

TOWNSHIP OF ESSA



ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

This plan is for use in the 2010 Municipal Election in conjunction with the Township's current Accessible Customer Service Policy, guidelines, training and customer service feedback standards.

The Township of Essa abides by the following principles when conducting the Township's election:

- Integrity of process maintained throughout election
- Secrecy and confidentiality of the individual vote
- Election is fair and non-biased
- Election is accessible to the voters
- Certainty that results reflect votes cast
- Voters and candidates treated fairly and consistently

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1. ACCESSIBLE ELECTION MANDATE

With respect to Accessibility, the mandate of the Township of Essa is as follows:

“It is the goal of the Township of Essa to ensure that electors in the Township of Essa who have a disability or an issue with accessibility are provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2010 Municipal Election.”

2. REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE *MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT, 1996*

In addition to our pre-existing accessibility requirements and the Township’s current Accessible Customer Service Policy, the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* S.O. 1996, Chapter 32, section 12 states:

“**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) Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall submit a report to council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c.33, Sched. 21, s. 8(8).

41. (3) The clerk shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as he or she considers necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without the assistance referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 52 91). 1996, c.32, Sched. s.41 930; 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).”

3. REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS

This plan will address the specific requirements pertaining to accessibility in relation to the 2010 Municipal Election in the Township of Essa.

This plan will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities of improvement arise.

4. REGARD FOR THE NEEDS OF ELECTORS WITH DISABILITIES

The procedure within this plan must respect the dignity and independence of electors. The election process should ensure that the policies, practices, and procedures are consistent with the core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

Disabilities can take many forms and can range from temporary to permanent. Often disabilities are non-visible and no one should ever make assumptions. Disabilities include developmental, cognitive and physical challenges/conditions of person of any age.

5. BARRIERS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

<u>Barrier Type</u>	<u>Example</u>
Physical	A doorknob that cannot be operated by an elderly person with limited upper-body mobility and strength.
Architectural	A hallway or door that is too narrow for a wheelchair or scooter.
Informational	Typefaces which are too small to be read by a person with low-vision.
Communicational	A speaker at a meeting who talks loudly when addressing a deaf participant.
Attitudinal	A campaign event that discourages persons with developmental disabilities from participating.
Technological	Information on a web site, which cannot be accessed by a person who is blind or visually impaired and who has reading software on a computer.
Policy/Practice	A practice of announcing important messages over an intercom that people with hearing impairments cannot hear clearly

6. TYPES OF DISABILITIES

Understanding people's needs and challenges may help you better communicate with them.

Physical Disabilities: There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and while people who use mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes are most recognizable, it is important to consider that not all people with physical disabilities require a mobility device.

Vision Loss: There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has vision loss.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss: Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. The distinction between the terms "deaf", "deafened", "hearing impaired" and "hard of hearing" are based on the individual's preferred language (spoken or signed) rather than on the actual degree of hearing loss.

Deaf-Blindness: A person who is deaf-blind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Speech Impairments: People with speech disabilities may have problems communicating. For many reasons, people may have difficulty speaking clearly, for example as a result of a stroke or cerebral palsy, which may result in difficulties with verbal communication. Some people may use communication boards or other assistive devices to help communicate. A speech disability often has no impact on a person's ability to understand. Ask them to repeat the information if you do not understand. Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible.

Cognitive Disabilities: Cognitive disabilities may affect understanding, communication, or behavior and can be attributed to brain injuries, developmental or learning disabilities. It is not always easy to identify someone who has a cognitive disability.

Mental Illness: Mental illness is a disturbance in thoughts and emotions that may decrease a person's capacity to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Mental illness can take many forms, just as physical illness does.

7. VOTING PLACE

For the purpose of this plan, voting place includes the exterior parking and walkways associated with the location.

In order to ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities, a site inspection will be completed prior to confirm the site as a voting place.

8. ELECTION MATERIALS

The Township is required, per the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Reg. 429/07, to provide a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Alternate formats are other ways of publishing information besides regular print. The Township and the person with a disability may agree upon the format to be used for the document or information.

In the event the information is not generated by the Township or is supplied by a third party, the Township will make every effort to obtain the information from the third party in an alternate format and/or will attempt to assist the elector by providing assistive equipment.

Printed material generated by the Township will be provided in Arial font, 12 point and can be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

9. VOTING PROVISIONS FOR ELECTORS WITH DISABILITIES AT THE VOTING PLACE

The following provisions are in place to accommodate the voting needs of electors with disabilities:

Support Persons – In relation to a person with a disability, a Support Person accompanies him or her in order to help with communications, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

The Deputy Returning Office may permit an elector who needs assistance in voting to have such assistance as the Deputy Returning Officer considers necessary. The Support Person, upon the completion of the prescribed oath, may accompany the elector behind the voting screen to assist the elector in the voting process.

Assistive Personal Equipment – Assistive personal devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

Service Animals – An animal is a “Service Animal” if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability for example a guide dog wearing a harness.

Service Animals will be permitted in all voting places.

Physical Disabilities – Voting places including parking areas, entrances and voting areas will be selected and/or set up in a manner that enables electors with physical disabilities to vote.

In the event an elector is unable to access the established voting area due to a physical disability, the Deputy Returning Officer may attend to the elector anywhere within the voting place.

Vision Loss – Voting places will include magnifiers for visually-impaired voters.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss – Each voting place will be equipped with a pad of paper and pen/pencil to communicate with the hearing impaired in writing, if required.

Speech Impairments, Cognitive Disabilities & Mental Illness – Personal Assistance from an Election Official will be available.

10. ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS

All Election Officials are required to complete the Township's Accessible Customer Service training which includes:

- The purpose of the Act
- How to interact with people with various disabilities
- How to interact with people who use the assistance of a service animal or support person

In addition to the Township's Accessible Customer Service training, all Election Officials will be provided with customized training on this plan and the related materials contained within, as well as the following:

- A requirement to monitor electors with disabilities to ensure that their needs are met, i.e. if an individual with a walker is in a long line, staff are to observe, and if it is felt that the elector is having difficulties, then offer a chair, ensure that their place is saved in the voting line-up, etc;
- A requirement to ensure that electors are aware that assistance is available if required;
- Direction for Election Officials to observe electors during discussions with them and if it appears that the voter is having difficulty understanding, ensuring that the voter is able to clearly see the speaker;
- Encourage Election Officials to approach an elector and offer support if it appears that the elector requires assistance to get around in the voting place;
- Conduct routine checks of the voting place to ensure accessible features are maintained;
- Offer assistance and watch for electors who have difficulty entering the building; and
- Ensure that electors who have self-identified as voting curb side are met in a timely manner.

11. REPORTING

The *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996 S.O. 1996, Chapter 32, section 12.1 (2) states:

"Within 90 days after voting day in a regular election, the clerk shall submit a report to council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c.33, Sched. 21, s. 8(8).

In addition, said report will be provided to the Accessibility Advisory Committee. It will also be made available to the public via the Township's website.

12. CUSTOMER SERVICE FEEDBACK

Feedback from our customers gives the Township of Essa opportunities to learn and improve. The Township recognizes that it is the right of our customers to make a complaint, compliment or make suggestions on ways to improve our services.

To assist the Township in ensuring that the delivery of goods and services to those with disabilities is provided in an effective and timely manner, customers are invited to provide their feedback in writing, in person, e-mail, or by telephone to:

Clerk - Township of Essa
5786 County Road 21
Utopia, Ontario L0M 1T0
Phone: 705-424-9770
E-mail: sstone@essatownship.on.ca

In order to assist in a proper response customers are asked to provide their name, address, phone number and any other contact information.

All comments received will be reviewed by Township Staff. Correspondence acknowledging receipt of the feedback will be provided, as well as the action(s) to be taken in response to the complaint or suggestion.

Appendix A – Voting Place Site Evaluation Form

Name of Voting Place: _____

Checklist

Exteriors	Yes	No
Accessible pedestrian route(s) or path(s) are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, scooters or other mobility devices		
Curb cuts or ramps are wide enough for wheelchairs and scooters and are kept clear of snow and ice in winter weather		
Routes are not obstructed by poles, plants, bicycle racks, etc.		
Accessible passenger loading zone accommodates accessible vehicles		
Parking Areas	Yes	No
Accessible parking spaces are clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility		
There is a safe, accessible pedestrian route from the designated parking area to an accessible building entrance		
Entrances	Yes	No
Entrances are accessible to people using wheelchairs or scooters		
Accessible door: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opens automatically - Has power assisted door operators, or - Can be easily opened with one hand 		
People can easily find information		
General Layout and Services	Yes	No
Queuing areas and serving aisles are wide enough for people using mobility aids including electric wheelchairs and scooters		
Counters/tables are accessible to and useable by patrons using wheelchairs or scooters		
Appropriate lighting is installed to ensure that people with vision disabilities may clearly identify colours, patterns and signage		

Person who Completed Evaluation: _____

Areas of Concern: _____

Site Selected: Yes _____ No _____

Special Accommodations for Site: _____
