



STAFF REPORT

Department: Corporate Services/Clerks

To: Mayor and Members of Council

Meeting Date: December 7, 2022

Report No.: CSR-2022-65

Report Title: 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections – Removal and Prevention of Accessibility Barriers

Recommendation:

That Report CSR-2022-65, 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections – Removal and Prevention of Accessibility Barriers dated December 7, 2022, be received; and

That, as set out in the Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan, 2022, a copy of this Report be forwarded to the Midland Accessibility Advisory Committee and be made available to the public via the Town of Midland website and through the Clerk's Office.

Background:

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (the "Act") requires the Clerk to have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. Accordingly, the Clerk produced an Elections Accessibility Plan in the Spring of 2022. The Plan was posted on the Town's Elections website.

Section 12.1(3) of the *Act* also requires the Clerk to report, within 90 days of the election, about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. This report is to be made available to the public.

Analysis:

This was the first year an exclusive internet/telephone voting system, provided by Intelivote Systems Inc., was utilized. Council's decision to move to this system included considerations of the COVID-19 factor and the recognition that voting online or by telephone would have many advantages for those with accessibility issues. Voters could vote 24-7 from their homes.

To ensure fulfillment of the requirements under the *Act*, the following actions were taken to identify barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities:

- The Midland Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) was consulted regarding the new internet/telephone election process.
- An accessibility checklist was developed for election staff for conducting these site visits. The voting locations also included the Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes.
- Voting equipment (tables, chairs, laptops, telephones) at the Voter Assistance Centre were also assessed to ensure that we were meeting the needs of the electorate.

The following actions were taken to remove and prevent barriers affecting Midland electors and potential candidates with disabilities:

Communications and Information

- Information regarding accessibility measures was included in general election advertising.
- Election information for electors and candidates was posted on the Town's website under WCAG 2.0 Level AA guidelines, compatible with screen reading software.
- Communication was available in alternative formats for electors and candidates upon request.
- Printed material generated by the Town of Midland was provided in an Arial font, minimum 11 point, and could be made available in a font (print) size 16 to 20 points or larger. We did not receive requests for larger print.

Internet Voting

The Intelivote System utilized met Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It was compliant with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information, such as with audio.

Eligible voters were able to vote on-line, using a smart phone, tablet device, gaming device or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software.

Telephone Voting

Telephone barriers may be identified as low volume, use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menu options.

The Intelivote telephone voting application provided the following:

- Service on all types of touch tone phones and wireless devices.
- Clear, plain language.
- Menu options that appeared easy to follow, advising when to select options and provision for confirmation of the voter's selections.

- Standard volume was used to allow for adjustment dependent on the telephone or device being utilized.

Voter Assistance Centre (VAC)

For those individuals without means to access voting via internet or telephone, or who required the assistance of a trained Election Official, a Voter Assistance Centre at the Municipal Office was open from October 11 to October 24, 2022, to provide in-person internet voting opportunities via laptop (kiosk mode) or telephone.

An accessible voting area was available which was low in height and had a wide area to allow for individuals who use a wheelchair or scooter to vote independently and secretively.

The entrance to the Voter Assistance Centre was accessed from Dominion Avenue via a ramp leading to the entrance. The exterior doors had automatic door opening devices and were wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or other mobility device.

A secondary access from the Third Street parking lot was level. The exterior doors had automatic door opening devices and were wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or other mobility device. The Council Chambers was accessible from this floor via an elevator.

Accessible parking was available in the Third Street parking lot, as well as along Dominion Avenue. The designated parking space(s) were clearly marked with the international Symbol of Accessibility and were on firm and level ground, close to the accessible Third Street building entrance. By-law officers monitored parking throughout the voting period.

Interior access to the Voter Assistance Centre was level and slip resistant. Tripping hazards were removed. The voting area was well lit, and seating was available. Entrance corridors were clear of obstructions and tripping hazards and allowed sufficient space for use of a wheelchair or scooter. Routine checks of entrance and exit routes were made throughout the hours of operation.

Additional barrier removals included:

- Magnification sheets, magnifying glasses and reading glasses were available at the Voter Assistance Centre.
- Electors requiring specialized transit services were able to contact Midland Accessible Transportation (AT) at 705-526-4321 or e-mail transportation@communityreach.ca
- The Town's electronic sign identified the Voter Assistance Centre, and external and internal directional signs clearly marked the Voter Assistance Centre location.
- Election Officials were trained and available at the Voter Assistance Centre to assist the electors.
- Service animals and support persons were permitted in the Voter Assistance Centre

at the Municipal Office.

- Appropriate signage was placed at the Voter Assistance Centre
- Additional seating was provided for those electors who preferred to sit while waiting for assistance.
- Within the Voter Assistance Centre, election workers approached any electors where assistance appeared to be required.
- Staff monitored all elector concerns and ensured that their needs were being met.
- Electors were greeted and provided with assistance and direction with an emphasis on accommodating any accessibility issues.
- Computer cords and extension cords were taped to the floor
- Brightly coloured directional flow arrows were taped on the floor

Long-term Care/Nursing homes

As required by the *Act*, Voter Assistance Centres were set up on specific dates at the five long-term care/nursing homes. Site visits were conducted by staff with the administrator at each facility to ensure full accessibility.

Two Election Officials attended each facility at the designated date to assist residents.

Stakeholder Consideration/Impacts:

The stakeholders are the voters and the candidates. Continuing to adhere to Provincially mandated accessibility standards is a win for everyone. Early dialogue with the Midland Accessibility Advisory Committee was of great assistance in the production and execution of the Election Accessibility Plan. This follow-up report, identifying, removing and preventing barriers serves to improve the election process for all stakeholders going forward.

Options/Alternatives:

That this Report be received as information and be the basis of continued election accessibility evaluations in future election processes.

Financial Impact:

The 2022 Election budget is \$120,000. Any costs associated with meeting accessibility standards and removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities have been included in this budget amount.

Council's Strategic Plan:

N/A

Conclusions:

In preparation for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections, Staff will continue to evaluate the 2022 Municipal Election process and that of past elections to determine ways to further improve the efficiency of the election process for all candidates and electors.

Prepared by: Sherri Edgar, Municipal Clerk

Reviewed by: Andy Campbell, Executive Director Environment & Infrastructure

Approved by: David Denault, Chief Administrative Officer