



DATE: January 12, 2015

REPORT NO. CS2015-001

TO: Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Administration

FROM: Lori Wolfe, City Clerk, Director of Clerk's Services

1.0	TYPE OF REPORT	CONSENT ITEM	[X]
		ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION	[]

2. TOPIC

2014 Election Accessibility Report [Financial Impact – None] (CS2015-001)

3. RECOMMENDATION

THAT Report CS2015-001 regarding accessibility initiatives undertaken for the 2014 Municipal Election BE RECEIVED as information.

4.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to advise Council on actions taken to comply with Section 12.1(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that might affect electors and candidates with disabilities. The *Act* requires the report to be submitted to Council within ninety days after voting day in a regular election.

5.0 BACKGROUND

The October 27th, 2014 Election was held in accordance with the provisions of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*. The *Act* assigns the responsibility and authority to the Clerk to conduct the election, and that he/she shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. In accordance with the *Act*, this report is to provide Council with information regarding the activities undertaken to identify, remove and prevent barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

Due to the size, scope and complexity of organizing and executing a Municipal Election for an estimated 68,000 eligible voters in a five ward system, planning started well in advance of 2014. The Elections Team met late in 2012 to establish the departmental

work plan that would be put in place for the conduct of the October 2014 election. Given the election function requires heavy participation of all staff within the Clerk's Department, a detailed work plan is a necessary guiding document to organize the activities so as to provide business continuity of regular business functions during an election year.

It was the goal of the Election Team to ensure that electors with a disability were provided with the opportunity to vote as independently as was possible in the 2014 election. Staff requested and Council approved the use of special accessibility voting equipment, as well as internet voting during the Advanced Voting period in the 2014 election. Those approvals were instrumental in achieving compliance with the Act for having regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities, giving them (as well as other electors) the choice in how and when they cast their ballot to elect their municipal representatives.

6.0 CORPORATE POLICY CONTEXT

In meeting the requirements of the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, all electorate have an equal opportunity to select the next Council. It is through this direct participation that the goal to achieve an excellence in governance and municipal management is enhanced.

The City of Brantford will be known for its open and accessible government including an accessible voting process. Brantford citizens will be engaged in, and informed about, their community and their city government.

The identification and removal of barriers for individuals with disabilities will create opportunities to enhance public understanding and involvement at City Hall.

7.0 INPUT FROM OTHER SOURCES

The Election Team consulted with owners/managers of all facilities used as voting locations to ensure the facilities met accessibility criteria. Staff sought input relating to accessibility efforts from the 2010 Election Staff Team, as well as the Accessibility Advisory Co-ordinator. Input was sought from representatives of the AMCTO Elections Team, AMO bulletins, and Clerks from other municipalities.

The Clerk's Department was fortunate to host an intern student from Wilfrid Laurier University who participated as a member of the Election team. He assisted in developing an advertising campaign, a literature review of best practices for elections, and set the groundwork for the 2018 election with a possible high school student vote program.

8.0 ANALYSIS

In support of compliance with the Act, staff reviewed the *Accessibility for Ontarians' with Disabilities Act, 2005* S.O. 2004 c. 11 (AODA) and noted with attention the key definitions of 'barrier' and 'disabilities' as follows:

"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.

"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
- (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.

During the planning phase and throughout the conduct of the election, staff considered the election project activities keeping in mind those definitions. The Team was well supported in their efforts to achieve a high level of accessibility for voters and candidates with disabilities given the fine work already performed by the Accessibility Co-Ordinator, the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Human Resources Department on the Corporate Accessible Customer Service Policy/Procedures, which were incorporated in the work plan and noted below for reference:

- Allow for the use of service animals and support for persons
- Provide notice of temporary disruptions of service
- Provide accessibility customer service training for all election staff, including the election officials
- Establish procedures for responding to feedback on the website
- On request, provide documents in alternate format that take into account a person's disability, and notice to candidates and voters

The following were noted as key aspects of the election where consideration was given to identify, remove and prevent barriers:

Communication and Information

- Measures were taken to provide communication initiatives and information for candidates and electors were available in alternate formats upon request;
- All information was posted on the City's Election web site;
- Advertisements included in the Civic News, Utility billings, mobile road signs;

- A link to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act was provided under the Election Related Links tab of the Election site;
- Timely and relevant information on the election, including introduction of internet voting, was delivered through a series of radio announcements, computer messaging in public locations (Sanderson Centre, physician offices);
- Attendance at Rogers “Brant News” Television show for interviews to convey election details including dates, locations, voting methods, accessibility assistance;
- Partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University in hosting an Intern Student to be part of the Election Team (Masters Local Government Program);
- Candidates were provided with an information kit including relevant election information materials (alternate formats were available if required);
- Election staff members were provided with training on how to interact and communicate with persons having various types of disabilities and with persons who use an assistive device or service animal.

Voting locations

- Conducted site visits of all potential voting locations to ensure compliance with the established check list;
- Where possible, ensured designated or reserved parking for persons with disabilities at each voting location;
- Provided appropriate signage at all voting locations with extra signage at locations with alternate accessible entrances;
- Provided accessible voting, both facility access and accessible voting equipment, at each of the Advance Voting facilities, which were both “vote anywhere” format;
- Provided a central accessible voting location at City Hall on Election Day, which was a “vote anywhere” poll;
- Set up designated voting area booths to be low and wide enough to enable a wheelchair or scooter user to vote independently and securely;
- Voting stations equipped with large print voting instructions and magnifying sheets to aid persons with low vision.

Staff training

- All election worker training sessions incorporated provisions to meet accessible customer service standards;
- Election officials were trained on the City’s Accessible Customer Service Standards and the AODA accessibility regulations;
- Reference material was included in each training manual;
- Special training was provided to staff working the Advance Vote on the proper use of the accessible voting equipment;
- Additional staffing at elementary school locations to act as door greeters to offer assistance as required;
- Clerk’s staff dedicated to help-desk for call-in assistance during Advanced voting period and internet use.

Voting and voting equipment methods

- Council approved alternative voting method of internet voting for two week Advanced period to allow vote anytime, anywhere during that period;

- Provided fully accessible voting equipment at both Advanced Voting locations and at City Hall on Election Day (ImageCast accessible audio voting equipment with assistive devices – audio tactile interface, sip and puff, pound paddles);
- All Advanced Voting locations and the accessibility poll at City Hall on Election Day were established with a “vote anywhere” format offering enhanced voting opportunity for all voters;
- Proxy voting was utilized in the Election;
- Staff were trained to administer the accessible voting equipment to electors;
- Attended the Ross McDonald School on both Advanced Voting period and on Election Day with accessibility equipment;
- Promoted Advanced Voting opportunities for electors with disabilities in all election advertising materials;
- Provided voting opportunities specifically for institutions and retirement homes on two occasions (Advanced period and on Election Day).

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications with this reporting activity. However, for Council's reference, all improvements or enhancements to the accessible voting experience were contained within the 2014 Election Operating Budget. While the overall cost of the accessible voting process is greater than the regular voting process, the City of Brantford offers all voters an independent and equal voting opportunity.

10.0 CONCLUSION

As early as the 2000 Municipal Election, the City of Brantford undertook measures to eliminate barriers for voters with disabilities. The City continues to meet, and in many cases exceed, minimum requirements for accessible voting established by Provincial legislation. Staff will continue this effort moving forward by working closely with the Accessibility Co-ordinator and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

In preparation for the 2018 Municipal Election staff will continue to monitor for any legislative changes as well as explore opportunities for enhancements to the accessible voting process, procedures and equipment that become available, including internet voting.

Lori Wolfe, City Clerk
Director, Clerk's Services

Darryl Lee, General Manager
Corporate Services Commission

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no
Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no