no requests for information in alternate format. By taking a pro-active approach, both in terms of training and equipment, venues, etc. I am confident the needs of the community for accessibility standards required under AODA and the obligations of the Township have been satisfied.

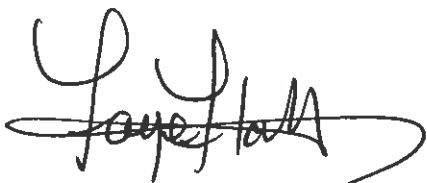
The Township of Emo will continue to learn, develop and monitor it's approaches to better meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Debriefs were conducted with all Election Officials and council and community feedback regarding the accessibility of the election will be considered for the next Municipal and School Board Election. Continually reviewing accessibility issues and initiatives, removing barriers, and preventing them is an ongoing process.

6.0 FEEDBACK

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

- Telephone: 807-482-2378
- Email: deputyclerk@emo.ca
- In person: 39 Roy Street, Emo, ON
- Mail: PO Box 520, Emo, ON P0W 1E0

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Faye Flatt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Faye Flatt,
Deputy Clerk, Returning Officer