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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Corporate Services
Report: #2022-INFO-51
Date: June 10, 2022

Subject:

2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to share the Region's 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan.

2. Background

2.1 In accordance with Section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, the Clerk, who is responsible for conducting an election, shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities and shall prepare a Plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

2.2 For municipal elections in The Regional Municipality of Durham, the Regional Clerk is, amongst other things, responsible for accepting nominations for the Office of Regional Chair and announcing the final results of the vote. As such, the Regional Clerk has the responsibility to consider any barriers that may affect candidates for the Office of Regional Chair as well as any electors who may wish to obtain information about the election for this office. Starting with the 2022 municipal election, to provide additional options for candidates, the Regional Clerk is accepting nomination material electronically.

- 2.3 The Clerks of Durham Region's eight local-area municipalities are responsible for conducting the election and reporting the results of the vote for the Office of Regional Chair to the Regional Clerk. Each area Clerk is responsible for developing their own Election Accessibility Plan under the Municipal Elections Act which will encompass the needs of both candidates and electors with disabilities.
- 2.4 The Region's 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan largely builds off of the Region's 2022 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and the Corporate Accessibility Policy; both of which seek to ensure equal participation for persons with disabilities, including candidates and electors.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 The Regional Clerk will receive any feedback related to the manner in which services are provided to persons with disabilities during the election process.
- 3.2 As required under section 12.1(3) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, within 90 days after voting day (October 24, 2022) the Regional Clerk's Office shall submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 4.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:
- a. Goal 5: Service Excellence. Objective: To provide exceptional value to Durham taxpayers through responsive, effective and fiscally sustainable service delivery.
 - 5.2 Collaborate for a seamless service experience

5. Attachments

Attachment #1: Draft version of The Regional Municipality of Durham 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Don Beaton, BCom, M.P.A.
Commissioner of Corporate Services



**The Regional Municipality of Durham
2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan**

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Introduction

Under two pieces of legislation called the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), the Region of Durham has an obligation to identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers. Barriers can be present in areas of: attitudes, technological, information and communications, organizational and physical.

In accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, disability is defined as:

- (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*; (“handicap”)

In accordance with Section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, the Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities and shall prepare a Plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

For municipal elections in The Regional Municipality of Durham, the Regional Clerk is, amongst other things, responsible for accepting nominations for the Office of Regional Chair and announcing the final results of the vote. As such, the Regional Clerk has the responsibility to consider any barriers that may affect candidates for the Office of Regional Chair as well as any electors who may wish to obtain information about the election for this office. The Clerks of Durham Region’s eight local-area municipalities are responsible for conducting the election and reporting the results of the vote for the Office of Regional Chair to the Regional Clerk. Each area Clerk is responsible for developing their own Election Accessibility Plan under the Municipal Elections Act which will encompass the needs of both candidates and electors with disabilities.

The Region’s 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan largely builds off of the Region’s 2022 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and the Corporate Accessibility Policy; both of which seek to uphold the principles of dignity and independence, strive to

provide integrated services and ensure equal participation for persons with disabilities, including candidates and electors.

The Plan is a living document that may be updated as the Region's accessibility policies and procedures continue to evolve or as barriers are identified.

Mandate

It is the goal of the Region of Durham to ensure that persons of all abilities are able to participate in the municipal election process.

Accessibility planning in the organization

Since 2003, the Region of Durham has been reporting on accessibility and the identification, removal and prevention of barriers throughout departments and services. This work has been accomplished by examining our facilities, employment practices, programs, services, policies and by-laws through the lens of accessibility.

The actions outlined in the Region of Durham 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan are specific requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) during this timeframe. The actions are organized under the accessibility standards of the AODA to support one of the following accessibility goals: Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation and Design of Public Spaces.

Accessibility considerations for candidates

Candidates for the Office of Regional Chair (or their agents) may need to access the Regional Headquarters building in order to submit their nomination forms or obtain information about the election; they may also access information through the Region's website at durham.ca/elections, or via telephone. Starting with the 2022 municipal election, the Region is also accepting nomination material electronically. Candidates, their agents, friends and family may also choose to attend Regional Headquarters on election night where the unofficial results of the vote will be displayed.

The Region has made every effort to ensure that the Regional Headquarters facility and the website are accessible for everyone. All staff have received accessible customer service training.

Candidates and potential candidates may also be participating in Candidate Information Sessions which are run by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, but are hosted by the municipalities within the Region. For 2022, one scheduled Candidate Information Session was hosted by the Region in an accessible meeting room. For the first time, the session was also broadcast via live stream and recorded, and participants were able to

submit questions via email. The recording is available on the Region's website along with the presentation material for easy access.

Accessibility considerations for electors

Electors may also need to access the Regional Headquarters building in order to obtain information about the election; they may also access this information through the Region's website at durham.ca/elections, or via telephone. For the most part, electors will be interacting with the local-area municipalities in order to ensure their names are added to voters lists, to access candidate information and through the voting process.

As noted earlier, the Region has made every effort to ensure that the Regional Headquarters facility and the website are accessible for everyone. All staff, including those in the Region's Corporate Call Center and at the Public Front Counter has received accessible customer service training.

Compliance Audit Committee

Under the Municipal Elections Act, municipalities are required to establish a Compliance Audit Committee to consider applications requesting audits of candidates' campaign finances. Electors who feel that a candidate for the Office of Regional Chair has not complied with the election campaign finance rules under the Municipal Elections Act may submit a request for a compliance audit. Information about the Committee, along with compliance audit request forms will be made available in an accessible format on the Region's website. Meetings of the Committee will be open to the public and held at Regional Headquarters in an accessible meeting room.

Accessibility specifics

Customer service

Goods and services provided by the Region will be done in a manner that takes into account persons (including candidates and electors) with disabilities.

- Goods and services will be provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- Provisions of goods and services to persons with disabilities, and others, will be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporary or permanently, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods and services.
- People with disabilities may use assistive devices, guide animals and/or support persons to access goods and services.
- Notice of planned or unforeseen service disruptions will be posted in the most appropriate manner (e.g. on site, website, media) by Regional departments.
- All employees, volunteers and those providing service to the public on the Region's behalf will be trained in accessible customer service (ongoing).

- An accessibility feedback process has been established to ensure ongoing improvement.

Information and communications

Candidates and electors are able to access election information in various accessible formats including on the Region's website. Corporate standards were established for providing accessible formats of information or communication supports upon request by:

- Developing guidelines and training to help employees in creating accessible documents (ongoing).
- Informing the public about the options of accessible information and communication supports available to them.
- Emergency procedures, plans or public safety information is offered in an accessible format upon request (ongoing).
- Conversion from Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 from Level A to Level AA.

Transportation

Candidates and electors who wish to access Regional Headquarters are able to do so using either conventional or specialized transportation through Durham Region Transit (DRT) services.

Durham Region Transit provides training for all conventional and specialized bus operators and supervisors focused on customer service, including but not limited to:

- Enhanced accessibility at DRT and the role of operators in supporting customers.
- Review of disabilities including visible, invisible, physical and cognitive and what is required to deliver exceptional customer service.
- Promoting Human Rights issues and expectations for inclusion.
- Requirements of AODA and the Integrated Transportation Standard.

For complete information on transit service options, please contact Durham Region Transit at 1-866-247-0055 or drthelps@durham.ca

Design of public spaces

Since January 1, 2016, the Region has incorporated accessibility into public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped. Many areas in the Regional Headquarters building have also been retrofitted to improve accessibility which will benefit both candidates and electors including:

- Automatic doors at all entrances to the Regional Headquarters building;
- Ample accessible parking spaces;
- Automatic doors to access Council Chambers and the Office of the Regional Clerk;
- Automatic doors to access washroom facilities;

- Lowered front counters at both the Office of the Regional Clerk and the Public Front Counter; and
- Improved signage throughout the building.

The Region's Workplace Modernization Project will transform Regional Headquarters over the next few years for barrier free access.

Plan development and review

The Regional Municipality of Durham 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed by the Office of the Regional Clerk in consultation with the Region's Accessibility Co-ordinator.

The Plan is consistent with the principles of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

Feedback

The Office of the Regional Clerk welcomes feedback on the manner in which services are provided to persons with disabilities during the Election process. Feedback can be provided via email to clerks@durham.ca or by telephone to 905-668-7711, extension 2100.

Post-Election report

As required under section 12.1(3) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, within 90 days of voting day, the Office of the Regional Clerk shall submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities which will incorporate any feedback received.

Appendix 1 – The Regional Municipality of Durham 2022 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Appendix 2 – Corporate Accessibility Policy