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**Submitted by:** Alycia Wettlaufer, Legislative Coordinator/Deputy Clerk

**Report No:** 2022-187

**Council Meeting Date:** Regular Council - 07 Dec 2022

**Subject:** 2022 Municipal and School Board Election - Accessibility Report

**File:** C07 Election/2022

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## RECOMMENDATION:

**For Council's information.**

## BACKGROUND & COMMENTS:

Section 12.1(1) of the *Municipal Elections Act* (MEA) states that the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities must be incorporated into the 2022 election process. Further, Section 12.1(3) provides that: "Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public."

Section 12.1(2) of the MEA states that "the Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before voting day in a regular election." The above plan was prepared within the Election Procedures, was posted on the Township website and available for viewing at the Township Office or in any form requested by an elector. The Election Accessibility Plan has been attached to this report.

The second attachment, Township of Zorra Accessibility Report, identifies actions that were taken by staff throughout the election planning process. Because Zorra utilized internet/telephone voting method for the 2022 election, all electors had the opportunity to vote in their homes, thereby addressing many of the accessibility concerns the Township may have encountered had traditional polls been run.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

N/A

## LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

### Goal:

We are an engaged community that values all members and actively encourages involvement, engagement, openness and transparency.

## ATTACHMENTS:

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[Attachment A - Municipal Election Accessibility Plan 2022](#)  
[Attachment B - Township of Zorra Accessibility Report](#)

**Approved By:**

Don MacLeod, Chief Administrative Officer  
Karen Martin, Director of Corporate Services

**Status:**

Approved - 01 Dec 2022  
Pending

# The Township of Zorra



## 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Township Clerk is responsible for the appropriate conduct of the municipal elections in the Township of Zorra. The Municipal Elections Act puts responsibility on the clerk to consider the needs of the electors and candidates with disabilities.

This plan will address the specific accessibility requirements in relation to the 2022 Municipal Election in the Township of Zorra.

The Township of Zorra has made great efforts in promoting a barrier free community. To ensure that the 2022 Municipal Election is consistent with the core principles of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, this planning document was developed in advance of the election to identify measures to be taken and reported to Council following the election.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

This plan is intended to highlight measures that the Township of Zorra will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives include:

- That persons with disabilities can independently cast their vote and verify their selection.
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates.
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate, or election official.
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Township of Zorra website and social media.

## **3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN**

This Plan is a “living” document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise. To develop the plan, several steps were taken to ensure that the statutory requirements were met, and a feasible implementation plan was in place. During the development of the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan, the following steps shall be implemented:

- Review and analysis of documents, policies and other supporting materials from the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), neighboring municipalities, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), technology suppliers and other various stakeholder groups.
- The draft plan will be forwarded to the Oxford County Accessibility Advisory Committee for their review and comment.

- Establish staff training standards and practices directly related to the Election to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in a positive customer service environment and ensure that all Election Officials recognize that a voter's needs shall be accommodated.

#### **4. STAFF TRAINING**

All Township staff carrying out election duties will complete the Township of Zorra Accessible Customer Service Training. Staff will also complete specific election training to recognize and ensure that persons with disabilities are serviced in a way that accommodates their individual needs.

Training will include:

- How to communicate with persons with disabilities
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices, require the assistance of a support person, or a support animal
- How to clearly explain internet and telephone voting
- What to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services
- How to provide voter assistance if required.

#### **5. VOTING METHODS**

The 2022 Township of Zorra Municipal Election will be working with Intelivote Systems Inc. to provide eVoting services to eligible voters. This includes the convenience and independence of voting from anywhere via telephone or Internet during the October 13 – 24, 2022 voting period.

Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can present accessible opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity.

The Intelivote Voting System provides voters with the capability to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for persons with disabilities who may have mobility restrictions, visual and/or hearing impairment, and/or have a difficult time with transportation. Additionally, persons who have assistive devices set up in their homes can now use them to assist with casting a ballot privately and independently.

By allowing persons with disabilities to vote from any location and from a selection of methods, there is an increase in the capability for the voter to vote without any assistance. This provides persons with disabilities the same independence and privacy in participating in the election as other voters. If persons with disabilities do

require assistance in the voting process, trained Election Officials will be present at the Voter Help Centre throughout the voting period.

#### **4.1 Internet Voting**

Eligible voters may vote online, using a smart phone, tablet device, gaming device or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software. Eligible voters may vote online provided they input their date of birth, PIN (provided by the Township), and other qualifying information, to access the internet address provided in their Voter Instruction Letter.

The Intelivote System has been created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is 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.

#### **4.2 Telephone Voting**

Eligible voters may vote using a telephone, by dialing the toll-free telephone number that is provided in the Voter Information Letter. Eligible voters will have to input their date of birth and PIN number (also contained in the Voter Information Letter) to access an audio ballot. Communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. 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 provides the following:

- Service on all types of phones and wireless devices.
- Clear, plain language.
- Menu options that are easy to follow, advising when to select options and provision of confirmation of the voter's selections.
- Standard volume is used to allow for adjustment dependent of the telephone or device being utilized.

## **6. VOTER HELP CENTRE**

The Voter Help Centre is located at the Township Office (274620 27<sup>th</sup> Line, Ingersoll). The following considerations are taken into account regarding the Voter Help Centre:

### **5.1 Entrance and Exit**

The route to the entrance of the Voter Help Centre shall be unobstructed and accessible. The route shall be wide enough to allow for an individual using a wheelchair, scooter, other assistive device, or service animal to travel safely. Doors into the Voter Help Centre will have automatic door opening devices or will be propped open in a safe manner. Routine checks of entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the hours of operation.

## **5.2 Parking**

Accessible parking shall be available at the Voter Help Centre. The designated parking space(s) shall be clearly marked with the international Symbol of Accessibility and will be on firm and level ground, close to the entrance of the Voter Help Centre.

## **5.3 Accessible Voting Booth**

The voting booth will have a wide area to allow individuals using mobility aids to vote independently and secretly. In the voting booth there will be a large, touchscreen tablet on a stand. If the tablet height needs to be adjusted, it can easily be removed from the stand to be held on its own without assistance.

# **7. VOTING ASSISTANCE**

## **6.1 Support Person/Friend of the Voter**

Pursuant to the Township Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy and 2022 Township Election Policies and Procedures, people with disabilities shall be permitted to be accompanied by a support person at any voting location. A designated support person and/or 'Friend of the Voter' will be administered an oath of secrecy/confidentiality by an Election Official prior to providing any such assistance.

The Help Centre staff will, in conjunction with the person with the disability, determine the extent to which they need assistance and the best way to provide assistance.

## **6.2 Service Animals**

Pursuant to the Township Accessible Customer Service Policy, individuals requiring service animals are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at all voting locations.

# **8. COMMUNICATION**

The 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan will be made available at Township Office and by way of the Township of Zorra website [www.zorra.ca](http://www.zorra.ca). Alternative formats will be made available upon request.

Information regarding the accessibility measures provided for the 2022 Municipal Election shall be included in general election advertising as well as in the 2022 Municipal Election Nomination Package.

## **7.1 Election Materials**

The Township of Zorra is required, as per the Accessible Customer Service Standard, to provide a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that considers the person's disability.

### **Alternate Formats**



Alternate formats are other ways of publishing information besides regular print. Some of these formats can be used by everyone while others are designed to address the specific needs of a user.

The Township of Zorra and the person with a disability may agree upon the format to be used for the document or information.

In the event the information is not generated by the Township of Zorra or is supplied by a third party, the Township of Zorra will make every effort to obtain the information from the third party in an alternate format and/or will attempt to assist the Elector by providing assistive equipment.

### **General Election Materials**

**Large Print** – Printed material generated by the Township of Zorra will be provided in Arial font, minimum 12 point, and can be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

**Website** – Information generated by the Township of Zorra on the website in relation to the election will be compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A and allow for assistive software to be utilized. In addition, website font can be adjusted within the browser's functionality to aid the user in reading the information.

### **7.2 Service Disruptions**

From time to time and/or for unforeseen circumstances beyond the Township of Zorra's control, temporary service disruptions may be experienced. In the event of a temporary accessible service disruption, Election Officials will commit to making reasonable efforts to ensure that services are reinstated as quickly as possible and that alternative services are provided where feasible.

In these instances of service disruptions, the Township of Zorra shall provide reasonable notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by persons with disabilities.

Notice of these temporary disruptions shall be provided in a conspicuous place and manner at the respective location(s). Information shall also be posted on the Township of Zorra's website. This notice shall include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Accessible services in relation to this plan include voting places, election materials and/or voting provisions for Electors with disabilities at the voting place.

In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of voting places during the advance vote or on Election Day, notices of disruption will be posted in real time on the Township of Zorra's website.

## 9. CANDIDATES

Candidates must also have regard to the needs of electors with disabilities. Campaign offices, election materials and canvassing should all be reviewed to ensure that they are fully accessible. The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has released several quick reference documents to assist candidates with accessible elections considerations:

- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices](#)
- [Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings](#)

## 10. REPORTING

Pursuant to Section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, within 90 days after voting day, the Clerk shall submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

## 11. FEEDBACK

The Township Clerk welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes need to be considered and ways in which the Township can improve the delivery of an accessible election. This plan is a living document and will continue to undergo changes when necessary.

Feedback on this plan can be submitted through the following:

- Telephone: 519-485-2490 ext. 7250
- Email: [clerk@zorra.ca](mailto:clerk@zorra.ca)
- In-person: 274620 27<sup>th</sup> Line, Ingersoll, N5C 3J6

**Attachment B**  
2022 Municipal Election – Township of Zorra Accessibility Report

Purpose of Report

The following represents the report to Council as required by Section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

General Considerations

The 2022 Township of Zorra Municipal and School Board Elections were conducted over a twelve-day voting period (October 13 – 24, 2022) as a 'vote anywhere, anytime' paperless election. Electors were not required to attend a specific polling location based on eligibility to vote, and instead were encouraged to vote remotely by telephone or online, 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Those individuals requiring assistance or with limited access to telephone or internet voting were able to attend one of two voting help sessions, or the Voter Assistance Centre (i.e., the Township municipal office), to cast their ballot. If those individuals requiring assistance were unable to attend the voting help sessions or the Voter Assistance Centre, Township election officials made alternate arrangements to assist said voters.

Voting Methods

For the 2022 Election, the Township contracted Intelivote to provide internet and telephone voting services. Online and telephone voting methods increase convenience, sustainability, and accessibility for the election. Voters were granted the independence of voting anywhere in the world via telephone and internet. This type of voting method allows voters to fill out their ballots in the privacy and convenience of their own home and to vote when they wish, which provides for easy voting for voters, including voters with disabilities. Furthermore, internet and telephone voting remove potential obstacles such as inclement weather, family/work commitments, and transportation.

Through internet voting, eligible voters were provided with the opportunity to vote online via several personal devices including but not limited to tablets, desktop computers, smart phones, and other internet-connected devices with a web browser, alongside any accompanying assistive devices or software one may require. The internet voting method supported independent, private, and convenient voting throughout the twelve-day voting period. Internet voting eliminated the need for many voters to attend the Voter Assistance Centre and/or voting help sessions in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those with mobility issues.

Moreover, Intelivote provided a service compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the online voting system.

Individuals who may not have been comfortable voting online or may not have had access to the internet were able to vote using the telephone. The system incorporated clear English and French language menu options, which were presented in an easy-to-follow order.

Identification of Barriers

The following actions were taken to identify barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities:

Actions	
1.	Had access to an accessibility checklist for election personnel to use when conducting election work, if required.
2.	Assessed voting method and equipment to ensure it met the needs of the electorate.
3.	Assessed the accessibility and physical barriers of the voter help locations, as well as the Voter Assistance Centre.
4.	Assessed the risk of our past election administration practices, identifying the likelihood of the creation of risk to accessibility of candidates and electors.

Removal and Prevention of Barriers

The following actions were taken to remove and prevent barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities:

*Communication and Information*

Actions	
1.	Ensured communication initiatives and information for candidates and electors were available in alternate formats (upon request).
2.	Provided all documentation and forms in large print to assist visually impaired (upon request).
3.	Provided candidates and staff with information relating to accessible customer service. All election staff completed accessible customer service training.
4.	Election staff were authorized to assist any voter on request, including communicating the voting instructions, with the voter's consent.
5.	Utilized pictures, where possible, to demonstrate the message and explain election/voting instructions.
6.	Utilized radio advertisements to promote the election.
7.	Offered the use of an interpreter for voters, where possible, if advance notice provided.

*Voting Locations*

Actions	
1.	Utilized the Municipal Office and Council chambers (on the main floor) as the Voting Assistance Centre to ensure accessibility.
2.	Provided one central voting location (Voting Assistance Centre) prior to voting day and on voting day which was physically accessible. Also ensured that the voter help session locations (Embryo-Zorra Community Centre and Beauty Room) were physically accessible for voters to cast their ballots.
3.	The Voting Assistance Centre and the voter help session locations were set up with increased space between voting kiosk tables to accommodate mobility devices and strollers.
4.	Provided seating areas throughout the voting location for electors needing a rest and for support persons.
5.	Provided appropriate signage.
6.	Permitted service animals and support persons in voting location.
7.	Designated parking available for persons with disabilities at voting location.

### *Voting*

Actions	
1.	Established voting booths on tables which were low and wide enough for easy access to enable the use of a wheelchair or scooter to allow the voter to vote independently and secretly; also provided seating for both elector and support person.
2.	Permitted an elector who needed assistance in voting to have such assistance. For example, a support person may make click the mark on the ballot for someone with a disability or may read the ballot aloud for them.
3.	Provided extended advance voting opportunities for all electors, with voting opening on October 13.
4.	Provided vote anywhere in the municipality using internet or telephone voting.
5.	If an elector was unable to attend the office to be added to the voters list, staff delivered and picked up the appropriate forms.
6.	A laptop, desktop computer, iPad and telephone were available for voters to use at the Voting Assistance Centre to cast their vote. Voters were able to choose the method that they were most comfortable using.

### *Staff Training*

Actions	
1.	Staff training incorporated provisions to meet accessible customer service standards.
2.	Provided reference materials to election officials when necessary.
3.	Monitored elector's concerns and ensured their needs were met.
4.	Directed election staff to observe electors during discussions with them, and if it appeared that the voter was having difficulty understanding, ensured that the voter was able to clearly see the speaker.
5.	Encouraged election workers to approach an elector if it appeared that the

	elector required assistance to get around in the voting location. Elections officials offered assistance to help, but did not assume an individual needed help.
6.	Election staff were trained to identify a service animal and follow the Municipality's Accessible Customer Service Policy.
7.	Maintained a friendly and approachable demeanor, regardless of how tired or hassled a worker may have felt.
8.	Check the access doors frequently to offer assistance and watch for electors unable to easily enter the building.
9.	Evaluate above effectiveness post-election.