

### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CLERKS AND PLANNING SERVICES

#### OBJECTIVE

Re: Accessibility Initiatives Taken for the 2022 Municipal Election – Section 12.1(3) *Municipal Elections Act*

#### RECOMMENDATION

**THAT** the Report from the Director of Clerks and Planning Services regarding the Accessibility Initiatives taken for the 2022 Municipal Election in compliance with Section 12.1(3) of the *Municipal Elections Act* concerning the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities, be received.

#### BACKGROUND

This report is submitted in compliance with a requirement under the *Municipal Elections Act* Section 12.1 (3) which states: “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.”

#### ANALYSIS

Measures have been undertaken at past elections to improve accessibility for all persons, including those with disabilities. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for alternative voting options for the 2022 Municipal Election.

With the status of pandemic restrictions during the election unknown, the Clerk’s Department prepared to offer alternative voting options, including one that did not require in-person contact. The following were implemented: Home Visit Voting, Special Ballot Voting and Vote by Mail. Below is the total number of votes casted by the various methods.

| <b>Alternative Voting Methods</b> | <b>Votes</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Home Visit                        | 4            |
| Special Ballot                    | 109          |
| Vote by Mail                      | 126          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>239</b>   |

Additional training was provided to Municipal staff as well as to the temporary election workers with respect to customer service to persons with disabilities.

In May of 2022 the Clerk's Department attended the Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting to speak to the 2022 Elections and obtain feedback from the Committee on the introduction of Alternative Voting Methods.

Following is a chart listing barriers that were identified having an effect on electors and candidates with disabilities. The chart includes matters that may be considered for the 2026 election. This report will be reviewed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee in order to receive additional input prior to the next municipal election.

| <b>Communications and Information</b> |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
|                                       | <b>Actions</b>   | <b>Considerations for 2026 Election</b>  |
| 1.                                    | Posted all notices, information and Voter Lookup on the municipality's website. Link provided on the City's homepage. Utilized City's social media for engagement. | Continue to maintain links from the home page to the Election information and social media<br><br>Set up Election Information booths at local events in the city leading up to election. |
| 2.                                    | Documentation and forms are available in large print   |  |
| 3.                                    | Provided training and information relating to providing goods and services to persons with disabilities  |  |
| 4.                                    | Notices posted on City Hall bulletin Board, signs in City Hall lobby, Monthly Mailer and City website/social media   | More social media presence leading up to election day  |
| 5.                                    | Alternative Voting Methods (i.e. Vote By Mail, Special Ballot, a Vote From Home) advertised on social media, City website and Monthly Mailer                       | Continue to offer Alternative Voting Methods   |



| Voting Locations |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| 1.               | Conducted site visits vote location to ensure full accessibility and to identify any deficiencies                        |  |
| 2.               | Reviewed previous notes pertaining to election voting locations  |  |
| 3.               | Provided one central voting location on voting day that is accessible, located on a bus route with free extended transit |  |
| 4.               | Provided appropriate signage at voting location  |  |
| 5.               | Reconfigured set up of vote location to minimize lines and improve crowd control   |  |
| 6.               | Permitted service animals and support persons at the voting places   |  |
| 7.               | Ensured parking for disabled persons at the voting locations   |  |
| 8.               | Provided private voting booths with seating and enhanced lighting  |  |
| 9.               | Provided magnifiers at many of the voting booths   |  |
| 10.              | Provided additional staff to assist persons with a disability  |  |
| 11.              | Scheduled extended advance voting opportunities  | Continue to offer Special Ballot at City Hall to accommodate those out of town for advance polls and/or those who work out of town |
| 12.              | Provided voting opportunities for persons living at an institution, at specified times                                   |  |
| 13.              | Wheelchairs (2) were available for use by persons in need  |  |



|                                   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 14.                               | Switched to digital voters list on election day eliminating the need for residents to line up alphabetically by last name. Reduced long lines ups                                     | Continue with modernized options (use of laptops for voters list)   |
| <b>Staff Training</b>             |   |   |
| 1.                                | Staff training for election workers with respect to providing services to persons with disabilities in a sensitive / respectful manner  |   |
| 2.                                | Trained all workers on Voter View – utilizing laptops for the voters list. Cut down on number of DRO's required   | Worked well – carry forward for 2026  |
| 3.                                | Monitored elector's varying needs. For example if an elector had a walker in a long line-up, a chair would be offered while ensuring that their place was saved in the voting line-up |   |
| 4.                                | Encouraged election workers to offer assistance   |   |
| 5.                                | Assigned persons to check access doors frequently to ensure safety and accessibility  |   |
| 7.                                | Curb-side voting was available upon request   |   |
| 8.                                | Maintained a friendly, approachable demeanor, regardless of how tired, upset or hassled a worker may have felt  | May consider shifts for 2026 vs working a 12 hour day for election workers                                      |
| 9.                                | Election staff was trained to identify a service animal, or deal with an elector who had brought a friend to assist them with voting  |   |
| <b>Identification of Barriers</b> |   |   |
| 1.                                | Displaying election results at end of election at vote location   | Mechanism for displaying results at the vote location requires modernizing to be more accessible/easier to view |



Following the election, the Clerk's Department requested feedback on the election process as a whole, the following was received with respect to identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities:

*"First, I want to thank you for your hard work, tact and diplomacy during a charged campaign season. My experience with staff has been nothing but professional and I sincerely appreciate your time and effort."*

*I voted in the advanced poll held in the municipal office. It was quick, professional and I felt very covid protocol friendly. Perfect for an individual like myself who is uncomfortable in busy public spaces. The instructions were clean, the flow of people smooth, and I admit I liked watching my ballot roll into the counting machine.*

*I had my service dog with me and was received quite well. It was a positive experience and I felt my vote counted, whatever the election outcome."*

*"In an effort to get voting numbers higher I would recommend that advance polling be done even for a half day each at both the Washington and Warsaw buildings, these buildings have population densities, and many people with mobility and health issues who feel excluded."*

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The introduction of Vote By Mail had a cost of approximately \$4,000 to support 500 voters (estimated required kits for pilot project). This expense was funded through the existing election reserve.

The Home Visit program did not incur any additional expenses as staff from the Clerk's Department attended to these during office hours. Similarly, Special Ballot was offered during office hours and incurred no additional costs.

The introduction of laptops for use by the DRO's resulted in a reduction of election staff required on election day, which in turn, resulted in less honorariums paid out.

## **LINKS TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

n/a

## **SUMMARY**

In order to be in compliance with Section 12.1(3) of the Municipal Elections Act, it is recommended that this report be received.

