

2026 Election Accessibility Plan

The City of Kitchener's (the City) Election Accessibility Plan (the Plan) serves as the city's commitment to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers that inhibit individuals from participating in the electoral process in preparation for the 2026 Municipal Election, and any by-elections. The Plan builds upon the lessons learned in the administration of the 2022 Municipal Election. As new potential barriers emerge during this election, the City will take steps to address them and incorporate those actions into this Plan and the subsequent Post-Election Accessibility Report.

Legislative Requirements

The [Municipal Elections Act, 1996](#) (the Act) s12.1 directs that:

- (1) A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

The Act gives other directions to the Clerk, such as to ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities, to have a deputy returning officer attend an elector with a disability anywhere within a voting place to allow them to vote, and to provide voting on the premises of specific institutions that serve person who are disabled.

The City follows the Plan in addition to internal accessibility policies to uphold the Act and deliver an accessible election.

Definition of a Disability & Barrier

Pursuant to the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#), (AODA) "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

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(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 AODA, “**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](#)’s policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability, “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. A disability may be the result of combinations of impairments and environmental barriers which can affect the individual’s full participation in society.

Development of the Election Accessibility Plan

In developing the Plan, consultation with relevant parties and community members early in the election process is conducted to maximize dialogue in creating a more accessible election. This includes consulting with people with disabilities through the city’s Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), collectively and as individual members, partnership with KW Habilitation, information sharing with Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region, Mayors Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS), 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.

The City continually assesses the barriers electors may face to participate in the election and will update the Plan with initiatives to remove those barriers. The City is committed to being responsive to changing circumstances and feedback received regarding the administration of the election.

The Plan will be followed by a Post-election Accessibility Report (the 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.

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The areas of identified accessibility barriers can be grouped into six categories:

1. Consultation Initiatives
2. Communication Initiatives
3. Candidate Initiatives
4. Voting Place Initiatives
5. Voting Process Initiatives
6. Election Worker 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 this Plan.

Consultation initiatives include:

- Review comments from electors, candidates, and election workers regarding the 2022 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 Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion team to gain feedback on potential barriers and methods to overcome these barriers.
- Collaborate with members of the Indigenous community on voting process and the locations and methods to vote.
- Collaborate with disability groups and networks to help disseminate election information through channels to best reach their communities.
- Conduct a post-election survey to receive additional comments and feedback on the 2026 election from electors, candidates, and election workers.
- Attend any meetings or events that promote accessibility to bring attention to accessibility related barriers for elections.

Communication Initiatives

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

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Communication initiatives include:

- Focus on providing election information that is informative, clear, and easy to understand. Provide this information in a variety of formats, including text, images, and videos.
- Deliver a marketing campaign that aims to reach voters across the city and inform them of their options for voting.
- Dedicate a section of the City of Kitchener election website to accessibility.
- Ensure City web pages are W3C Consortium WCAG 2.0 Level AA Compliant.
- Provide the City's election email and mailing address for correspondence and feedback regarding accessibility of the election.
- Ensure the MyKitchener portal includes accessibility information about voting.
- Include information about accessible voting on the voter notification cards (VNCs) that are mailed to every registered voter.
- Engage community groups who focus on accessibility to help promote accessible voting options.
- Communicate 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 information on how the City is administering an accessible election so that the candidates can also support voters with disabilities and facing barriers to participation.

Candidate initiatives include:

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- 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 a list of voting places and their accessibility, so they can assist in directing voters to a voting place that meets their needs.
- Ensure any City-hosted candidate information session(s) are held in accessible location(s).
- Meet accommodations required by candidates including alternative formats for information, 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.
- Receiving candidates submitting their nomination at City Hall in an accessible location, and with the candidate's agent or support person.

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 new potential voting places and/or where facility construction has occurred, to ensure they meet predetermined accessibility requirements. Include members of GRAAC in visits to specific voting places to receive their feedback and recommendations.
- Ensure voting places have adequate signage for easy navigation of voting places. This includes signage outside the voting place directing voters to the entrance.
- Ensure election workers are aware of and can direct voters to voting place features, such as accessible washrooms.
- Ensure the main entrance to the voting place will be an accessible entrance.

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- Enhance walkability from the parking lot to voting places to reduce any arduous distances.
- Ensure there are accessible parking spots close to the main accessible entrance. If alternative accessible entrances are used, consult with the Director of Transportation to establish temporary accessible parking spaces in proximity to the primary entrance.
- Establish an advance voting place at City Hall to receive voters from the entire city who need additional support while voting.
- Offer scent-free voting during advance voting at City Hall.
- Establish drive-thru voting opportunities during advance voting to serve voters in vehicles.
- Establish voting places at retirement homes and institutions to assist electors.
- Hire Election Assistants to mitigate voting place accessibility issues including offering rest and seating opportunities if there is an expected wait.
- Collaborate with the Waterloo Region District School Board and Waterloo Catholic District School Board to have voting day as a day where students are not in school.

Voting Process Initiatives

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

Voting Process initiatives include:

- Ensure accessible voting equipment is available at voting places during all advance voting dates and in one place, accessible by transit, in each ward, on voting day.
- Ensure Voter Notification Cards (VNCs) indicate which voting place has accessible voting equipment in each ward.
- Train election staff to assist voters when requested. This includes accommodating bedside voters at institutions.
- Produce clear guides for the use of accessible voting equipment and ensure election workers at voting places with accessible voting equipment are trained on how to use it.
- Promote the process for electors who do not have a permanent residence, to be added to the voters list and the ability to cast a ballot.
- Ensure each voting place is supplied with, text magnifiers to assist electors who have limited vision, notepads to increase communication with electors who may have language or hearing difficulties and chairs or stools available for electors who cannot stand for a prolonged period.

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- Ensure election workers are trained on 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.
- Promote in cases where a voter cannot physically attend a voting place, options including proxy voting and the city's pilot home visit upon request program.
- Promote the city's on-demand multi-language services interpretation services to voters upon request in the language of their choice.
- Develop and promote contingency plans to notify electors in the case of an emergency or disruption of services.
- Continue to assess the state of alternative voting options for next election to increase accessibility and engagement.

Election Worker Initiatives

Ensure that all individuals can apply, train and serve as election workers.

Election worker initiatives include:

- Develop and promote an election worker recruitment process (e.g. application, training, etc.) that is open and inclusive to all individuals, including youth (16+).
- Ensure training for election workers focuses on accessibility to increase familiarity with accessible voting options and processes, including accessible voting equipment, assisting electors with a disability, and accessible customer service training.
- Ensure training focuses on inclusion of diverse groups, such as those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ identified, religious minorities, and the intersections of those identities.
- Provide election staff with 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.
- Ensure the City's contact centre is prepared to support anyone who reports encountering an accessibility challenge during the election.

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- Hire additional election staff to assist at certain voting places to enhance accessibility.
- Prepare flash cards that election workers can use to facilitate communication with voters.

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 email election@kitchener.ca.

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

Email: election@kitchener.ca

Phone: 519-741-2345

Mail: Election Office, 200 King St W, PO Box 1118, Kitchener, ON N2G 4G7