

# City of Kitchener

## 2022 Municipal and School Board Election

### Post-Election Accessibility Report

#### Legislative Requirements - Municipal Elections Act, 1996

When planning the 2022 municipal election, the focus was on creating an environment where anyone, regardless of ability, could cast a ballot independently with secrecy of the vote preserved. This report highlights the ways the City of Kitchener worked to achieve the goals outlined in the 2022 Election Accessibility Plan, published to the City's website on August 11, 2022.

The City's Election Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure compliance with relevant legislation including the: *Municipal Election Act, 1996*; *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*; and *Human Rights Code*. The report was also developed within the framework of the City's Accessibility Plan and Election Accessibility Plan. This report reaffirms the City's Accessible Election Mandate, *"The City of Kitchener strives to provide a voting process that encourages participation of persons with a disability and inspires confidence in the municipal election."*

**The areas of identified accessibility barriers can be broken down into seven categories:**

1. Consultation Initiatives
2. Communication Initiatives
3. Candidate Initiatives
4. Voting Place Initiatives
5. Voting Process Initiatives
6. Election Official Initiatives

#### Consultation Initiatives

Collaborate with individuals and groups in the community to gain an increased understanding into providing an accessible election for persons with a disability and to receive feedback on the Plan.

#### Post-Election Action Analysis

- In preparation for the 2022 Municipal Election, Election staff consulted with the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) (September 2022), Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS) (September 8, 2022), and the Equity and Anti-Racism Advisory Committee (August 31, 2022) to gain feedback on potential barriers and methods to overcome these barriers. Valuable feedback was provided and adjustments to the Plan were made to overcome potential accessibility barriers including identification requirements, site inspections, accessible washroom availability, and proxy voting processes. City staff attended meetings to bring attention to accessibility-related barriers for elections.
- Staff reviewed comments from electors, candidates, and election workers regarding the 2018 election and collaborated with the City's Equity, Anti-Racism, and Indigenous Initiatives staff

team and Advisory Committee to remove barriers to voting, including modifying training of election workers to address inclusivity in election workers and voters.

- Voting locations and processes were posted at institutions, retirement residences and vulnerable sector agencies (Ray of Hope, St. John’s Kitchen and A Better Tent City) used as voting locations.
- To continue to obtain feedback, the City offered a “just-in-time” Customer Satisfaction Program survey to engage voters on their experience at each advance voting opportunity and on election day, providing immediate feedback that staff could use to mitigate any issues that developed. The survey consisted of questions based on the Likert-type, or slider scale where electors could rate their experience on key terms such as, accessibility, location, interactions with staff, wait times, process, etc.
- The City launched a post-election survey for election workers in November 2022 and an enhanced customer engagement survey was launched in December 2022 to obtain greater feedback and help the City to plan for the next election.
- The delivery date of the voting equipment in 2022 did not allow sufficient time to prepare for a preview day to view the accessible voting equipment.

#### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- Consultation with the Indigenous community on voting processes and the location of voting opportunities.
- Consider earlier delivery of voting equipment so the community, candidates and potential election workers have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the equipment.

#### **Communication Initiatives**

Provide election information in an accessible format and utilize multiple broadcast mediums to maximize access.

#### **Post-Election Action Analysis**

- The City’s election website was designed to be both informative and accessible, with all information for voters, candidates and third parties placed in distinct section on the website with links and access to all forms through a rich-text format (RTF). Election information was written using plain language and election jargon was eliminated except where required by law. All election information and graphics on the election website were written to comply with AODA standards.
- Election information was communicated through various channels in addition to the City’s website including emails, social media, radio, newspaper and myKitchener app.
- All voting locations were posted on the City’s website, myKitchener app and in the newspaper, including information on accessible voting equipment availability at all Advance Voting locations. Voter notification cards (VNCs) and voter notification letters (VILs) also indicated what voting locations contained accessible voting equipment.
- An election general awareness video was created, posted to the City’s website and promoted via social media.

- General awareness of the City’s voting locations and process was circulated to key stakeholders including the Multicultural Centre, United Way, Capacity Canada, Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation and Greater Chamber of Commerce for sharing through their networks.
- Diwali fell on the same day as Election Day in 2022. Specific communications were sent to community groups affected by this conflict to promote advance voting opportunities.
- A dedicated widget on the City’s website and myKitchener app were created to increase the profile of the accessibility plan and intent to reduce barriers to voting. The election sites were continuously updated during the 2022 election to ensure new information was released in a timely manner. All election web pages were W3C Consortium WCAG 2.0 Level AA Compliant.
- Electors directly connected with the city on accessibility initiatives through centralized points of contact, via email ([election@kitchener.ca](mailto:election@kitchener.ca)) and the City’s corporate contact centre (CCC). The CCC employs the use of TTY phone lines to communicate with any deaf, deafened and hard of hearing candidates, electors and potential election workers.
- Multi-language Interpretation services were available and used to communicate with electors, candidates and potential election workers where English is not their primary language. During election official training, trainers explained how the program worked and how to access the service on demand.
- An ASL interpreter was provided to facilitate training an election worker who had a hearing disability.

### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- Consider engaging a member of GRAAC to participate in the communication campaign promoting the accessibility of the election.
- Consider engaging the Equity and Anti-Racism staff member to review the election communication plan.
- Broaden the stakeholder engagement to include regional immigration partners to engage new Canadians in the democratic process.
- Consider supplying all locations with flash cards or voting process posters for electors who have a hearing disability or are newcomers to the process at all locations in the 2026 election.
- Consider enhanced communication avenues including community centre digital signs, mobile signs, tax bill inserts, Kitchener Ranger games, movie theatres, etc.
- Develop videos on voting process (including school board support), marking a ballot, and using the accessible voting equipment.

### **Candidate Initiatives**

Provide candidates with election information on how to make their campaigns accessible and election information that is accessible. Alternative formats are available upon request.

### **Post-Election Action Analysis**

- All candidates were provided with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) Guide for Running an Accessible Campaign via the City of Kitchener's

website and encouraged to ensure their campaign material and signs took into consideration disabilities.

- The list of voting locations was published on the City's website and shared with election candidates including how electors without a permanent residence could vote.
- The list of certified candidates was available on the City's website with their contact information and links to websites, if they provided consent. Some candidates did not consent to disclosure of their contact information and/or website links did not always function, creating information barriers.
- The city did not host candidate information sessions. Candidates who had questions were encouraged to come to City Hall, or to contact City staff via any other communication method (phone, email, mail etc.) to have their questions answered. Common questions and themes were grouped into a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that were circulated electronically to all candidates.
- Encouraging appointments to file nomination papers was well received and feedback from candidates was positive, ensuring their paperwork was in order and provided an opportunity to ask questions of the Returning Officer or delegate.
- Election-related information was posted to the City's website in rich-text format (readable by a screen reader) where electors, candidates, etc. could download the appropriate document or view the information online.
- City Staff also prepared documents in both English and French as required by law (i.e. nomination filing documents, public notices and voter notification cards) and available upon request.
- The city voters' list was available in an electronic, accessible format, free of charge to all candidates through a secure, centralized portal, allowing candidates to manipulate the data as required.

### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- While not a requirement in the Act, consider reducing information barriers by requiring all candidates to complete a short biography, platform or priority issues, contact details and website validation.
- Consider holding City-hosted candidate information session(s) at accessible location(s) to increase education and voter engagement and reduce information barriers.
- Consider increasing the presence of candidate resources on the run for office webpage.

### **Voting Place Initiatives**

Ensure voting places are accessible and easy to navigate for electors with a disability.

### **Post-Election Action Analysis**

- Assessed all election voting locations to determine accessibility requirements, facility accommodations, layout, surveillance, security and access to internet and electrical. Locations were selected as 2022 voting locations based on their geography, access to transit routes and capacity to manage expected turnout. Locations that were not equipped with automatic push buttons were provided additional greeting staff to ensure that electors with accessibility issues could enter the premises and make their way unimpeded to the voting location.

- Voting locations were listed on the City’s website and voter information letters (VILs)/voter notification cards (VNCs). Initially, there were some discrepancies with addresses posted, but this was corrected prior to Election Day.
- All voting locations were supplied with numerous signs to be placed on both inside and outside of the location. Election workers were instructed during training that it was their responsibility to place the signs in areas with high visibility to ensure ease in accessing the voting location. Facility signs (change of copy signs) at locations were used where available to identify them as voting locations.
- School facilities and locations that were challenging to navigate internally were assigned additional election workers to assist voters.
- Due to construction at City Hall, no location in the downtown core was available.
- Some locations were adjacent to construction works projects (i.e., Bridgeport Public School).
- Some rental bookings were allocated (Mill Courtland Room 1) to the incorrect space, and when notified adjusted internally to the more appropriate space (Gymnasium).
- Based on feedback from MACKS, election officials were trained to locate the closest accessible washroom to the voting location in the event electors required service.
- City staff employed a “vote anywhere” model for Advance Voting and “vote anywhere in your ward” model on Election Day increasing the flexibility and opportunities to vote. Some locations used in 2018 were collapsed and combined with neighboring locations from 2018.
- Additionally, City staff worked with schools and libraries to maximize the number of available parking spots (e.g., covering “Staff Only” parking signs in school lots) for use by voters. When possible, the most accessible entrance was used at each voting location.
- St. John’s Kitchen, Ray of Hope and A Better Tent City were used as Advance Poll locations for electors who were without a permanent residence.
- Voting locations were implemented at 16 institutions (including Long-Term Care facilities) across the city.

### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- Increase the amount of exterior “Vote Here” signs at voting location.
- Invite member(s) of GRAAC when conducting site inspections to provide critical lived experience feedback.
- As part of the site assessment, determine what voting locations have back-up generators in the event of a power outage.
- Include room layout in supply tote with accessible entrances noted and provide the contact of the location point person as well.
- Reserve and confirm all room bookings with appropriate staff.
- Some school facilities requested/encouraged use of alternate entrances and exits that were not chosen by City staff for accessibility reasons. Consider noting for election officials the preferred entrance/exit with rationale.

- Review the planned locations with City and Regional facility/construction project managers to flag any planned construction conflicts.
- Conduct a review of all possible institutions in advance of the 2026 election to determine if any additional institutions should be reflected.
- Conduct introductory site visits with institution administrators in the spring of 2026.
- Ensure that voting locations are plotted, and addresses are secured from the City's Geographic Systems Information (GIS) system.

## Voting Process Initiatives

Ensure the voting process is easy and accessible for persons with a disability.

## Post-Election Action Analysis

- Staff implemented the election using paper ballots and vote tabulators at all locations with the exception of institutions. Much feedback was received from MACKS, and Equity & Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and the general public on considering alternative voting methods in place at neighbouring municipalities (i.e., vote by mail, internet/telephone voting).
- Four consecutive Advance voting days were selected, Wednesday to Saturday, October 12-15, 2022, with timeframes extended and consistent (11 am to 7 pm each day) based on 2018 data and feedback.
- Five Advance Voting locations and one location in each ward (10) were supplied with accessible voting equipment for electors who had hearing/vision or mobility impairments. The accessible voting equipment featured an Audio-Tactile Interface (ATI) Handheld Touch Pad, Paddles, and Sip and Puff Devices, connected to the tabulator allowing the elector to listen to the audio ballot, use the ATI to mark their selections, and print the ballot, with marks identified, on demand for processing by the tabulator. Equipment was placed on a table near the tabulator with a chair positioned in proximity to assist with those requiring seating.
- All election workers were provided training on AODA standards, service animals, and assisting voters with disabilities either using the accessibility voting equipment or accommodating bedside voters. However, some Election Day locations did not have accessible equipment operational when the voting location opened.
- Where an elector was unable to attend their voting location, curbside voting was available at all voting locations, as permitted by the Act. Election Officials were called to the electors vehicle to confirm eligibility, administer the ballot, maintaining the privacy and security of the elector's vote at all times.
- Electors were provided with the ability to have an individual, or designated support person, accompany them when marking their ballot, if the Oath of a Friend was administered prior to providing such assistance. All Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) were deputized and provided training on administering oaths.
- Electors were encouraged to appoint a proxy if they were unable to attend the Advance and Election Day locations. City staff attended upon electors to complete the proxy appointment process.
- Managing Deputy Returning Officers (MDRO) and Tabulator Assistants (TA) were provided clear, hands-on instructions on how to use the accessible voting equipment in order to be able to guide/assist electors at designated voting locations.

- City staff worked with the election vendor, Dominion Voting, to increase the size of the ballot, font and target box and were successful in increasing accessibility features. Additionally, City staff ensured the correct pronunciation for each candidate's name for the audio ballots.
- Access to the voter's list was available electronically through the city website by accessing VoterLookup and then through Voterview (elector list management system). Electors could check to see if they were on the voters' list, and if not, submit the prescribed forms for additions, deletion or corrections in person at City Hall or directly at the voting location. Election Headquarters and the Corporate Contact Centre provided assistance through the main phone lines and in person.
- Required voters' list amendment, residency and identity forms were supplied to all voting locations including St. John's Kitchen, Ray of Hope and A Better Tent City to enable such voters to receive a ballot and vote.
- All voting locations were supplied with magnifiers, notepads and chairs/stools at Advance Voting and on Election Day to assist with accessibility.
- Emergency procedures were created and Communications staff were prepared to publish/distribute a notification in the case of an emergency.
- Alternative voting options will be assessed for the 2026 election after reviewing feedback from City staff, electors, election workers and candidates including the feasibility of offering more accessible voting locations on Election Day.

#### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- Consider varying Advance Voting days and locations and separating the voting days before and after Thanksgiving weekend.
- Dedicate additional time and training on the accessible voting equipment for designated locations and staff. Produce clear guides for the use of accessible voting equipment.
- If using accessible voting equipment again, develop short videos that clearly outline the process and abilities to ensure voters understand options and time requirements.
- Consider enhanced accessibility and inclusion training with scenario-based practical hands-on training.
- Consider improved magnifiers to assist electors who have limited vision.
- Continue to assess the state of alternative voting options for next election to increase accessibility and engagement.
- Approach the Region of Waterloo to offer free transit to electors and/or consider a service administered by the City to provide a ride to a voting location, upon request.

#### **Election Officials**

Encourage election worker applications from Indigenous persons, Black persons, racialized persons/persons of colour, women, persons with disabilities, those who are 2SLGBTQ+ identified and the intersections of these identities and state this openly on the job descriptions for all election worker positions. Training for election workers will include a focus on accessibility to increase familiarity with accessible voting options and processes.

#### **Post-Election Action Analysis**

- Met with Equity and Anti-Racism staff on the ability to pose demographic diversity questions for election applicants. This was not possible as the demographic data strategy priorities were invested in other initiatives.

- Staff included language on the application form encouraging diverse applicants, “The City of Kitchener is committed to an equity-driven, inclusive, accessible, and barrier-free recruitment and selection process, and to ensuring our workforce reflects the full diversity of the community we serve. We welcome applications from Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ persons, as well as other equity deserving groups.”
- Election staff were provided training regarding inclusion of diverse groups, such as those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ identified, religious minorities, and the intersections of those identities.
- All Managing Deputy Returning Officers (MDRO) were trained and received guides on;
  - how to set up and use the accessibility voting equipment,
  - how to appropriately assist electors during the process,
  - how to respectfully assist voters with disabilities,
  - appropriate actions to take when in the presence of a service person/animal who are assisting a person with a disability,
  - situational accessibility dos and don’ts.
- Enhanced training and content were included regarding creating a positive and inclusive voting location particularly addressing handling and questioning of photo identification, gender identity, pronouns, and use of gender-neutral language.
- An election worker with a hearing disability was provided with an ASL interpreter for the Election Worker training.
- City staff reached out to St. John’s Kitchen, Ray of Hope and A Better Tent City and were able to hire election workers who were volunteers at those organizations and understand the needs of that community. Staff also worked with these organizations to ensure a balance between meeting the legislative requirements of the Municipal Elections Act and reducing barriers for their community.
- The Managing Deputy Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers received training material with instructions on processing forms to enable voters without a permanent residence or identification to vote.
- City staff ensured that the dedicated contact centre information (via phone) was provided publicly and a centralized email account available for anyone who encountered an accessibility issue.

### **Opportunities for Improvement in 2026**

- Consider alternative training and education abilities (reduce reliance on reading training guides).
- Promote the election worker application process publicly earlier to generate greater interest and review compensation levels with an equity-informed lens.
- Consider the use of prepared flash cards for easy communication between the election worker and voters.
- Explore ways to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion training.

Feedback on this Report can be submitted through the following channels:

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