RICHMOND HILL
VOTES

2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Report

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Introduction

The 2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan reaffirmed the City's commitment to provide all candidates and voters with the equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process with dignity and independence. This report evaluates the success of the plan in identifying and eliminating barriers to accessibility. The City of Richmond Hill is committed to continuously improving the accessibility of elections and providing a positive voting experience for everyone.

References

1) Richmond Hill's 2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan

The 2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan establishes the objectives for identifying and eliminating barriers to accessibility and the actions planned to achieve elections that are accessible for all stakeholders.

2) Richmond Hill's Internet Voting Procedures – Sections 3, 17, and 19

The City's Internet Voting Procedures affirm that accessibility is one of the most important principles of elections (Section 3.5). They also outline how voters can attend a Vote Centre to receive whatever assistance they require to participate in the election and cast their ballot (Section 17). The Internet Voting System itself is designed to meet accessibility standards and be accommodating for all voters, including those accessing it using assistive technology (Section 19).

3) Richmond Hill's Accessibility Policy

The City's Accessibility Policy affirms our commitment to providing accessible services to everyone and to identifying and eliminating barriers to accessibility. The principles outlined in the policy govern how staff provides services in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of all people and complies with accessibility legislation (such as the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*).

4) Accessible Customer Service Procedures

Our Accessible Customer Service Procedures build on the Accessibility Policy and provide more detailed guidance to staff. The procedures help to ensure that the City is providing accessible services in specific ways, including processes for providing accommodations, receiving and responding to feedback about accessibility, and more.

5) Municipal Elections Act, 1996 – Section 12.1

It is the City Clerk's responsibility to conduct an election that is accessible to voters and candidates with disabilities. The City Clerk is also responsible for publishing a plan for achieving this (Richmond Hill's "2022 Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan") and a report on the outcomes of accessibility initiatives after the election (this report). This Accessibility Report describes any results or lessons learned in connection with each strategy from the Accessibility Plan.

6) Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* ("AODA"), aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. The AODA is made up of five standards: Information & Communications, Employment, Public Spaces, Transportation, and Customer Service. The legislation and standards apply to all levels of government, nonprofits, and private sector businesses in Ontario.

Feedback

If you have experienced or are aware of a barrier to participation in the elections in Richmond Hill, the City Clerk wants to hear from you so that we can improve our services. Please contact us and let us know how we can improve.

Phone: 905-771-8800

Email: **elections@richmondhill.ca**

Mail: City of Richmond Hill

225 East Beaver Creek Road

Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3P4

Attn: Office of the Clerk

Objectives

1) Ongoing Identification and Removal of Barriers

Action	Description	Outcomes
Consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)	This plan will be presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for feedback and comments. The Election Management Team will incorporate the Committee's feedback into operations and amend this plan as needed.	The Accessibility Advisory Committee was invited to provide feedback on the Accessibility Plan on June 23, 2023. The Accessibility Advisory Committee and the City Clerk discussed details of physical accessibility of Vote Centres, accessibility for persons with visual impairments, and processes for providing assistance to voters at Vote Centres.
Internal staff consultation and review	Staff in the Office of the Clerk responsible for the City's accessibility policies will provide advice on how to improve and optimize accessibility for the elections.	The Clerk, staff responsible for accessibility, and senior Election Officials reviewed accessibility considerations as they arose throughout the Municipal Elections. The City's Multi-Year Accessibility Plans include continuous improvement processes that take elections into consideration between election cycles.

Action	Description	Outcomes
Post-election accessibility report	Within 90 days after voting day, the City Clerk will prepare a report on the accessibility of the election. The report will describe how the City addressed barriers to accessibility for candidates and disabilities. The report will be available on Richmond Hill's website.	This report will be posted on the City's website within 90 Days after Voting Day. The Clerk will evaluate the Accessibility Plan and the outcomes of the Municipal Elections.
Receive and respond to feedback	Elections staff will monitor accessibility feedback received through the City's website and Access Richmond Hill contact centre. Any barriers communicated to the City will be addressed promptly.	Elections Staff were able to provide individualized advice to residents experiencing difficulty and help them successfully navigate options and vote successfully. Staff identified opportunities for communicating useful information more effectively in future elections.

2) **Accessible Information and Communications**

Action	Description	Outcomes
Develop an accessible and informative election website – Richmondhill.ca/RHVotes	The City's elections pages will be fully accessible. All the information needed for candidates and voters to successfully participate in the election will be provided clearly and in detail. The City's website provides BrowseAloud, a free web page reader to assist individuals who have difficulty reading online.	The City's website contained comprehensive information for voters and candidates. It complied with WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards, and BrowseAloud reader was available to users of the page. Any downloadable documents complied with WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. No feedback was received identifying problems with the website's accessibility features.
Provide information in alternative formats upon request	If voters or candidates need any information in a format that has not been made available, the City will work with them to meet their needs.	Proactive efforts were made to provide information in accessible formats. No requests were received for alternative formats.

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3) Accessible Vote Centres

Action	Description	Outcomes
Vote Centre Inspections	The City will only use accessible facilities that have been inspected for basic accessibility. Election Officials will also perform a final accessibility check on the first day that Vote Centres are open. Election Officials responsible for managing Vote Centres will receive feedback about the location's physical accessibility and either address any concerns right away or escalate them to the Election Management Team for response.	Vote Centres were inspected for accessibility prior to selection. Staff maintained frequent contact with facility staff to ensure maintenance, construction, or malfunction would not affect accessibility. Election Officials conducted multiple on-site inspections of each Vote Centre on the first day that Vote Centres opened and found all accessibility features intact. Vote Centre staff addressed issues as they arose and recorded feedback on specific locations that will be taken into consideration for future elections and by-elections.
Collaborate with host organizations	At any non-City facilities used as Vote Centres, such as schools, Election Officials will work closely with the host organization to ensure accessibility.	The City used Elections Ontario's extensive accessibility standards in developing Richmond Hill's criteria for accessible Vote Centres. Staff worked with the York Region District School Board and inspected schools to ensure that they met the criteria as an accessible location.

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Action	Description	Outcomes
Accessible Candidate Nominations	Candidate nomination meetings will occur in an accessible location. Additional accommodations will be provided upon request.	Nominations were conducted in-person in a fully accessible location. No requests for additional accommodations were received.
Accessible signage at Vote Centres	Clear, prominent signs will guide voters to the voting place. Signs will follow accessibility guidelines and be easy to read and understand. Whenever possible, the accessible entrance and exit locations will be the same as the main access points for all voters. If this is not possible at any Vote Centre, clear and prominent signs will guide voters to the alternative accessible access point(s).	Vote Here signs with accessibility logos were place at the accessible entrance of each Vote Centre. In addition, Election Officials were present at entrances and hallways to provide assistance and detailed instructions to voters.

4) **Accessible Voting Process**

Action	Description	Outcomes
Provide alternative voting methods (Internet Voting)	Internet voting will be available in addition to paper ballot voting. The Internet Voting System is designed to meet accessibility standards and be accommodating to all users. Voters can use their own internet connected devices, including those with accessibility tools and features, to cast their ballot. Voters can also visit a Vote Centre for assistance using the Internet Voting System.	The Internet Voting System complied with the WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. Support was available to voters at 12 Vote Centres, which were established in accessible locations and configured to meet accessibility requirements. Additionally, phone support was available to voters for extended hours through the Voter Assistance Helpline.
Permit support persons and service animals in Vote Centres	People with disabilities will be able to bring a support person or service animal with them to a Vote Centre. Election Officials at the Vote Centres will be trained on accessible customer service, including understanding that some people will bring a support person or service animal with them, and will help to ensure a smooth and easy voting experience.	Support persons and service animals were permitted to assist voters in Vote Centres as required. Voters with disabilities were able to request assistance from a friend or support person to mark their ballot.

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Action	Description	Outcomes
Support from Election Officials	Election Officials at the Vote Centres will be trained on accessible customer service, and are able to provide assistance to voters as required.	The City Clerk and Election Management Team developed a process for Election Officials to assist voters and provided training on assisting voters to all Election Officials. Election Officials addressed exceptional circumstances at Vote Centres by providing individualized support for voters requiring assistance.
Schedule Continuous Voting	Voting will be available continuously, without interruption, for seven days of voting. This will provide flexibility for anyone that has difficulty voting during designated hours at Vote Centres, including voters with disabilities.	Continuous voting was available during the planned times and Vote Centres were open as scheduled with weekend and evening hours. Phone support was available to voters for extended hours through the Voter Assistance Helpline.

Action	Description	Outcomes
Provide other voting opportunities for seniors and persons with disabilities	Election Officials will provide dedicated, on-site voting opportunities at: • Retirement homes where 50 or more beds are occupied; • Institutions where 20 or more beds are occupied by persons with disabilities or chronic illness. If voting opportunities are not possible at these locations due to emergency or other health circumstances, the Clerk will make sure that the facility's residents still have the opportunity to vote. The facility will be assigned its own designated voting hours, and Election Officials will be on stand-by to support its residents during this time. The City will also provide the facility with the technology needed to use the Internet Voting System if necessary.	Voting opportunities were provided for retirement residences and long-term care homes. Election Officials worked with facility staff to arrange voting for seniors and persons with disabilities. Several long-term care facilities were under lock-down due to a viral outbreak during the time scheduled for their voting opportunities. In these instances, the City Clerk and elections staff worked with the facility staff to ensure that voting opportunities were provided while maintaining the facility's infectious disease protocols.
Voter lookup	Residents will be able to go to the City's website to check if they are on the voters' list, add their name if they are not, and update or correct their information if needed. Voters can also get help with this by calling the Voter Assistance Helpline at 905-771-5555 or visiting a Vote Centre during its hours of operation.	The electronic voters' list management service was available until noon on Voting Day. In-person registration was available at the fully accessible Vote Centres for the duration of their operating hours until the close of voting.

5) Accessibility Training and Promotion of Accessible Campaigns

Action	Description	Outcomes
Provide candidates with information on how to make their campaigns accessible	Candidates will be provided with a copy of AMCTO's "Candidate's Guide to Accessible Elections." Links to accessibility resources and plans will be shared under the Elections Resources section of the City's election website at RichmondHill.ca/RHVotes. The Clerk will provide updates to candidates throughout the election period, and will include any new information about accessibility in these updates.	All candidates were provided a copy of AMCTO's Candidate's Guide to Accessible Elections. Additional accessibility resources were made available on the City's website.
Develop accessibility training for election staff	All Election Officials, including temporary election workers, will be trained in accessible customer service. City staff have all completed accessible customer service training already, and any external workers will need to either complete training or verify that they have completed some equivalent training with another municipality.	All Election Officials were municipal staff and their prior completion of accessibility training was confirmed. Election training for all Election Officials identified accessibility of the election to all voters as a fundamental principle.