

The focus of this plan is to ensure that electoral services are accessible to all voters and candidates and create a positive and inclusive voting experience for all.

Municipality of Grey Highlands Accessible Election Plan 2022

September 2022

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Introduction

The Municipality of Grey Highlands is committed to making municipal elections accessible to all citizens of Grey Highlands – including voters, candidates, employees and volunteers who participate in the election administration. The Municipality of Grey Highlands Accessible Election Plan 2022 supports and enhances the Municipality's policies, multi-year Accessibility Plan and commitment to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Purpose

The focus of the Accessible Election Plan 2022 is to:

- a) ensure that electoral services are accessible to all voters and candidates;
- b) identify and eliminate barriers for persons with disabilities; and
- c) create a positive and inclusive voting experience.

Plan Development and Review

The Municipality of Grey Highlands Accessible Election Plan 2022 was developed by Municipal Clerk's Elections Team.

The following criteria were considered in the development of this Plan: Policies and procedures must be consistent with the principles of the [Municipal Elections Act, 1996](#), the [Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001](#), and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#), and respect the dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity of persons with disabilities.

The Municipal Clerk's Office will continue to develop and adjust the Accessible Election Plan 2022 in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. This Plan will be reviewed and updated as new opportunities are identified or become available. Following the election, the Municipality Clerk will review the outcomes with the County of Grey Accessibility Advisory Committee to identify potential areas of improvement and any additional barriers experienced during the election that can be addressed in future plans. The Municipality Clerk will report to Municipal Council within 90 days following the election on the outcomes and performance of the Accessible Election Plan 2022.

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Legislative Requirements – *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended

The Municipal Clerk is responsible for conducting municipal elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure all voters have the opportunity to fully participate in the 2018 Municipal Election.

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended states the following:

- 12.1(1) A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (8).
- 12.1(2) 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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.
- 12.1(3) 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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.
- 41(3) The clerk shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as they consider necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without the assistance referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 52 (1). 1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 41 (3); 2001, c. 32, s. 30 (1).
- 45(2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (23).

Accessible Customer Service

The Municipal Clerk's Office is committed to providing quality goods and services that are accessible to all persons in accordance with the Municipality of Grey Highlands Accessible Customer Service Standards and in compliance with the customer service standards of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. In fulfilling our mission, the Municipal Clerk's Office will provide services that respect the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

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Definitions and Barrier Types

Disability: The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* defines "disability" as follows:

- (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*.

Attitudinal Barriers: Barriers result when people think, and act based on false assumptions. Example: receptionist talks to an individual's support person because they assume the individual with a disability will not understand.

Information and Communication Barriers: Barriers created when information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population. Example: print that is too small for some people to read and public address systems that alert only people who can hear the message.

Technology Barriers: Barriers occur when technology, or the way it is used, cannot be accessed by people with disabilities. Example: websites that are not accessible to people who are blind and require the use of screen reader software.

Physical and Architectural Barriers: Physical barriers or obstacles that make it difficult for some people to easily access a place. Example: a door knob that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility or strength, or a hallway or door that is too narrow to allow a person who uses a wheelchair to pass through safely.

Organizational (Systemic) Barriers: Occur when policies, practices or procedures result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded. Example: A hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities.

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Key Areas of Focus in the Elections Process

The Elections Office has identified the following five key areas of focus within the election process to prevent and remove accessibility barriers:

1. Elections Communication and Information
2. Voting Locations
3. Voting Methods
4. Staffing
5. Assistance for Candidates

Key Area 1: Elections Communication and Information

Initiative: Provide an informative and accessible election website

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Ensure election information is available in clear, simple language.	Information/ Communication	Feedback received
Continuously update election information posted on the Municipality's website to reflect the most recent information, and any temporary disruptions.	Technology	# of website hits
Ensure election web pages are W3C Consortium WCAG 2.0 Level A compliant.	Technology	Website meets requirements

Initiative: Provide election information in alternative formats and through multiple channels

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Present information about election accessibility to stakeholder and community organizations upon request.	Information/ Communication	# of requests
Produce a "How to Vote" pamphlet in English and make the booklet available in both print and alternative formats.	Information/ Communication	# of requests for accessible formats
Provide an accessible "How to Vote" video and post it to the Municipality's website.	Information/ Communication	# of views (if developed internally)
Provide How to Vote information in local Newspaper	Information/ Communication	# of posts

Key Area 2: Voting Locations

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Initiative: Ensure all Voting Locations are accessible to voters with disabilities

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Determine the potential location of Voting Locations with accessibility in mind.	Organizational	Date potential locations determined.
Provide information to voters on location of Voting Locations.	Information/ Communication	# of people that attend the voting location.
Review all potential voting locations for accessibility including two (2) accessible parking spots near the closest entrance to the poll(s).	Physical/ Architectural	# of locations with 2 accessible parking spots
All voting locations to be inspected prior to Voting Day to ensure accessibility for all voters.	Physical/ Architectural	# of locations inspected
Where possible, the accessible entrance is to be the same as the main entrance.	Physical/ Architectural	# of locations where main entrance is also the accessible entrance
<p>In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of voting locations during the Voting Period, notices of disruption will be posted as soon as possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -on the Municipality's website; -Facebook; -Twitter; and -At the site of the disruption. <p>When applicable, a media advisory will be issued.</p>	Information/ Communication	<p># of notices posted</p> <p># of interactions on social media</p>

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Initiative: Ensure all Voting Location accessibility entrances are clearly identified

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Ensure voters with accessibility needs are directed to the accessible voting entrance by prominent signage, if different from main entrance.	Physical/ Architectural	# of accessibility related signs at each voting place
Use large-print signage at voting places; train election workers to communicate with people who are blind or have low vision.	Information/ Communication	Feedback

Initiative: Provide a contact to deal with accessibility issues, concerns or complaints

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Establish a website link to an accessibility feedback form so an elector who encounters an accessibility issue can contact Election or Accessibility staff. Email: elections@greyhighlands.ca	Information/ Communication	# of accessibility related emails
Use the received feedback to ensure that voting locations are accessible to voters, as required by the <i>Municipal Elections Act, 1996</i> .	Organizational	# of modifications made based on feedback, if necessary

Initiative: Provide information on accessibility features available at Voting Locations

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Provide details of accessibility features available to voters and candidates on the Municipality's website.	Information/ Communication	# of webpage hits

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Key Area 3: Voting Methods

Initiative: Provide accessible voting opportunities

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Provide voters with the option to vote by internet or in person.	Technology / mobility	# of paper votes # of internet votes
Review ballot design to increase legibility; Increase legibility of ballots through use of accessible font styles and sizes, appropriate case usage, and colours, where possible.	Technology	Ballot design review
Provide the availability of trained staff to assist in marking ballots using the Oath of Assistance if necessary.	Technology / attitudinal	# of electors who completed the Oath of Assistance.

Initiative: Provide voting opportunities in long-term care facilities

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Establish a voting location at Grey Gables in order to allow eligible residents of the facility the opportunity to vote	Physical/ Architectural	# of long-term care facilities where a voting place has been established

Initiative: Provide assistance to voters with disabilities as requested

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Upon request, assist the elector with voting or reading of ballot.	Organizational	average # of requests
Train Deputy Returning Officers to assist voters with voting process when requested.	Organizational	# of Deputy Returning Officers trained
Enable voters to swear an oath if they are unable to provide the required identification and/or documentation with a signature.	Organizational	# of oaths

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Initiative: Provide instructions on the use of accessible voting equipment

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Produce or provide videos that outline the voting process and the accessible voting technologies in use for the election. Videos will include accessible elements and captioning. Post the videos on the Municipality's website.	Information/ Communication	# of videos produced # of views

Key Area 4: Staffing

Initiative: Provide refresher accessibility training to all election staff

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Develop accessibility refresher training and reference materials for all elections staff, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities; • how to interact with persons who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person; • how to use voting equipment and assistive devices to deliver election services; • what to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services. 	Organizational	# of staff trained
Require all elections staff and workers to confirm in writing that they have received elections and accessibility training.	Organizational	# of signatures

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Key Area 5: Assistance to Candidates

Initiative: Provide information on how to make campaigns accessible to the public

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Provide candidates with references and links to provincial publications, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates' Guide to Accessible Elections (by Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario) 	Organizational/ Attitudinal	# of references distributed # of candidates reached

Initiative: Provide access to information in alternative formats

Strategies	Barrier Type	Measurable
Ensure the candidate guide and/or other relevant publications are available in an accessible format, upon request.	Information/ Communication	# of accessible candidate guides distributed
Provide the Municipality of Grey Highlands Voters' List in an electronic format to candidates, upon request.	Technology	# of electronic Voters' Lists distributed
Hold candidate information sessions in accessible locations.	Technology	# of information sessions held virtually
Offer to meet candidates in person to provide candidate information alternative to the virtual session	Technology	# of in-person candidate sessions # of candidates in attendance

Post-Election Report

Following the election, the Municipal Clerk will review the outcomes with the County of Grey Accessibility Advisory Committee to identify potential areas of improvement and any additional barriers experienced during the election that can be addressed in future plans. The Municipal Clerk will report to Municipal Council within 90 days following the election on the outcomes and performance of the Accessible Election Plan 2022.

The Municipal Clerk's post-election report will be posted on the Municipality's website in a format accessible to persons with disabilities and distributed to disability groups and other stakeholders, upon request.

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Feedback

The Municipal Clerk welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes and improvements can be considered and ways in which the Municipality can improve the delivery of an accessible election. The feedback process provides the Municipal Clerk's elections staff with an opportunity to carry out corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences, address training needs, enhance service delivery, and offer accessible methods of providing election services.

Please provide us with your feedback so that we can continuously improve the accessibility of Grey Highlands municipal elections. Feedback can be submitted to the Elections Office through a variety of methods including:

Phone: 519-986-2811

Email: elections@greyhighlands.ca

Fax: 519-986-3643

In Person: 206 Toronto Street, Unit 1, Markdale

Mail: PO Box 409, Markdale, ON N0C 1H0

The Grey Highlands Accessibility Feedback Form can be found on the Municipality of Grey Highlands website. This form will be forwarded to the Elections Office for action. Additionally, staff can, upon request, complete and submit the feedback form on behalf of a person with a disability. Each completed form is reviewed by the Municipal Clerk's elections staff who will respond to the candidate or voter directly within five business days, providing an anticipated action and timeframe for a full response where appropriate.

If you require this information in an alternate format, please contact the Elections Office.