

PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee
FROM: Kevin Arjoon, Municipal Clerk
DATE: June 30, 2017
SUBJECT: **Feedback on 2016 Municipal and School Board Election**

ORIGIN

Municipal Election held October 15, 2016 and the Improving Accessibility for Voters Plan presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on April 18, 2016.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

- Municipal Elections Act, section 62 (1), "A polling station shall be in premises with level access and shall contain an adequately lighted compartment where an elector may mark the elector's ballot paper in secrecy."
- Several sections within the Municipal Elections Act indirectly address electors with disabilities; these sections were considered in the planning and execution of municipal elections.

DISCUSSION

On April 18, 2016, the Municipal Clerk's Office presented an Improving Accessibility for Voters Plan to the Accessibility Advisory Committee and received feedback on possible enhancements for the 2016 Election. The Municipal Election was held on October 15, 2016 and the Municipal Clerk's Office is interested in receiving feedback from the AAC on their voter experience and to receive feedback on possible improvements for future electoral events.

The Improving Accessibility for Voters Plan was organized into four themes, these themes were established as a result of the Your Ideas, Your Vote, a HRM session on voter engagement held on April 11, 2015.

Independent Voting
Communication
Equitable Hiring Practices
Physical Accessibility

Staff will be on hand to receive feedback from the Committee and to respond to any questions. It is anticipated that any comments received will be investigated by the Municipal Clerk's Office and may be incorporated into a future iteration of the Plan, or election services rollout.

Attached: Improving Accessibility for Voters 2016 Municipal Election

Municipal Clerk

Tel: 902.490.4210 Fax: 902.490.4208
Email: clerks@halifax.ca halifax.ca

Municipal & School Board Elections

Improving Accessibility for Voters

Prepared by:

Election Office
March 2016

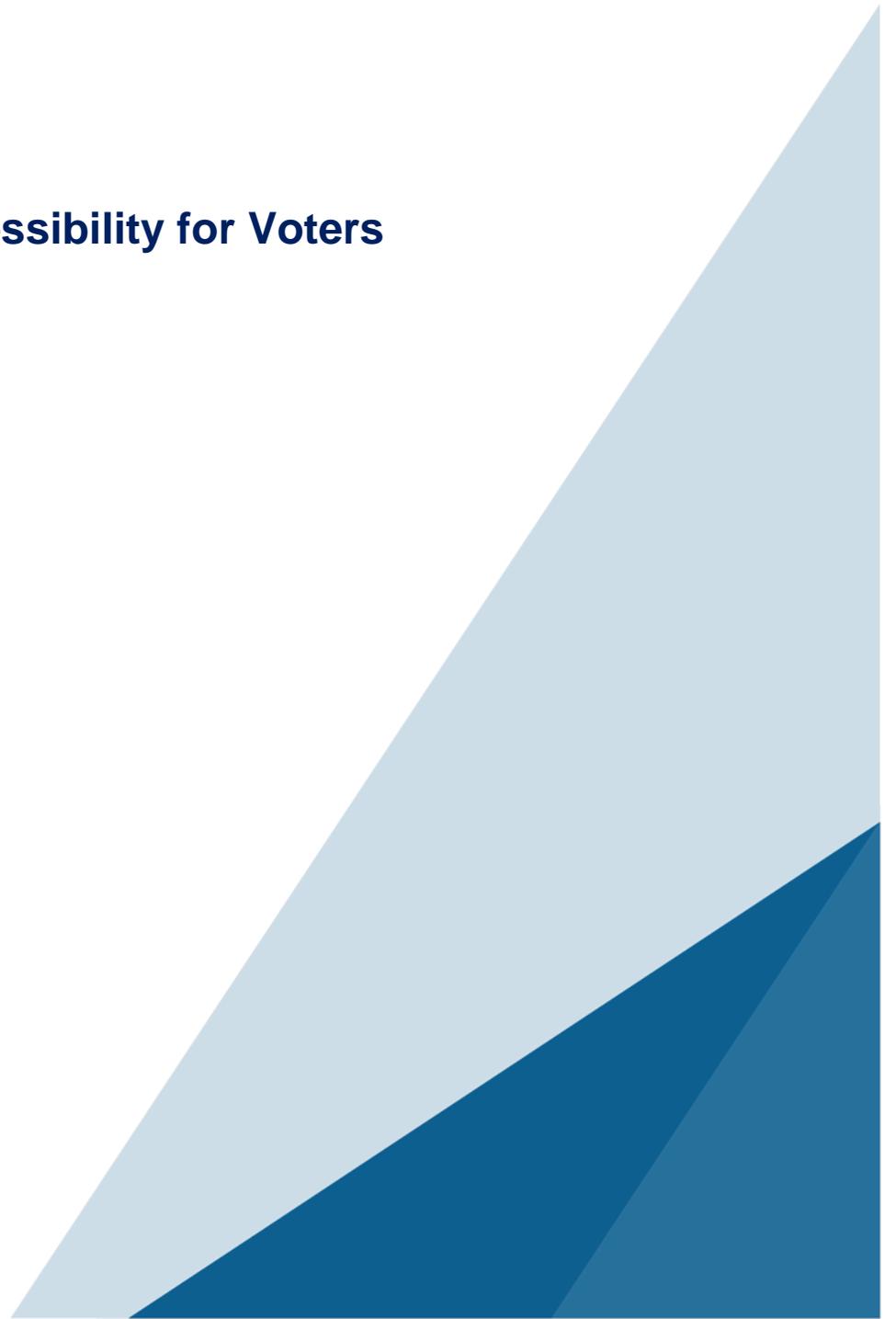


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Introduction

One of the initiatives for the Municipal and School Board Elections is to ensure that all persons in the region have the opportunity to vote independently.

This plan has been created to facilitate the full participation of all citizens in the electoral process and to work towards the elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers facing persons with disabilities.

Independent Voting

Public consultation conducted in the spring of 2015 identified that citizens are looking for more options to increase the ease and access to voting for all electors. The following outlines the range of options for voters, including those with disabilities, to vote in Municipal and School Board elections:

Internet and Telephone Voting

Internet and telephone voting will be used during the advance voting period. The remote voting will allow for those who may prefer to vote from the comfort of their own home using their supportive technology or through public internet access locations such as libraries. Telephone voting can be accessed from any phone with touch tone service.

Products and Services at Polling Stations

The Elections Office recognizes that many voters want to attend a polling place in person to cast their ballot. A number of actions have been taken to accommodate persons with disabilities at polling places.

Assistive Devices

Election staff will make available assistive devices that will aid persons with disabilities to independently and privately mark their ballot. All polling stations will have the following supplies available on request:

- Pencil grips
- Magnifiers
- Tactile ballot templates
- Pad of paper and pens

Election Worker Training

Approximately 1,500 temporary election workers will receive training on the voting process. Training will include etiquette and the use of “people-first” language in supporting people with disabilities at the polling locations.

Assistance at the Polling Station

Electors can vote with assistance if they are blind, unable to read, or have a disability which prevents them from marking their ballot independently. An oath is required and a friend can

enter the polling booth with the elector in order to mark the ballot on the elector's behalf. Deputy Returning Officers (DRO) can act as a friend for the elector, if the elector requests.

Communication

Effective communication with the electorate is essential to a successful election. The communications plan for the election will include references to accessible services and support. Election information will be made available through a range of channels and in diverse formats, including:

Community Outreach

Building relationships across diverse communities will enable the Elections Team to disseminate relevant election information to a wide range of stakeholders. These relationships will also facilitate receiving valuable feedback from these stakeholders after the election.

Voter Information Letters (VIL)

A VIL will be sent to each voter on the list of electors before advanced voting begins. In addition to other information, such as date and time of the election, individual PINs for e-voting, and candidate information, the letter will also inform voters if there are any accessibility concerns identified at their Advance Poll and Election Day locations, in which case the voter may request a transfer certificate (see below) if required. In addition, these letters can be sent via email to electors who have supportive technology at home to “read” or “listen” to the contents.

Materials available in alternative formats

Voter information will be available in a range of formats, including electronic, audio and larger text format.

Additionally, all materials will be written in plain/clear language for electors, service providers, and others who may be providing assistance.

Election Website

The municipal election webpages will be used as the primary tool to communicate to the public on the election. Efforts will be made to ensure that Halifax.ca/Election is current and up to date.

Standards for the website are influenced by the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Standard on the Accessibility, Interoperability and Usability of Web Sites and include:

- Graphics/Photographs - Alternate Text attributes will be used on all graphics with a short intuitive description.
- Text Alternatives will be provided for all time-sensitive media. At minimum a description of the media (audio or video, etc.) will be provided.

- Any uses of CAPTCHA will have text or audio alternatives that identify and describe the purpose of non-text content.

TDD Services

This audio service enables persons with hearing loss to access information by telephone. TDD is currently available seven days a week between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. and will also be available through the HRM Elections public call centre during enumeration and the election period through this number TDD: 1.866.236.0020.

Feedback

The Election Office welcomes all feedback on any accessibility concerns that may have arisen during a voter's voting experience. A link will be provided at Halifax.ca/Election to email feedback, which will be used in future election planning.

Equitable Hiring Practices

For the 2016 election each position has a brief description of tasks and requirements to help an individual to decide whether they wish to apply. There are at least 9 poll location positions available and various positions available at Elections Central throughout the election period.

Our hiring is in compliance with the human resources standards of the municipality and we encourage all persons who are interested in the election process to apply. As with all positions, where accommodations are possible we work with the employee to ensure a safe, productive environment.

Physical Accessibility

The Municipal Elections Act states that "a polling station shall be in premises with level access and shall contain an adequately lighted compartment where an elector may mark the elector's ballot paper in secrecy". Level access is defined as "premises that are so located that a person may reach the premises from the street or roadway and enter the premises without going up or down any step, stairs or escalator".

Guided by Elections Nova Scotia accessibility standards, polling places are considered, visited, and evaluated based on the following accessibility criteria:

Allocated parking spaces close to entry for voters with disabilities

Level access to the building, on grade, or there is a ramp or elevator provided

Condition of parking lots and walkways

Access to transit routes

Doors and passageways comply with current width, clearance, and threshold requirements

Adequate interior and exterior lighting

Accessible washroom facilities

Additional requirements will be made available at each polling place including:

- Respite seating for those who may require relief;
- High contrast signage to identify the polling place; and
- Temporary accessible parking signage where none may normally exist at the polling place.

Transfer Certificates

In the event that there is a polling place identified that prevents an elector with a physical disability from voting at a polling station where his/her name appears on the list of electors, a transfer certificate can be issued by the Returning Officer or Assistant Returning Officer. The transfer certificate is required to be issued by 5:00pm on the Wednesday before Election Day and it permits the elector to vote at another polling station within the polling district or at a polling station in another polling district within the municipality.

Regular Reviews of Polling Places during Voting

A checklist will be provided to poll officials at all polling places. This will include confirmation that the site remains accessible and safe at various points while polls are open for voting.

Information Officers and Supervisory Deputy Returning Officers at Polling Locations

Either or both of these staff will be at all polling places to provide directions and assistance to voters.