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# **2022 City of Stratford Post-Election Accessibility Report**

## **Introduction**

The City of Stratford is a community that respects the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. We committed to promote a barrier-free and inclusive community in making the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election accessible by working to accommodate the needs of electors and removing barriers to vote for persons with disabilities. The focus of the Post-Election Accessibility Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services offered to all electors and candidates in the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

## **Governing Legislative and Policy Framework**

Under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, (the Act) the Clerk is legislatively responsible for conducting Municipal and School Board Elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to participate fully in the election. 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. The Clerk is also required, within 90 days after a regular election, to prepare a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and make the report available to the public.

## **Background**

The 2022 Stratford Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure that proactive accessibility considerations were included in the planning and implementation of the 2022 Stratford 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 voting locations are accessible;
- persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
- electors and candidates living with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures that are available;
- persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;
- persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election official; and
- efforts to ensure electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, the City's website and social media (Facebook, Twitter), and other forms of media as determined by the Clerk.

The Plan was developed in consultation with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee. The following summary identifies the actions and initiatives taken during administration of the 2022 Stratford Municipal and School Board Elections, as they relate to the prevention, identification, and removal of accessibility barriers. The City Clerk's Office will continue to review and consider opportunities to enhance inclusive election programs and options to support all eligible electors in future elections.

## **General Considerations**

The 2022 Stratford Municipal and School Board Elections were conducted over an eleven day voting period (October 14 – 24, 2022) as a 'vote anywhere, anytime' paperless election. Electors were not required to attend a specific polling location based on their eligibility to vote, and instead were encouraged to vote remotely by telephone or online, 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Those individuals requiring assistance or with limited access to telephone or internet voting were able to attend a Voter Help Centre and could cast an online ballot from those locations.

## **Voter Help Desk and Voter Help Centres**

Staff reviewed the Voter Help Desk (Clerk's Office at City Hall) and the Voter Help Centre (VHCs) locations (one at the Rotary Complex and 8 special VHCs at

retirement/long-term care/older-adult housing residences) in relation to accessible routes, ingress and egress, parking, floor plan, and technology criteria.

## **Accessible Routes**

All VHCs were accessible by Stratford Transit and public transit information was posted on the City's election website and communicated through the local paper, City social media accounts, and on the transit screens available on the buses. Supplementary large print signage on the exterior and interior routes and access points was posted to identify the VHC.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026:

- Election team to consider ordering additional signs or feather signs identifying the location as a VHC for the municipal election.

## **Ingress and Egress**

Entrances and exits to all VHCs were unobstructed and provided appropriate width for mobility device access.

## **Parking**

Designated accessible parking spaces were available at all VHC locations. No parking volume issues were reported or observed.

## **Floor Plan**

Rest area seating was provided at all locations and all technology cords were securely covered to prevent tripping hazards. VHCs were set up with increased space between voting kiosk tables to accommodate mobility devices and strollers. Tabletop privacy screens were added at each voting station to increase the privacy of voting.

## **Voting Methods**

For the 2022 Election the City contracted Simply Voting to provide internet and telephone voting services. The continued implementation of online and telephone voting methods built upon the increased convenience, sustainability, and accessibility of previous City of Stratford Municipal and School Board Elections. Voters were granted the independence of voting anywhere in the world during the voting period via telephone and internet. Staff reviewed the accessibility components of the voting methods including legibility of electronic ballots when internet voting and audibility and pronunciation of words and candidate names when telephone voting.

## **Telephone Voting**

Individuals who may not have been comfortable voting online or may not have had access to the internet had the option to vote using the telephone. The Simply Voting telephone voting service accommodated telephone voting via all types of touchtone and wireless telecommunication devices. The system incorporated clear English and French language options, which were presented in an easy-to-follow order. Voters were advised when and how to input their selection and a confirmation was reviewable prior to final submission. A total of 780 electors cast their ballot via telephone voting, representing 6.7% of all ballots cast.

## **Internet Voting**

Through internet voting, eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online via several personal devices including but not limited to tablets, desktop computers, smart phones, and other internet-connected devices with a web browser, alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software one may require. The internet voting method supported independent, private, secure, and convenient voting, anytime, even from the comfort of one's home, or while on the go, throughout the eleven-day voting period. Internet voting eliminated the need for many voters to attend a VHC in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those who may be immunocompromised, have mobility difficulties, or barriers to accessing transportation.

Simply Voting provided a service compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2 Level AA) which is compatible with all market-leading screen readers and web accessible devices, so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the online voting system for an optimal independent user experience. A total of 10,881 electors cast their ballot via internet voting representing 93.3% of all ballots cast.

## **Customer Service**

For those voters who attended a VHC in person, several forms of assistance were available. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a variety of supports including service and therapy animals and assistive devices, all in accordance with provincial legislation and City customer service policies. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could provide support to the voter after completing the "Oral Oath at Voter Help Centre" by an election staff member. Issuance of the oath granted the support person the authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the kiosk and privacy screen. Election staff were also authorized to help any voter on request, including with the physical casting of an online ballot, with the voter's consent.

## **In-person Voter Assistance**

For those voters without access to telephone or online voting opportunities, or who sought assistance from Election Staff, a VHC was open for two days in advance of Election Day, as well as for the full Election Day. At the VHC, voters were provided with access to internet voting kiosks and Election staff assistance. The location was set up with 9 internet voting kiosks and three revision stations.

## **Special Voter Assistance**

Staff established VHCs at eight institutions and retirement homes to provide special voter assistance and access to online voting computers. Set up of these Special VHCs eliminated the need for those residents to attend an off-site VHC if they did not have access to internet or a telephone.

## **Voter Help Desk**

A Voter Help Desk (519-271-0250 extension 5237) was set up to provide live assistance to callers during stated hours. This provided another channel to access election related information for those who did not have access to the election website. During the voting period, the hours of service were extended into the evenings and weekends.

## **Election Staff**

The City recruited Election Staff to assist with the 2022 Stratford Municipal and School Board Election. Positions available included Deputy Returning Officers, Managing Deputy Returning Officers, and Greeters.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment for Election Staff was conducted using an accessible online application process extended to 2018 City of Stratford Election staff and the public at-large.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026:

- Expand outreach and promotion of recruitment opportunities to other community organizations supporting people with disabilities and other underrepresented communities.

## **Training**

Election staff received in-person training and a handbook. Training included content on health and safety, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and the provision of accessible

customer service to persons with visible and invisible disabilities in the context of the municipal election.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026:

- Expand online and virtual training delivery and engagement opportunities to provide flexibility, independence, and convenience for the completion of election officer training.

## **Communications**

Print publications relating to the 2022 Election included a notation regarding availability of alternate format upon request. Web content on the Election website [www.stratford.ca/elections](http://www.stratford.ca/elections) was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements. A variety of communications methods were used (print, social media, signage).

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026:

- Consider opportunities for targeted outreach to diverse community groups to facilitate information sessions or information packages to educate an inclusive group of electors on general election information such as how to verify they are on the Voters' List, the voting options available, and where to find candidate information.
- Establish an accessibility and inclusion Testing User Group, comprised of individuals with a variety of disabilities to help review communications and materials to identify potential barriers from various lived experiences.

## **Voter Information Letter and the Voter's List**

All eligible electors included on the Voters' List received a Voter Information Letter (VIL) in the mail, containing instructions and information about online and telephone voting methods, voter help centre hours and locations, as well as a unique voter PIN. VILs were also provided by email, subject to proper proof of identity and residence being provided. Election Staff worked with Simply Voting to ensure the VIL provided plain language and formatting.

Staff also provided accessible options for electors to review and update their information on the Voters' List. Updating information on the Voters' List was completed in-person and via email.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Add Quick Response (QR) code to the VIL for convenient access to the online voting site.

- The colour contrast of the PIN number on the VIL generated by the vendor was a mid-grey colour on a white background that did not meet 4.5:1 colour contrast ratio and may have been difficult to read for some individuals. The dark grey colour was chosen instead of black for the PIN by the vendor for security reasons so that the PIN would not show through the envelope and VIL as easily. Increasing the colour contrast for the PIN is recommended for future VILs, and use of alternative envelope material as suggested previously may help to mitigate security concerns.

## Candidates

All candidates were provided with a copy of the AMCTO Candidates Guide to Accessible Elections. During the election, comments were received from voters that information on candidates was not easily found. The City maintained a list of candidate names, website, social media, and contact information on the Election website if provided by the candidate. The Stratford Public Library also created a webpage which included information related to candidates including any media articles written. While information was available, there exists a systemic disconnect between electors being aware of who is running for office, what candidates' platforms were, and where to access candidate information.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026:

- The City can promote the Stratford Public Library webpage if one is created again for the 2026 municipal election.

## Feedback

Additional feedback regarding the accessibility of the 2022 Stratford Municipal and School Board Election can be submitted through regular mail, email, telephone, facsimile, or by using the City's Customer Feedback Form, which is available via the City's website.

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