

## Background

The 2022 Municipality of Port Hope Municipal and School Board Election Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure that proactive accessibility considerations were included in the planning and implementation of the 2022 Municipality of Port Hope Municipal and School Board Elections. The Plan identified actions to be taken to ensure equal and equitable election practices not only for electors, but for candidates and election staff as well. Objectives included ensuring:

- That all Voter Assistance Centres are accessible;
- That persons with disabilities can independently cast their vote and verify their selection, and that assistance is available if requested;
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote, and on eligible candidates;
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate, or election staff; and
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the local newspaper, election communications, municipal website, and social media.

The following summary identifies the actions and initiatives taken during administration of the 2022 Municipality of Port Hope Municipal and School Board Elections, as they relate to the prevention, identification, and removal of accessibility barriers.

This report does not seek to identify the overall success of the 2022 Municipal Election and also does not look to address the examination of the results based on demographic information, turnout rates, and general complaints or inquiries during the voting process. The demographic and voter turnout information is currently being analyzed in coordination with our electronic voting provider and will generally be encompassed in a report to Council.

## General Considerations

The following identifies the actions and initiatives taken during administration of the 2022 Municipality of Port Hope Election to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers.

The 2022 Municipal Election was conducted over a ten-day voting period (October 14 to 24, 2022) as a vote-anywhere, vote-anytime, paperless voting election. Voters were not required to attend a specific voting place location based on their eligibility to vote, and instead could vote remotely by telephone or

online 24 hours a day from anywhere or at one of the two Voter Assistance Centres (VACs) during hours of operation.

The use of computers, telephones and other aids presented accessible opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity. This is demonstrated through the opportunity to vote from home which facilitates the voting process for persons with disabilities who may have mobility restrictions, visual impairment, and/or have a difficult time with transportation. Additionally, persons who have assistive devices set up in their homes could use them to assist with casting a ballot privately and independently.

## Telephone Voting

Eligible voters could vote using a touch-tone telephone, and the toll-free telephone number, date of birth, and PIN number contained in their Voter Information Letter to access an audio ballot. Communications barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Barriers may be identified as low volume, use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menu options.

Areas for improvement with telephone voting:

- Between 3-5 voters reported that the speed of the automated prompts were too fast and that instructions were received too quickly for telephone voting resulting in pressing the “#” after only selecting one councillor which prevented the voter from selecting any further councillors and moved them onto the next ballot. Election Staff generated a script of the telephone voting process, using that to provide assistance to voters through the Election Help-line. This script was generated by the internet vendor and was carefully curated after a series of testing, keeping accessibility standards in mind. Election Staff offered assistance for the few voters that had trouble with these types of complaints but ultimately this concern was primarily the result of user error. Notwithstanding, Staff will provide this feedback to the internet provider, and will take this into account and work to address this challenge in the future.

## Internet Voting

Eligible voters could vote online, using a smart phone, tablet device, or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software, along with their date of birth and PIN and qualifying information, to access the internet address provided in their Voter Instruction Letter. The internet voting method supported independent, private, and convenient voting, anytime, even from the comfort of one’s home, or while on the go, throughout the ten-day voting period. Internet voting eliminated the need for many voters to attend a VAC in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those who may be immunocompromised, have mobility difficulties, or barriers to accessing transportation.

The Intelivote System was created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is compliant with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information, such as with audio.

Areas for improvement with internet voting:

- A small number of voters advised that they were uncomfortable using computers to cast their ballot due to lack of experience using that technology. Many of the voters knew to come to a Voter Assistance Centre so that Election Staff were able to assist them as necessary. Videos on how to vote online were also posted on the municipal election website. For those voters that called into the election helpline, staff were able to assist them in casting their ballot by providing advice over the phone. We will continue to educate the public on the use of technology for paperless elections.
- Ensuring electors are aware that at any point in the voting process that they can cease and return to the voting session on an alternative method or visit a voting assistance centre if further assistance is required.
- Additional information in relation to the fact that electors have a responsibility to ensure their own technology (phone, computer, tablet) is suitable for the purposes of casting ballots and is not going to create accessibility issues.

## In-person Voting at Voter Assistance Centres

For those individuals without means to access voting via telephone or internet, or who require the assistance of a trained Election Official, two Voter Assistance Centres were open to provide in-person internet voting opportunities via a laptop. Municipal Staff conducted a review of potential locations for Voter Assistance Centres with accessibility objectives in mind, and with feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Consistent with the objectives of the Accessibility Plan, a Voter Assistance Centre was set up in each of the two Wards, both located in Municipal Facilities. The former Canton Municipal Office, 5325 County Road 10 in Ward 2, and at Town Hall in Ward 1. Town hall was open for assistance during the following hours:

### **Voter Assistance Centre – Town Hall (56 Queen Street)**

October 14, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

October 17-23, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

October 24, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

### **Voter Assistance Centre – Port Hope Community Hub (5325 County Road 10)**

October 14, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
October 22-23, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
October 24, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Prior to the voting period, Staff completed a layout review to ensure appropriate special and technology arrangements and site set-up diagrams were created for each location to ensure consistent set-up. Throughout the voting period, rest area seating was provided for, doors were maintained unobstructed, and all technology cords were taped down to prevent tripping hazards.

An accessible voting area was available at each voting help centre location. These areas were low in height and have a wide area to allow for individuals who use a wheelchair or scooter to vote independently and secretively. All voting place locations were provided with magnifying sheets, and a privacy kiosk to ensure content could be enlarged by the user depending on visual requirements while privacy was maintained.

The entrances, corridors, parking, egress and ingress of the voting help centres were in accordance with the Municipal Accessibility Plan which provides for appropriate width to accommodate mobility device entry, designated parking spaces, and power door openers and an elevator. In addition, there were several election officials hired for the municipal elections to provide assistance.

Areas for Improvement:

- Exploring the potential use of touch screen tablets to allow individuals with limited hand mobility to apply votes rather than rely on the functionality of a mouse.

For those voters who visited a Voter Assistance Centre in person during the ten-day voting period, methods of assistance were provided. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could be administered the “Friend of the Voter Oath” by an election official to grant them authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the privacy screen. Election Officials were authorized to aid any voter on request, with casting their online ballot. Election Officials wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the municipal election logo to ensure members of the public could clearly identify those who could provide assistance.

Staff noted that nearly all voters who attended VACs with concerns regarding the use of technology and requiring assistance were pleased with the process and ease of use upon being provided assistance.

## Special Voting Provisions

Staff visited a total of six Long-Term Care facilities and retirement homes to provide onsite access to online voting via laptops. This eliminated the need for those residents to attend a VAC if they could not access a telephone or the internet. Bedside voting was available upon request.

Areas for Improvement:

- For the 2026 election, seek opportunities to include additional retirement facilities or buildings where voters may benefit from additional assistance.

## Communications

### Alternate Formats

The Municipality of Port Hope did not receive any requests for alternative formats to be provided.

### Election Materials

Printed material generated by the Municipality was provided in ITC Avant Garde Pro or Arial, 12-point font, and was available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points - or larger upon request. For the 2022 election, no requests for large print were made.

Web content on the Election website [www.porthopevotes.ca](http://www.porthopevotes.ca) was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements. A variety of communications methods were used (print, social media, signage, and video with captioning).

Staff participated in events and outreach initiatives relating to the promotion of the Election and revisions to the Voters' List.

## Candidates

Candidates were also advised that they should have regard to the needs of electors with disabilities. Candidates were encouraged to ensure that Campaign offices, election materials and canvassing should all be reviewed by the Candidate to ensure that they were fully accessible. The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has released several quick reference documents to assist candidates with accessible elections considerations, which were provided to Candidates through their Candidate Information Package:

- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation – Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation – Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings](#)

## Reporting

Pursuant to Section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, 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.

## Conclusion:

By allowing persons with disabilities to vote from any location and from a selection of methods, there is an increase in the capability for the voter to vote without any assistance. This provides persons with disabilities the same independence and privacy in participating in the election as other voters. If persons with disabilities do require assistance in the voting process, trained Election Officials were present at in-person Voter Assistance Centres offered across the Municipality, throughout the voting period.