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2022 Town of Ajax Post-Election Accessibility Report

Background

The 2022 Town of Ajax Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure that proactive accessibility considerations were included in the planning and implementation of the 2022 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections. The Plan identified actions to be taken to ensure equal and equitable election practices not only for electors, but for candidates and election staff as well. Objectives included ensuring:

- That all Voter Assistance Centres are accessible;
- That persons with disabilities can independently cast their vote and verify their selection, and that assistance is available if requested;
- 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 staff; and
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the local newspaper, election communications, Town of Ajax website, and social media.

The following summary identifies the actions and initiatives taken during administration of the 2022 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections, as they relate to the prevention, identification, and removal of accessibility barriers.

General Considerations

The 2022 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections were conducted over an eight-day voting period (October 17 – 24, 2022) as a ‘vote anywhere, anytime’ paperless election. Electors were not required to attend a specific polling location based on their 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 three Voter Assistance Centres, regardless of their ward of residence, and could cast an online ballot from any location.

Planning

To ensure accessible and inclusive coordination and implementation of the election, the Election Team partnered with the Abilities Centre in early 2022 to participate in its LEAD assessment program. LEAD (Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery) is a methodology to help governments, public and private sector organizations define and embed inclusion and accessibility into strategic planning, daily operations, program environments, and organizational culture. This partnership consisted of reviewing key elements of the election for accessibility and inclusion. Staff were provided with an assessment report which included

summary recommendations that helped to guide the Municipal Election Accessibility Plan and future election planning considerations.

Voter Assistance Centres

Staff reviewed all Voter Assistance Centres (VACs) (3 at the Town's community centres, 5 special VACs at retirement/long-term care/older-adult housing residences) in relation to accessible routes, ingress and egress, parking, floor plan, and technology criteria. A trial VAC was set up to assist with determining appropriate spatial and technology arrangements and detailed site diagrams were created for each location to ensure consistent set-up and voter experience. Rest area seating was provided at all locations, entryways were unobstructed, and all technology cords were securely covered to prevent tripping hazards. VACs were set up with increased space between voting kiosk tables to accommodate mobility devices and strollers. In addition to tabletop privacy screens, 6' x 8' pipe and drape screening between each kiosk table was set up to increase the privacy of voting. This configuration eliminated the need for voters to have to pass behind a voter casting their vote to access the second kiosk at the table.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Due to the volume of technology cabling present at each VAC, it is recommended that rubber matting be rented/purchased to cover cords and wiring to further increase safety and avoidance of hazards.
- Consider reducing the number of revision stations and kiosks to decrease the distance of travel required within a VAC.

Accessible Routes

All VACs were accessible by Durham Region Transit and public transit information was posted on the Town's election website. Supplementary large print signage on the exterior and interior routes and access points was posted to identify the VAC.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Branded decals were put up at all community centre main entrances to promote the election. The main entrance to the facility was not necessarily the primary entrance to access the VAC, which led to navigational confusion and frustration for some voters. If decals are to be used in the future, for clarity, it is recommended they be placed to identify the primary entrance to access the VAC.
- Consider relocating the Audley Recreation Centre VAC location from the Banquet Hall back to the gymnasium to provide the shortest distance possible to access the site. Hosting the VAC in the gymnasium allows for more convenient traffic flow from the facility and adjacent library branch, as the banquet hall is not connected to the rest of the facility and is located at the most eastern side of the building.

Ingress and Egress

Entrances and exits to all VACs were unobstructed and provided appropriate width for mobility device access. Where automated door operators were not present, wooden doorstops were used to prop open doors.

Parking

Designated accessible parking spaces were available at all VAC locations. No parking volume issues were reported or observed.

Voting Methods

For the 2022 Election, the Town contracted Simply Voting to provide internet and telephone voting services. The continued implementation of online and telephone voting methods built upon the increased convenience, sustainability, and accessibility of previous Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Elections. Voters were granted the independence of voting anywhere in the world via telephone and internet.

Telephone Voting

Individuals who may not have been comfortable voting online or may not have had access to the internet or a device were able to vote using the telephone. The Simply Voting telephone voting service accommodated telephone voting via all types of touchtone and wireless telecommunication devices. The system incorporated clear English and French language options, which were presented in an easy-to-follow order. Voters were advised when to input their selection and confirmation and a confirmation was reviewed prior to final submission. A total of 1,157 electors cast their ballot via telephone voting, representing 6.0% of all ballots cast.

Internet Voting

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, anytime, even from the comfort of one's home, or while on the go, throughout the eight-day voting period. Internet voting eliminated the need for many voters to attend a VAC in person to vote. This is an added benefit to those who may be immuno-compromised, have mobility difficulties, or barriers to accessing transportation.

Simply Voting provided a service compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2 Level AA) which is compatible with all market-leading screen readers and web accessible devices, so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the online voting system for an optimal independent user experience.

A total of 18,048 electors cast their ballot via internet voting. 83.7% of all ballots cast were voted remotely, and 10.3% of all ballots cast were voted onsite at a VAC. A voter exit survey was presented to voters casting ballots remotely, which reported that 7.71% of survey respondents identified as a person with a disability.

Customer Service

For those voters who attended a VAC in person, several forms of assistance were available. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a variety of supports including service and therapy animals and assistive devices, all in accordance with provincial legislation and Town

customer service policies. Voters were permitted to be accompanied by a support person (other than a candidate or scrutineer) who could provide support to the voter after completing the “Friend of the Voter Oath” by an election staff member. Issuance of the oath granted the support person the authority to accompany and assist a voter behind the kiosk and privacy screen. Election staff were also authorized to help any voter on request, including with the physical casting of an online ballot, with the voter’s consent.

In-person Voter Assistance

For those voters without access to telephone or online voting opportunities, or who sought assistance from Election Staff, three large VAC locations were open for three days each in advance of Election Day, as well as for the full Election Day. At VACs, voters were provided with access to internet voting kiosks and Election staff. Each location was set up with 30 internet voting kiosks and 14 revision stations. At the three main VACs, 2-3 large touchscreen monitors and styluses, in addition to mice and keyboards, were deployed, providing an opportunity for those with a lesser level of dexterity to complete an online ballot. A large poster was displayed at all locations indicating all languages spoken by staff at that location, and Election Officers indicated languages spoken on their ID lanyards, to enhance the level of service available to electors.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Increase the number of touchscreen large-monitor all-in-one voting kiosks available at VACs (limited vendor availability in 2022).
- Improve visual identification for election officer and IT staff so they are more easily identifiable (e.g. provide t-shirts or badges instead of lanyards).

Special Voter Assistance

Staff visited five locations licensed by the Province of Ontario as retirement residences, or long-term care facilities to provide special voter assistance and access to online voting via touchscreen kiosks and mobile tablets. Set up of these Special VACs eliminated the need for those residents to attend an off-site VAC if they did not have access to internet or a telephone.

Virtual Voter Assistance

New in 2022, staff implemented a virtual voter registration process, whereby electors could schedule a Zoom appointment with Election Staff to complete the credentialing and enumeration process virtually and be added to the Voters’ List. This service increased convenience to individuals who could not attend a VAC in-person for various reasons.

Additionally, the Election Office was contacted by a family of three electors requiring assistance with online voting for an individual with visual impairment and two individuals who were immuno-compromised and unable to access their mailed Voter Information Letter. Election staff scheduled virtual appointments with the family to confidentially meet with each elector and provide personal assistance including navigating the online voting platform, and accessing their individual voting credentials. This service was very well-received and appreciated by the electors.

Election Helpline

An election telephone helpline (905-619-2529 ext. VOTE) was set up to provide live assistance to callers during office hours. This provided another channel to access election related information for those who did not have access to the election website. During the voting period, the hours of service were extended into the evenings and weekends.

Election Staff

The Election staff complement for the 2022 VACs included 15 VAC Managers (5 Town Staff per site in multiple shifts throughout the day), 42 Revision Officers (14 per site), 54 E-Vote Officers (18 per site), and 1 IT staff per site, representing the diverse Ajax community through their language skills, election experience, culture, and abilities.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the E-Vote Officer and Revision Officer positions was conducted using an accessible online application process extended by invitation to the Town's advisory committee members, volunteer portal registrants, and 2018 Town of Ajax Election staff, and the public at-large. The Town also partnered with Community Living Ajax Pickering Whitby (CLAPW) to employ three program participants as Election Officers.

Applicants took part in group interviews and accommodation requests were facilitated throughout the recruitment process (application form, communication, interview, training, deployment, etc.).

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Seek to build upon the partnership established with CLAPW and expand outreach and promotion of recruitment opportunities to other community organizations supporting people with disabilities and other underrepresented communities.

Training

Election staff received online and in-person training specific to their role. Training included content on health and safety, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and the provision of accessible customer service to persons with visible and invisible disabilities in the context of the municipal election. Training was delivered in multiple formats including in large group and low-ratio settings. Instead of time/date specific online webinar training delivery, a portion of election staff training was delivered online through the Town's online training platform, allowing training to be rolled out for self-guided, convenient tracking and completion.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Expand online and virtual training delivery and engagement opportunities to provide flexibility, independence, and convenience for the completion of election officer training.

Communications

Print publications relating to the 2022 Election included a notation regarding availability of alternate format on request. Web content on the Election website ajax.ca/vote was compliant

with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements. A variety of communications methods were used (print, social media, signage, and video with captioning). An election infographic was designed to provide a visual explanation of the voting process.

Staff participated in several events and outreach initiatives relating to the promotion of the Election and revisions to the Voters' List.

- Music in the Square (promotional hand-outs)
- Older Adult Wellness Fair (information station)
- In-person Revision Clinics:
 - Town facilities and library branches
 - Ashley Manor
 - Harwood Manor
 - Westwood Manor
 - Life Centre Not-for-Profit Housing Corporation
 - Unity Village
- Promotional Materials:
 - St. Andrews Seniors Centre
 - Village Seniors Centre
 - Lakeridge Gardens Long-term Care Home
 - Chartwell Ballycliffe Long-term Care Home
 - Chartwell Hardwood Retirement Residence
 - Revera Winbourne Park Long-term Care Home
 - Revera Westney Gardens Retirement Residence

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- Consider opportunities for targeted outreach to CLAPW and other diverse community groups to facilitate information sessions or information packages to educate an inclusive group of electors on general election information such as how to verify they are on the Voters' List, the voting options available, and where to find candidate information.
- Establish an accessibility and inclusion Testing User Group, comprised of individuals with a variety of disabilities to help review communications and materials to identify potential barriers from various lived experiences.

Notice of Service Disruption

Notice of Service Disruption templates were provided to all voter assistance centres to be posted in the event of temporary disruptions to service onsite (power failure, elevator out of service, etc.). The posters provided information on alternative voting services and contact information.

Voter Information Letter

All eligible electors included on the Voters List received a Voter Information Letter (VIL) in the mail, containing instructions and information about online and telephone voting methods, voter

assistance centre hours and locations, as well as a unique voter PIN. Election Staff worked with Simply Voting to ensure the VIL provided plain language and formatting. A Quick Response (QR) code was also added to the VIL for convenient access to the online voting site.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- During the voting period, several calls were received by the Election Hotline from voters indicating that they had inadvertently discarded their VIL prior to voting. Consideration for changing the type, colour, and or marking of the VIL envelope is encouraged, to visibly identify the envelope as something other than “junk mail.” Perhaps using a brown paper envelope like that used for banking or utility mail may differentiate the VIL envelope from unwanted correspondence.
- The colour contrast of the PIN number on the VIL generated by the vendor was a mid-grey colour on a white background that did not meet 4.5:1 colour contract ratio and may have been difficult to read for some individuals. The dark grey colour was chosen instead of black for the PIN by the vendor for security reasons so that the PIN would not show through the envelope and VIL as easily. Increasing the colour contrast for the PIN is recommended for future VILs, and use of alternative envelope material as suggested previously may help to mitigate security concerns.

Candidates

A section relating to accessibility was included in candidate information packages, and reference to the following resources was included in the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan:

- [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](#)
- [AMCTO Candidate’s Guide to Accessible Elections](#)

A common comment received from voters at VACs was that information on candidates was not easily found. While the Town maintained a list of candidate website, social media, and contact information on the Election website, there exists a systemic disconnect between electors being aware of who is running for office, what candidates’ platforms were, and where to access candidate information.

Opportunities for Improvement in 2026

- The Accessibility Advisory Committee has expressed interest in developing a tip sheet and/or best practice guidelines for candidate election campaign accessibility.
- While it remains the responsibility of the candidate to promote their campaign to eligible electors, the Town could consider additional promotion of Candidate Events coordinated through the Town’s Candidate Event program and promotion of the list of

candidates on the Election website to elevate awareness of information available to electors.

Feedback

Additional feedback regarding the accessibility of the 2022 Town of Ajax Municipal and School Board Election can be submitted through regular mail, email, telephone, facsimile, or by using the Town's Customer Feedback Form, which is available to all staff at all service counters in Town facilities and via the Town's website.

Phone: 905-683-4550

TextNet: 1-866-460-4489

Fax: 905-683-1061

Mail: Elections – Town of Ajax, 65 Harwood Ave. S., Ajax, ON, L1S 2H9

Email: accessibility@ajax.ca


