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## **2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-Election**

### **Post-Election Accessibility Report**

#### **1. Introduction**

When preparing for the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election, ensuring all voters in Cambridge had equal opportunities to cast their ballots independently remained a priority by identifying barriers that could limit voters' independence and dignity. The following summary highlights actions and initiatives during the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election administration relating to accessibility barrier prevention, identification, and removal.

#### **2. Legislative Requirements – Municipal Elections Act, 1996**

In accordance with Section 12 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the City Clerk is responsible for conducting municipal elections and establishing policies and procedures to provide all electors with opportunities to fully participate in the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election. While a post-election accessibility report is only required following a regular election under the legislation, the City of Cambridge has opted to publish this report to continue to be transparent and accountable.

#### **3. The 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan**

For the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election, the City of Cambridge continued to utilize the Municipal Election Accessibility Plan crafted prior to the 2022 general election. This accessibility plan was developed in consultation with the City's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Services staff. For the by-election, the plan was provided to all candidates as part of the nomination process and was made publicly available through the City's website.

The key measures in the Accessibility Plan focused on identifying and removing barriers to make the voting process accessible for all voters, especially those with disabilities. Special attention was paid to providing information in accessible formats and accommodating support persons and service animals to assist voters with communication, mobility and other needs.

#### **4. Voting Methods and Opportunities**

The 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election was conducted over a fifteen (15) day voting period commencing at midnight October 30, 2023, and ending November 13, 2023.

Electors were given multiple methods to cast their vote including:

1. In-person Voting
2. Online Voting
3. Institutional Voting (Special Voting Locations)
4. At-Home Voting
5. Voting by Proxy

For the 2023 by-election, the City contracted Intelivote to administer both internet and traditional paper ballots with a manual count. The continuation of online and paper ballot voting methods built upon the increased convenience, sustainability, and accessibility of previous City of Cambridge Municipal and School Board Elections. Voters were given the independence of casting their ballot from anywhere in the world at any time via internet voting or from anywhere within their ward residence on Election Day using a traditional paper ballot.

### **In-person Voting**

There were 4 voting locations in proximity of Ward 1. On voting day, November 13, 2023, electors could vote at any polling location of the provided 4 voting locations.

In the months leading up to the election, City staff inspected all election facilities to ensure accessibility. Facilities were checked for accessibility features, technology and layouts. Criteria included parking, entrances, signage and proximity to transit. Staff aimed to have accessible entrances and voting areas on the main floor. Temporary modifications were made such as additional signage, accessible parking and propping open doors.

In the 2023 by-election, the roles of staff distributing ballots and revising the voters list were separated. By dividing these duties, wait times to receive a ballot were reduced and chairs were provided at each revision table to ensure voter comfort while filling out the revision application.

### ***Improvements Proposed in 2022***

The 2022 Post-Election Accessibility Report suggested avoiding using schools as voting locations when possible due to constraints like restricted Accessible Parking, poor lighting and deteriorating walkways.

The 2023 by-election did not utilize schools as locations, although due to time constraints, this meant that no locations were available within Ward 1. The City of Cambridge ensured that all locations were accessible by a neighbouring bus route. A majority of utilized facilities were City owned and provided solutions to the limitations school locations possess.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Ensuring voting locations are located within a reasonable distance of all wards. This will minimize travel times and provide more equitable access to voting for residents of all neighborhoods.

## **Online Voting**

Online voting offered voters the ability to cast ballots from any internet-connected device at any time during the designated online voting period from October 30 to November 13, 2023. Each voter was provided with a unique voter identification number and personal identification number in their voter information letters, which they used along with their date of birth to access and cast their ballot online. The extended online voting period was the longest duration of online voting the City of Cambridge has offered to date.

## **Special Voting Locations**

As required by the Municipal Elections Act of 1996, the Clerk is mandated to conduct voting stations at special institutions and retirement homes. The 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election utilized, the 2022 list of long-term care facilities, retirement homes and nursing homes, contacted all facilities and designated contact persons within each facility to liaise with the city for the promotion and administration of elections. A total of 4 facilities were identified in Ward 1. City staff administered voting at all 4 facilities during the Advance Voting period, allowing residents to cast their ballots.

### ***Improvement Proposed in 2022***

In 2022, the City considered alternative methods to provide voting access for residents of special institutions and retirement homes. Internet voting using touchscreen kiosks and tablets could provide a larger window for residents to vote during the election period instead of designated days.

This improvement was utilized in the 2023 By-election, although the traditional paper method remained popular.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Increasing promotion of advance voting at facilities. Many residents were unaware of the voting opportunities. Increased signage and notification to residents and family members.
- Offering a longer voting window at each facility. The current voting window may not provide enough opportunity for all residents who wish to vote.
- Sending an additional staff member solely dedicated to assisting residents, especially help with utilizing a tablet.

## **At-Home Voting**

At-home voting was offered to allow residents unable to visit polling places to still cast ballots. Election officials visited voters' homes with the necessary materials including a proper ballot, ballot box and tablet. All at-home ballots were sealed and counted manually at City Hall after polls closed.

### ***Improvement proposed in 2022***

In 2022 it was proposed to consider using mobile tablets to administer at-home voting to reduce the number of supplies election officials must bring to each residence.

Tablets along with paper ballots were utilized to conduct voting at home, increasing the volume of materials taken to each residence.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Conduct at-home voting with only a tablet to reduce supplies and ensure staff are trained to assist voters with online voting methods.

### **Voting by Proxy**

Under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, an elector may formally authorize another qualified voter to vote on their behalf in the event that they are unable to reach the polling place. Information on appointing a proxy was posted on the City's election website. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk accepted appointments during which the required form could be certified. Election officials received training containing the information needed to assist voters with proxy voting. No proxy appointments were made for the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-Election.

## **6. Training for Election Officials / Voting Assistance**

All City staff involved in the election received online training specific to their role. The training covered how to serve people with disabilities by accommodating their needs. Election officials learned in detail about the voting process and how to assist voters who require help. Voters could call, email, or visit City Hall for assistance regarding issues like being added to the voter's list or difficulties with online voting.

In 2022, the City's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility team created an informative video for voters to learn about the accessible voting options available. The video can be viewed at [here](#).

Accessibility needs and accommodations were considered for existing employees with disabilities who would be working during the election and on voting days. Accommodations were available upon request.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Consider the establishment of additional Voting Assistance Centres at public libraries and City recreation centres with several forms of assistance available to voters throughout the Election period. Voter Assistance Centres would allow voters to be accompanied by a variety of supports including service and therapy animals and assistive devices in addition to support persons who could provide support to the voter after completing the necessary oath with an Election Official. Where a voter does not

have a support person to assist them, Election Officials at Voter Assistance Centres could help any voter on request, including with the physical casting of an online ballot, with the voter's consent.

- Consider more in-person and hands on training opportunities for Election Officials to accommodate various learning styles and to provide workers with the ability to spend more time with the VoterView software used to process voters.
- Commencing with the 2026 Municipal & School Board Elections, Elections Ontario will assume responsibility for the Voter's List. The City and its Election Officials will promote the Elections Ontario online voter registration leading up to and during the 2026 Election as this tool is a more convenient and accessible way for voter's to register.

## **7. Communications and Information**

All candidates and electors with disabilities were able to receive information and copies of election documents in a format that takes into account their disability. The format may be agreed upon between the requestor and the Clerk or their designate. The below notice of this provision was included on all election related documentation, including this report:

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### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Consider working with community and cultural groups to remove barriers to local government and the election process.
- Consider a by-law to council to offer election forms in other languages and formats.
- Consider hosting Voter Information sessions.

## **8. Notice of Temporary Service Disruption**

The Municipal Election Accessibility Plan provides that notice shall be provided for each planned or unplanned voting disruption that could affect the public, such as the unavailability of an assistive device, service or feature that is regularly available to enable or enhance access to services. No service disruptions were experienced during the delivery of the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-Election.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Consider developing standardized Notice of Service Disruption templates and posters to provide to all voting locations and assistance centres in the event of a temporary disruption.

## **9. Emergency Information and Procedure**

Election Officials were aware of the emergency evacuation procedure and plans at their designated voting locations. As part of their training, they were informed on how to assist staff and electors with disabilities in the event of an emergency.

## **10. Assistance to Candidates**

Candidates were provided with information on how to make their campaigns accessible to the public. This included the City's 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan and links to an Election report containing feedback from respondents on how they like to hear about candidates. Additionally, an Equitable and Inclusive Campaigning Guide was provided to all candidates. Common feedback received indicated voters without internet access mainly relied on traditional sources like printed pamphlets, local newspapers and door-to-door campaigning.

Candidates were encouraged to:

- Offer recordings of campaign information for the visually impaired and hearing impaired
- Provide sign language interpreters and other supports at in-person events
- Hold campaign events at accessible venues that were transit-accessible
- Allow for service animals and support persons at campaign functions
- Organize a range of in-person meet-and-greet events at community spaces and door-to-door
- Seek to engage with Indigenous communities, youth, seniors and equity-deserving groups
- Encourage volunteers to distribute campaign materials and help voters get to polling stations

While the City maintained a list of candidates' websites and contact information, many older voters were not aware of this online information. Printed materials and traditional campaign methods were still important sources of candidate information for this group. As a result, some older voters without internet struggled to access details about candidates and their platforms.

As proposed in 2022, quick reference guides to assist candidates with campaigning and, additionally, understanding the manual ballot count process were created and distributed to candidates and their scrutineers. For the 2023 Ward 1 Municipal By-election, the City Clerk and Deputy Clerk set up pre-consultation meetings for each candidate and conducted a thorough review of all materials provided prior to nomination day. A thorough review of documents was seen as beneficial, as candidates gained a better understanding of the rules and guidelines to create an inclusive and accessible campaign.

## ***Opportunities for Improvement in 2026***

- Promoting candidate events on the City's election website to raise awareness among voters
- Sharing voter feedback with candidates to improve outreach to those without internet access
- Encouraging candidates to utilize various campaign methods, including print materials and door-to-door campaigning, to reach older voters and those who struggle to access candidate information online.

## **11. Conclusion**

Significant progress has been made with regard to accessible elections. The guidelines, policies, practices and processes must respect the dignity and independence of voters, and the election system should ensure that the policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity. Ensuring that voters and candidates with disabilities can participate in the election process is essential. Consideration of accessible voting systems and site accessibility requirements is necessary.

### **Feedback**

Additional feedback regarding the accessibility of the 2023 City of Cambridge Ward 1 Municipal By-election can be submitted as follows:

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