

## 2022 Election Accessibility Plan

### 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 Election’s Accessibility Plan reaffirms the City of Kitchener’s commitment to ensure full and equal access to electoral services for persons with disabilities. This Plan will identify and pro-actively address accessibility barriers for the 2022 municipal election. As Voting Day approaches, this Plan will be continuously updated as the City of Kitchener identifies new barriers and areas of improvement.

### Legislative Requirements - Municipal Elections Act, 1996

In addition to the City of Kitchener’s internal accessibility policies, the [Municipal Elections Act, 1996](#) provides that the Clerk responsible for conducting elections shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities, ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities, prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities, and make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election. Within 90 days after Voting Day in a regular election, the Clerk shall also prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

### Definition of a Disability & Barrier:

Pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, “**disability**” means,

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; (“handicap”)

Pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, “**barrier**” means,

anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice; (“obstacle”).

### **Ontario Human Rights Commission**

An important note from the Ontario Human Rights Commission, “disability” covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and some not visible. A disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

### **Development of the Election Accessibility Plan:**

In developing this Plan, the Election Committee is consulting with stakeholders and community members early in the election process to maximize dialogue in creating a more accessible election. This will include consulting with people with disabilities, as well as people who identify as Indigenous, Black, racialized persons/persons of colour, women, 2SLGBTQ+ identified and the intersections of these identities, as this is an important part of addressing the needs of all people who have disabilities.

This Plan is a “living” document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise. This is to ensure all concerns and recommendations are received, and to be responsive to feedback from the community.

The Election Accessibility Plan will be followed by a Post-Election Accessibility Report. The Report will assess the initiatives taken by the City to address accessibility barriers. Additionally, the Report will determine if the initiatives can be improved and whether they will be continued in subsequent elections.

### **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. Training Election Worker Initiatives
7. Post-election Accessibility Report

## 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 this Plan.

Consultation initiatives include:

- Review comments from electors, candidates, and election workers regarding 2018 election.
- Consult with Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC), Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS), and the Equity and Anti-Racism Advisory Committee to gain committee feedback on potential barriers and methods to overcome these barriers.
- Collaborate with the City's Equity, Anti-Racism, and Indigenous Initiatives team to gain feedback on potential barriers and methods to overcome these barriers.
- Collaborate with disability groups and networks to help disseminate election information through the City's website, social media, etc.
- Conduct a post-election survey to receive additional comments and feedback on the 2022 election from electors, candidates, and election workers.
- Attend any meetings or events that promote accessibility to bring attention to accessibility related barriers for elections.
- Consider having a preview day for accessible voting equipment to increase comfort level for voters with disability.

## Communication Initiatives

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

Communication initiatives include:

- Focus on providing election information that is informative, clear, and easy to understand.
- Dedicate a section of the City of Kitchener election website to accessibility.
- Ensuring City web pages are W3C Consortium WCAG 2.0 Level AA Compliant.
- Provide the City's election email for correspondence and feedback regarding accessibility of the election.
- Ensure the MyKitchener portal includes accessibility information about voting places.
- Communicating service disruptions or last-minute changes that affect the accessibility of voting places during advance vote or on voting day in real time:
  - on the City's website,
  - on social media,
  - at the site of the disruption, and
  - when applicable, a media advisory will be issued.

- Provide equipment to facilitate communication for election staff and members of the public who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.
- Provide multi-language translated election information upon request.
- Provide on-demand interpretation services for all in-person and telephone interactions upon request.

### 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.

Candidate Initiatives include:

- Provide candidates with resources such as the Candidates' Guide to Accessible Elections produced by The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO).
- Provide candidates with list of locations and services to connect with persons who lack a permanent residence.
- Ensure any City-hosted candidate information session(s) are held in accessible location(s).
- Make alternative formats for information regarding a candidates' campaign available upon request.
- Provide translated candidate information upon request in the language of their choice.
- Provide on-demand interpretation services for all in-person and telephone interactions upon request in the language of their choice.

The City is ensuring accessibility for candidates with disabilities by:

- Making the candidate's guide and/or other relevant publications available in accessible formats, including rich text format.
- Making the City voters' list available in an electronic, accessible format, free of charge to all candidates.

### Voting Place Initiatives

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

Voting Place Initiatives include:

- Perform a site visit to inspect all potential voting locations for accessibility.
- Ensure voting locations have adequate signage for easy navigation of voting places.
- Ensure the main entrance to the voting place will be the accessible entrance.
- Enhance walkability from the parking lot to voting locations to reduce any arduous distances.

- Establish voting places at St. John’s Community Kitchen, Ray of Hope, and A Better Tent City, that are accessible to electors who lack a permanent residence.
- Establish voting places at retirement homes and institutions to assist electors.
- Hiring Election Assistants to mitigate voting place accessibility issues including offering rest and seating opportunities if there is an expected wait.

### Voting Process Initiatives

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

Voting Process initiatives include:

- Ensure accessible voting equipment is available at polling locations during all advance voting dates and in one location, accessible by transit, in each ward on voting day.
- Voter Notification Cards (VNCs) will indicate which voting location has accessible voting equipment in each ward.
- Voting opportunities will be available in retirement homes and institutions to allow eligible residents to vote.
- Election staff will be trained to assist voters when requested. This includes accommodating bedside voters.
- Produce clear guides for the use of accessible voting equipment.
- Affidavit of residence will be provided to St. John’s Community Kitchen, Ray of Hope, and A Better Tent City to efficiently assist persons who lack a permanent residence to receive a ballot.
- Text magnifiers will be provided to assist electors who have limited vision.
- Notepads will be provided to increase communication to assist electors who are hard of hearing or deafened.
- Have chairs or stools available for electors who cannot stand for a prolonged period.
- Welcome the use of support persons and service animals in voting places. Any person with a disability accompanied by a support person or service animal may enter any voting place with their support person or service animal.
- In cases where a voter cannot attend a voting place, they can appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf.
- Provide on-demand interpretation services to voters upon request in the language of their choice.
- Create process to notify electors in the case of an emergency or disruption of services.
- Assess the state of alternative voting options for next election to increase accessibility and engagement.

## 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.

Training of election officials initiatives include:

- Election staff will be trained on;
  - accessible election equipment,
  - assisting electors with a disability
  - accessible customer service training, and
- Election staff will be provided reference materials for all election officials highlighting how to effectively serve voters with disabilities;
  - including AODA, customer service standards, and serving people with disabilities messaging in all training materials, classroom training and web-based training
  - making individual accommodations available upon request to staff during training (for example, ASL interpretation or communication devices), and
  - processing an affidavit for persons who lack a permanent residence.
- Ensure job aids highlight the importance of servicing all individuals in a manner that is fair and accessible.
- Establish a dedicated contact centre for anyone who encounters an accessibility issue.
- Election staff will be 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.
- Hire additional election staff to assist at certain voting locations to enhance accessibility.

## Post-election Accessibility Report

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* states the following:

### Report

(3) Within 90 days after Voting Day in a regular election, the clerk shall prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

## Ideas & Feedback:

The City Clerk encourages input and feedback to further enhance election accessibility. If you feel you have identified a barrier or have a recommendation to improve accessibility for the upcoming election, please e-mail [election@kitchener.ca](mailto:election@kitchener.ca).

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

Email: [election@kitchener.ca](mailto:election@kitchener.ca)

Phone: 519-741-2345