

Request for Decision

Post-Election Accessibility Report

Presented To: City Council

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Type: Correspondence for Information Only

Recommendation

For Information Only

Background

Recent changes to the Municipal Elections Act (MEA), 1996, require the Clerk within 90 days after the election to submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

The MEA places responsibility on the Clerk, who runs the municipal election, to have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. As well there is a requirement in the MEA that each voting place be accessible to electors with disabilities.

A number of initiatives relating to accessibility were undertaken to ensure persons with disabilities and special needs had the opportunity to participate in the 2010 Municipal Election in the following areas:

- Voting Locations
- Opportunity for Electors to Vote Independently
- Communications and Information
- Staff Training

Voting Locations

Site visits were conducted of all our voting locations to ensure accessibility. A checklist was used when inspecting each voting location. Items considered in choosing voting locations include - is there a barrier free path of travel from the parking lot/ sidewalk with curb cuts along the route to the primary entrance; is the entrance accessible; are temporary ramps required; is the door hardware accessible; is lighting inside and outside adequate; are there accessible washrooms; are the corridors and doorways spacious enough for a wheelchair, scooter or service animal to pass through comfortably; is the location on a public transportation route; is the name of the building clearly visible from the street or sidewalk; is accessible parking available and is the parking space clearly marked with the International symbol of accessibility.

Signed By

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Digitally Signed Nov 17, 10

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During our site of Corpus Christi school, it was noted on our checklist that a ramp to provide access the building by persons with a disability was required. On election day, the City Clerk's Office was contacted by an elector advising that the ramp had not been installed and election staff made arrangements to have the ramp installed that day.

Opportunity for Electors to Vote Independently

To ensure electors the opportunity to vote privately and independently, Voter Assist Terminals were available during the Advance Polls held on Saturday, October 16 and Sunday, October 17, 2010 in four shopping malls - being the New Sudbury Centre, Place Bonaventure Mall, the Hanmer Valley Shopping Mall and the Southridge Mall. The Voter Assist Terminal was also available at Tom Davies Square on all four days of Advance Voting from October 16th to 19th. The Voter Assist Terminal is a paper ballot marking device that allows voters with disabilities and other special needs to mark their ballot privately and independently. A demonstration of the Voter Assist Terminal and Vote Tabulator was made to the Accessibility Advisory Panel. The Voter Assist Terminals were used by approximately 21 electors with disabilities during the Advance Vote.

Once again this year Transit passes were included on the Voter Notification Card which could be used by electors on voting day or during the advance vote. The transit passes could also be used by Handi-Transit passengers when going to vote. A total of 117 transit passes were used during 2010 Municipal Election.

Magnification sheets were available at all polling locations to assist voters with low vision and a voting booth area with ample room to move around was provided in locations.

Persons with disabilities could also attend the voting places with a support person or service animal. If an elector did not attend with a support person, election officials were available to provide assistance. "How to Vote" scratch pads to assist in communicating with electors and "How to Vote" brochures which demonstrate how to mark the ballots were available at all voting places.

In cases where an elector was unable to attend a voting place, he or she could have appointed another person to act on their behalf - proxy voting. Proxy certificates were available in the City Clerk's Office or at any Citizen Service Centre.

The MEA requires that voting locations be established at the following facilities in order to allow eligible residents of the facility the opportunity to vote - an institution with 20 or more beds that are occupied by persons who are disabled, chronically ill or infirmed and in a retirement home in which 50 or more beds are occupied. In the City of Greater Sudbury we had 23 such polling locations which either had a poll open for the entire day or had a poll with reduced hours. We also provided for bedside voting where required.

Communications and Information

Information regarding the election was posted to the City's election website <http://elections.greatersudbury.ca>. The website provided information to electors with a variety of disabilities and allowed person to have the opportunity to review election information at their own pace. People with speech difficulties were able to pose questions to election staff by way of e-mail. Our web pages are W3C compliant which allows electors with vision disabilities to have full access to election information and results. Information on the website was continuously updated to reflect the most recent information.

We also provided election information using social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The City of Greater Sudbury also has a TTY number for the hearing impaired.

An election tabloid was also produced which outlines key election information such as voter qualification,

identification requirements, voting dates, voter notification cards and accommodations for electors with disabilities. The tabloid was printed in English and French and 68,100 copies were distributed to households through local newspapers. It was also available in our Citizen Service Centres and the City Clerk's Office.

We also used television, radio and local newspaper advertising to provide information regarding the 2010 Municipal Election.

Staff Training

All our election officials received accessible customer service training on serving persons with disabilities and special needs. A DVD which was developed with the assistance of the Accessibility Advisory Panel was viewed by all election officials working in the polls.

All Election Manuals for the various election official positions included a brochure entitled "*Communication Tips on Providing Great Service to Citizens with Disabilities*". This brochure was also made available on the Elections webpage.

Parking lot attendants and greeters were available at a number of locations to assist electors with disabilities.

Campaign Expenses - Candidate with a Disability

There have been changes to the MEA since the last election as they relate to persons with disabilities. One of these changes provides that expenses incurred by a candidate with a disability are excluded from the permitted spending limit of the candidate. Examples of expenses which would be excluded are the cost of a sign-language interpreter for door-to-door campaigning, the cost of accessible transportation to attend campaign events/candidates meetings and the cost of specialized software.

Conclusion

Prior to the election, a presentation was made to the Accessibility Advisory Panel advising of initiatives being undertaken for the 2010 Municipal election regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities and special needs. We advised the Panel that it is important to hear from persons with disabilities regarding their experience with the election process and to provide feedback and suggestions on how we can improve accessibility.

In conclusion our focus is to ensure that election services are accessible to all electors and candidates, to identify and remove barriers that affect persons with disabilities and special needs and to create a positive voting experience.

We will continue to develop and adjust our approaches in order to meet the needs of person with disabilities and special needs.