



2026 Municipal Election

Accessibility Plan

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Introduction

The City of Waterloo is committed to ensuring that municipal elections are accessible to all residents. This Accessibility Plan outlines measures the City will take to identify, remove, and prevent barriers that may affect electors and candidates with disabilities. The goal of this plan is to ensure that all individuals can choose to participate in the democratic process in a manner that respects dignity, independence, inclusion, and equal opportunity.

Accessibility is an important consideration in all aspects of election administration. The City recognizes that barriers may arise from physical environments, communication methods, technology, policies, and/or attitudes. Through this plan, the City seeks to anticipate and address these barriers so that election services remain inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community.

The City will continue to review election procedures and services throughout the election cycle and incorporate feedback from voters, candidates, election workers, and community organizations. The City will also work collaboratively with the local Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI) team to review accessibility initiatives and identify opportunities for improvement.

Legislative Framework

Municipal elections in Ontario are conducted in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* ('the Act'). The Act places responsibility on the City Clerk to administer the

election and to ensure that the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities are addressed.

Section 12.1 of the Act requires that the Clerk prepares an accessibility plan that identifies barriers and outlines steps to remove and prevent those barriers. The plan must be made available to the public before voting day. Following the election, the Clerk must prepare a report evaluating the accessibility measures implemented during the election and identifying opportunities for improvement.

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

12.1 (1) A Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c.33, Sched. 21, s.8 (8).

12(2) The Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

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

45 (2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the Clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (23).

In addition to the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the City aims to comply with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* and its associated regulations, including the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, defines a barrier as:

“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”)

These legislative frameworks guide the City’s commitment to accessible service delivery.

Accessibility Principles

The City of Waterloo is guided by several core accessibility principles when planning and administering elections. Election services should allow voters to participate independently and privately wherever possible. The electoral process should respect the dignity of all participants and provide equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities to take part in civic life.

The City aims to integrate accessible services into the delivery of election services rather than providing separate processes, whenever possible. Accessibility considerations will be integrated into:

- election planning,
- voting location selection,
- communication practices,
- technology procurement, and
- staff training.

Consultation and Community Engagement

The City values the perspectives and experiences of community members in identifying and addressing accessibility barriers. Engagement of accessibility partners and community members living with one or more disabilities helps ensure that election services reflect the needs of residents.

In developing and implementing this plan, the City will consult with the local Accessibility Advisory Committee and the READI team. These groups may be invited to review election accessibility initiatives, test accessible voting equipment, and provide feedback on communication materials.

This Accessibility Plan will be published on the City's election website and will be available in accessible formats upon request. Residents will also be encouraged to provide feedback regarding accessibility throughout the election process, by contacting the Clerk's office and election workers at the voting locations.

As per the Act, a Post-Election Accessibility Report will be created to assess the procedures and policies put in place to address accessibility barriers. The report will also help in identifying any gaps in service, and/or areas that can be improved on for future elections.

Accessible Election Communications

Clear and accessible communication is essential to ensuring that voters understand how and where to vote. The City will provide election information in formats that are accessible and easy to understand.

Election materials, including the election website, will comply with accessibility standards and will be written in plain language whenever possible. Information regarding voting methods, voting locations, candidate nominations, and accessibility services will be made available through multiple communication channels.

Residents who require election information in alternative formats will be able to request accommodations. The City will make reasonable efforts to provide accessible formats in a timely manner.

In 2026, the City will introduce electronic voter notifications. This should improve accessibility by providing voting information in a flexible, digital format that works with assistive technologies, can be adjusted to individual needs, and is delivered quickly and reliably. This makes it easier for a wider range of people to access and use important voting information.

Accessible Voting Locations

The City will work to ensure that voting locations are accessible:

- Update the accessibility checklist and visit each voting location to ensure accessibility of entrances and voting areas.
- Work with local accessibility partners to ensure requirements for fair and equitable access are met and ensure the same entrance will be used for all voters.
- On voting days, election staff will verify that accessible entrances and equipment are operational and that paths, entrances, and voting areas remain barrier-free throughout the day.
- Provide clear signage to mark voting locations and entrances and direct voters to voting areas.
- Provide seating for those who need it.
- Ensure clearly marked accessible parking is available near the entrances of voting locations.
- Service animals will be permitted in all voting locations.
- Where automatic door openers are not available, election staff will be assigned to assist voters entering/exiting the facility.
- Establish voting places at the following facilities to allow eligible residents of the facility the opportunity to vote:
 - Any institution where 20 or more beds are occupied by persons who are disabled, chronically ill or medically fragile.
 - A retirement home where 50 or more beds are occupied.
 - In addition, voting locations shall be established at select housing that include a mix of life lease and independent living residences. Voting will be offered over a set period to allow all residents, to vote at the same location.
- To provide voters with additional flexibility and improve accessibility, on the voting day, the City will establish six (6) super vote locations where anyone eligible to vote in the City of Waterloo may attend. The Waterloo Memorial Recreation Centre supervote location will have online interpretation services, accessible voting equipment, and ASL interpretation services available during the entire vote as noted below.

Accessible Voting Options

The City will provide multiple voting options to support accessibility and ensure that voters can participate in the electoral process in a manner that they choose that suits their needs. These options include:

- Voters with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person within the voting location. Designated election officials are also available to assist with the voting process upon request.
- The City will provide accessible voting equipment at Waterloo Memorial Recreation Centre during advance voting and on Voting Day for electors. This includes an audio ballot marking device that supports a range of assistive technologies (such as sip-and-puff devices, adaptive switches, or paddles) for independent voting. American Sign Language (ASL) and multilingual online interpretation services will also be available at this location. Staff will be trained to support voters using these tools.
- Members of the local Accessibility Advisory Committee will be invited to test accessible voting spaces, equipment and interpretation services in advance of voting days to support continuous improvement and best practices.
- Magnification tools will be available at all voting locations to assist voters with low vision.
- Where voters attend an incorrect voting location within their ward, vote tabulators will be programmed to accept ballots for all polls in that ward, allowing electors to vote without requiring a transfer.
- Election staff will receive training about assisting voters with disabilities, including how to provide support respectfully and accommodate support persons within voting locations.
- Electors who are unable to attend a voting location may appoint a voting proxy in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act.

In 2026, the City will introduce the Vote-at-Home on Request Program (see Procedure for the use of Vote-at-Home upon Request Method). This is an accessibility measure designed to ensure that all eligible electors can participate in the municipal election. This service provides an option for individuals who cannot reasonably attend a voting location to vote in a familiar and comfortable environment of their choosing. Electors can request a scheduled in-home voting appointment, during which trained election officials will provide clear instructions, provide assistance where needed, and ensure that each voter can cast their ballot independently and with dignity.

The program is built to remove barriers to participation by accommodating a range of accessibility needs. Safeguards are in place to protect voter privacy, maintain ballot secrecy, and ensure the integrity of the election process, while also prioritizing the safety and comfort of electors.

Accessible Voting Equipment and Assistance

The City will provide accessible voting equipment to support voters who require assistance when marking their ballot. Accessible voting equipment will include:

- audio ballot markers,
- tactile controls,

- magnification tools, and
- assistive devices designed to support voters with physical or visual disabilities.

Election staff will receive training on the use of accessible voting equipment so that they can assist voters when needed. Voters may also choose to be accompanied by a support person while voting. If a voter requires assistance marking their ballot, election officials may assist in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act.

Language and Interpretation Supports

The City recognizes that communication barriers may affect some voters. Interpretation services, including American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, will be available at the Waterloo Memorial Recreation Centre voting location on voting day, to assist voters who require communication support.

Election staff will be trained on how to access interpretation services and assist voters when needed.

Accessible Candidate and Third-Party Information

The City is committed to supporting candidates and registered third parties in understanding and meeting accessibility requirements throughout the municipal election process.

- Information about accessibility will be provided to candidates and registered third parties in the candidate information package and posted on the City's website.
- The City will make election-related information available in alternative formats upon request.
- Candidates will receive the City of Waterloo Customer Service and Duty to Accommodate training materials.
- In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, expenses incurred by a candidate or a registered third party who is an individual with a disability, that are directly related to the disability and would not have been incurred but for the election, are considered campaign expenses under section 88.19(3)(9). These expenses, however, are not subject to the maximum spending limit, as set out in sections 88.19(8) and 88.21(8).

Hiring and Training of Election Officials

Election workers play a key role in ensuring that voting spaces are welcoming and accessible.

- Election worker application forms will be available in accessible, AODA-compliant formats.
- Accommodations will be available to election workers upon request.
- Designated accessibility-focused election staff will be trained on the use of accessible voting equipment and assisting electors with disabilities.

- Election staff will receive training to learn how to support individuals who use assistive devices or are accompanied by a service animal or support person.
- Staff will also learn techniques to maintain voter privacy and dignity while providing assistance.

Continuous Improvement and Barrier Prevention

The City is committed to continuously improving the accessibility of municipal elections. Accessibility considerations have been made to election planning, communication strategies, technology procurement, and operational procedures. There is always more to do.

The City will monitor accessibility initiatives throughout the election process and will review feedback received from voters, candidates, election staff, and community partners. This feedback will help identify barriers and inform improvements for future elections.

Post-Election Accessibility Report

Following the 2026 Municipal Election, the City of Waterloo will review the initiatives outlined in this plan and prepare a report that will be made publicly available. The report will incorporate feedback from the local Accessibility Advisory Committee and the READI team, and will assess the effectiveness of this plan while identifying opportunities for improvement for future elections.

This review is conducted in accordance with section 12.1(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, which states:

“Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the Clerk shall submit a report to council on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.”

The Clerk’s post-election report will be published on the City’s website in an accessible format and shared with interested parties upon request.

The City encourages residents to provide feedback to help improve accessibility in municipal elections. If you have identified a barrier or have suggestions to enhance accessibility, please contact us at elections@waterloo.ca.

Feedback, suggestions, or requests for assistance can also be submitted through the following channels:

Email: elections@waterloo.ca

Phone: 519-747-8704

TTY: 519-886-3941

In person:

Legislative Services / City Clerk’s Office

Waterloo City Centre

100 Regina Street South
Waterloo, ON N2J 4A8

By contacting one of the following staff members:

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