

Municipality of Shuniah
2018 Municipal and School Board Election
Post-Election Accessibility Report

1. Introduction

The Municipality of Shuniah is a community that respects the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities and endeavors to promote a barrier-free and inclusive community.

The focus of the Post-Election Accessibility Report is to evaluate the accessibility of the electoral services offered to all electors and candidates in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. This report outlines the actions taken regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affected electors and candidates with disabilities and how these actions impacted their voting experience.

The Municipality of Shuniah will continue to learn, develop, and adjust our approaches in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The review of accessibility issues and initiatives and addressing barrier prevention and removal is an ongoing practice.

2. Governing Legislative and Policy Framework

Under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, (The Act) the Municipal Clerk is legislatively responsible for conducting Municipal and School Board Elections and establishing policies and procedures to ensure that all electors have the opportunity to participate fully in the election. The Act requires the Clerk to have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities and to ensure that all voting places are accessible to electors with disabilities. The Clerk is also required, within 90 days after a regular election, to prepare a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and make the report available to the public.

In addition to the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the Clerk must also comply with the requirements of the following legislation:

The Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990 provides that all persons have the right to equal treatment without discrimination, including on the basis of disability, and that persons with disabilities be provided with accommodation short of undue hardship.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was enacted in 2005 and sets out clear goals and timeframes for making Ontario accessible by 2025. Under the AODA, private and public sector organizations across Ontario are required to comply with Regulations established by the Province. These Regulations include the Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standards.

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR) brings together accessible standards for Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation, and Design of Public Spaces under one regulation and harmonizes the requirements common to each standard. Each of the standards articulates specific requirements and compliance deadlines, which will be phased in across Ontario between 2011 and 2025.

3. Election Preparation

In preparation for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election, staff reviewed the relevant legislation and put forward a recommendation to Council to re-implement the 2018 election using a web-based format and a telephone call in election. As was done in the 2014 election this method of ballot delivery sets out to remove barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. Notably, the ability to utilize equipment specifically tailored to an individual's needs was cited as a significant improvement to physically attending a polling location. Further a number of locations were reviewed and rendered inappropriate for access.

4. Strategies and Actions for the Identification, Removal, and Prevention of Barriers

4.1. Method of Vote and Voting System

On February 14, 2017 Municipal Council approved the method of vote for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Municipal Council determined that online and telephone voting would be utilized for the 2018 Election including advance polls and on voting day. The primary reason for conducting an electronic and telephone election for both advanced and voting day was cost prohibitions for conducting a dual method election.

The Municipal Clerk's staff worked closely with the voting system service provider, Intelivote Solutions Inc., to evaluate the system and ensure that it was fully secure and accessible for persons with disabilities. It was also thought that they could use their personal assistive technologies to interact with the voting system anywhere and a demo of the voting system was available on the Municipality of Shuniah's election website.

Significantly, online voting provided electors with the ability to cast their ballot from home allowing increased rights of privacy to electors with disabilities who may find voting at traditional paper based voting locations more difficult, as they had the ability to vote with little or no assistance required from others. Online voting from home proved to be particularly effective as is shown with close to 40% of the eligible voters casting their ballot online or by telephone.

4.2. Voting Locations

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election offered a two accessible voting locations to ensure that voters could to cast their ballot. In terms of site selection, the Municipality has the MacGregore Recreation Centre and the Municipal Administration Offices both built to accessibility and barrier-free path of travel inside the voting location including barrier-free parking, door operators or accessible doors, adequate lighting, and adequate slope and surface.

Before the opening of all voting locations, Election Officials performed final accessibility checks to ensure that the locations were set-up in an accessible manner. Staff also ensured that all Election Officials responsible for setting-up voting locations were aware of legislative accessibility requirements in the event that last-minute changes needed to be made to voting locations. The Election staff would also be available to attend the vehicle with a ballot should an elector not be able to leave their vehicle for any reason.

During the entire voting period, personal assistive devices were permitted in all voting locations,

such as wheelchairs and walkers. Support persons and service animals were welcomed and assistance was offered to voters at every stage of the voting process, including being greeted at the door, making any necessary amendments to their information on the Voters' List, and casting their ballot. Election Officials treated all voters with dignity and respect, being sensitive to the individual needs of voters and recognizing that some required unique attention. While forms and oaths were printed in large font, magnifying sheets were also present to assist voters with low vision and Election Officials read and signed oaths upon voters' requests.

4.3. Information and Communication

The Municipality of Shuniah considered accessibility in all information and communication strategies for the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Upon requests from persons with disabilities, staff was able to provide copies of election documents, or the information contained in the document, in a format that took into account the person's disability.

The Municipal election website was designed to be both informative and accessible. All information for voters, candidates, and third parties was placed in distinct sections on the website and they were directed to access all documents and forms through the website in an effort to promote accessibility and transparency. The information available online used clear and simple language and was continuously updated to reflect the most recent election developments and information.

Additionally, the website was compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A guidelines. It allowed for personal assistive technologies to be utilized with the website and for users to adjust the website font within the browser's functionality to aid them in reading the information. Notably, the election website contained an accessible voting section that outlined the various accessible voting locations and accessible features of the electronic voting system.

Election information was communicated through various channels and alternate formats including regular candidate emails, social media, and radio and newspaper. Voter Information Notices were mailed out to all eligible electors on the Voters' List as well as an insert explaining where and when to vote in the election and have elector information on the Voters' List amended.

In the event of disruptions to electoral services or unforeseen circumstances that affected the accessibility of voting locations, a process was in place to facilitate notification.

5. Conclusion

It was the goal of the Municipality of Shuniah to ensure that electors within the municipality who required accessibility services were provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Staff also strived to make the nomination and registration process as accessible as possible for candidates and third parties.

The 2018 Municipal and School Board Election total voter turnout was 38.2%, exceeding the provincial average of 37.60%. Debriefs have been conducted with all Election Officials and staff feedback regarding the accessibility of the election will be considered by Municipal Clerk in preparation for the next Municipality of Shuniah Municipal and School Board Election.