

**To: Reeve and Members of Council**

**From: Robert Tremblay, Clerk**

**Date: December 23, 2010**

**Re: Accessibility Report for the 2010 Municipal Election**

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## ISSUE

The purpose of this report is to inform Council on efforts to identify, remove and prevent barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities, pursuant to Section 12.1 of the *Municipal Elections Act*, S.O. 1996, c.32, Sch., s.1(1), as amended.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

***That Committee of the Whole recommend Council receive and adopt the Accessibility Report for the 2010 Municipal Election.***

## BACKGROUND

The following changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* were introduced by the provincial government in late 2009:

*“12.1(1) Electors and candidates with disabilities*

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

*12.1 (2) Report*

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Clerk, as Returning Officer, took every effort to reduce barriers on a number of levels with regard to the planning and undertaking of the 2010 Municipal Election.

Recent Township projects such as the new website and renovated township office addressed some of the barriers with regard to the provision of information and the location of the Voter Help Centre. In addition, the 2010 Election built on the efforts of the past with regard to Electronic Voting and outreach to homes for the aged. Accessible customer service training received by Township staff was also a great benefit for election officials assisting candidates and electors. Moreover, accessibility guides produced by the Association of Municipal Clerks, Treasurers and Managers of Ontario (AMCTO) were provided directly to candidates and to the general public via the website.

## DISCUSSION

### ***Customer Service and Information Sharing - Providing Tools to Assist***

All Township staff and elected officials received accessible customer service training in late 2009. This training was invaluable in providing strategies to identify and eliminate barriers in the provision of services. The role of election official was carried out by Township staff. Election officials play a central role in assisting electors at the Voter Help Centre or on the telephone.

An accessibility guide produced by AMCTO was provided in every nomination package provided to each candidate. It was also posted to the Township's new website, which allows documents to be viewed in larger font. The document was posted in multiple formats, including pdf, Word, large font and Braille. The guide was intended to draw attention to the measures candidates should be considering to ensure equal opportunity for all electors to access candidates and their information. Measures included all aspects of campaigning including: literature through print media, audio and video messages, and access to campaign offices.

### ***Voting Method - Access through E-Voting***

An opportunity to cast a ballot from the comfort and convenience of a familiar setting, complete with the tools, equipment and/or software that assist citizens with disabilities in their day to day activities is addressed with internet and telephone voting. This method of voting was also used in 2006 and a by-election held in 2007.

E-voting combined with everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can present opportunities for persons with disabilities to vote, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity. Persons with disabilities accessed the e-voting services offered by the municipality for the 2010 Election using several methods.

The supplier of the e-voting solution (Intelivote Systems Inc.) used by the municipality, created and operates a system that meets the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) requirements. These accessibility requirements, architected into the solution, assist persons with disabilities and an aging population. The system complied with the guidelines as defined by the W3C technologies website principles. These guidelines cover a variety of initiatives including the organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information over the web. Abiding by this standard ensured voters with a disability, with existing web aware technology, could connect to the voting website and interact with the voting system.

As an example, voters were offered the opportunity to make an audio selection of some of the security features required when entering a voting session via the web. This support afforded visually impaired voters the opportunity to successfully navigate the login security CAPTCHA challenge required to cast their ballot.

Persons with disabilities could access the e-voting services over the telephone, both mobile and land line. Communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Barriers may come in the form of low volume, the use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menus and menu options. The e-voting system was designed and implemented with the following telephone voting functional criteria taken into consideration:

- The telephone e-voting service is offered on all types of touch tone telephones and wireless devices.
- Clear natural language is used and is offered in English.
- Menu options are clear and easy to follow, advising when to select options and providing confirmations of voter selections.
- Standard volume is used to allow for adjustments dependent on the telephone or device of the user.

Persons with disabilities could also use the TTY (Teletypewriter) service to access e-voting services. It is required by law that the Relay service be confidential and not disclose any information from conversations and no record-keeping of conversations be stored.

Persons who are deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing could have made use of the Internet to cast their ballot in the election with little to no assistance. Persons, who have a vision loss disability, including total blindness and legal blindness, had the ability to use the telephone to cast their ballot for the election. The e-voting system addresses other types of disabilities (intellectual, learning, mental health) as described in the website accessibility requirements and telephone operating functions.

Using the e-voting system, disabled persons are given the opportunity to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for disabled persons who have mobility restrictions and/or have a difficult time with transportation due to physical disabilities. Travel to a physical polling location would no longer create a hardship or barrier to them.

Enabling persons with a disability the opportunity to vote from any location, using more than one method, (telephone or internet) increases the opportunity for these individuals to participate in the election without assistance. This level of independence affords them an increased level of privacy while casting their ballot without the usual involvement of a friend or relative, which might otherwise compromise their secret ballot.

### ***Voter Help Centre***

The municipality also hosted a Voter Help Centre where all members of the public, including persons with a disability, could visit or call to get assistance with their voting process. The newly renovated and expanded Township Office was designed and constructed with new up-to-date accessibility features (ramp, washrooms, customer service stations, doors). Three stations were set up with telephone and Internet access, including a large accessible touch screen. Election officials were trained to provide assistance if requested.

### ***Outreach to Lanark Lodge and Perth Community Care***

The e-voting system was also designed to accommodate the older population in the community. Internet and telephone voting allowed election staff to travel to senior citizen homes to assist in the voting process to ensure participation of residents. Voter Instruction Letters destined for electors residing in senior homes were delivered to the homes by the Clerk. Seniors could choose the telephone to complete their voting, or election staff visited the residence with a laptop equipped with an accessible large touch screen affording those electors the opportunity to cast their ballot using the Internet.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Accessibility was taken into account in the technical requirements outlined in the Request for Proposal for e-voting services, as well as for equipment and supply needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general, e-voting offered electors choice in the way they were able to cast their ballot. The flexibility and choice afforded electors with disabilities, using the Internet or a telephone, positively impacted their accessibility.

The e-voting system combined with election staff support provided an equal and dignified opportunity for electors to cast their ballot.