



# Corporation of the Town of Hearst

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## 2022 Municipal and School Board Elections Accessibility Plan

### **Introduction**

This plan will address the specific accessibility requirements in relation to the 2022 Municipal Elections in the Town of Hearst.

In an effort to ensure that the 2022 Municipal Elections are consistent with core principles of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, this planning document was developed in advance of the election in order to identify measures to be taken and reported following the elections.

### **Legal Requirements and Authority**

The following excerpts from the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, define the requirements for conducting an election with regard for persons with disabilities:

Article 12.1 (1) A Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

Article 12.1 (2) The Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the plan available to the public before Voting Day in a regular election.

Article 12.1(3) Within 90 days after Voting Day in a regular election, the Clerk shall prepare a report about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

Article 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(1).

Article 45(2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the Clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the definition of disability is noted as follows:

- a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- b) A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- c) A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- d) A mental disorder, or
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

### **Objectives**

This plan is intended to highlight measures that the Town of Hearst will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives include:

- > That all voting locations are accessible;
- > That persons with disabilities are able, as far as possible, to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
- > That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;
- > That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election official;
- > That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures via channels such as the Town's website and municipal communications to the public.

### **Development of the Plan**

This Plan is an active document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise.

## **Voting Locations**

For the purpose of this plan, the Voting Locations include the exterior parking, walkways and property associated with:

- **Hearst Town Hall** located at 925 Alexandra Street, Hearst, Ontario;
- **Place des Arts** located at 75 - 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Hearst, Ontario.

These are the Voting Locations designated for the Town of Hearst Municipal and School Board Elections.

In order to ensure these Voting Locations are accessible to electors with disabilities, a Voting Site Inspection Report will be completed prior to Election Day.

## **Parking**

Designated parking for electors with disabilities is to be provided in close proximity to the entrance of the voting places. Accessible parking spaces will be clearly marked and will be on firm and level ground. Routine checks will be made to ensure all entrances remain barrier free throughout the course of the day.

## **Entrance/Exit to the Voting Places**

The entrances to the Voting Places will be easy to access and barrier free. Every effort will be made to ensure that the doors into the interior voting areas are wide enough (860 mm or 34 inches) for a wheelchair, scooter, other assistive device or service animal to pass through safely and easily. Routine checks of the entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the day.

## **Interior Voting Areas**

Access to the interior voting area at Place des Arts will be level and easily traversed. The Town Hall voting area is provided with an elevator, giving easy access to the voting area. A voting booth will also be set up in the entrance lobby for those electors who wish to remain at the entry level. In such instance, the DRO will meet the elector to have him or her vote.

All doormats or carpeting will be level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards.

All voting areas will be well lit and seating will be made available at numerous areas of the voting locations, in addition to each poll table and voting booths.

A wheelchair will be made available at the reception area for anyone with mobility constraints.

## **Support Persons**

Electors with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person within the voting areas. In addition, an Election Official in the voting place can assist the voter in casting his or her vote.

Prior to entering the voting booth, the Election Official shall, in conjunction with the elector with the disability, determine the extent to which he/she needs assistance and the best way in which this assistance can be provided. This may actually be marking the ballot as directed by the person with the disability.

Persons requiring additional support will be invited to contact the municipal election staff in advance of Election Day in order to customize a plan for each individual.

## **Assistive Personal Equipment**

Electors with disabilities may use assistive personal devices including wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, note-taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks or devices for grasping.

## **Service Animals**

Service Animals will be permitted in voting places. We invite persons who intend to bring a Service Dog to the voting areas to contact the municipal office in advance of Election Day in an effort to coordinate the persons' needs with the practical aspect of line up and crowds.

Candidates and scrutineers are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at the voting place.

## **Vision Impairment**

Each voting booth will be equipped with magnifying sheets to accommodate voters with vision impairment.

## **Hearing Impaired, Deafness**

Each voting place will be equipped with a note pad and pen to communicate with the hearing impaired, if required.

## **Proxy Voting**

An elector with a disability that is homebound or otherwise unable to go to the voting locations may appoint another person to act as a voting proxy to cast a ballot on his or her behalf. The appointment must be made on the prescribed form available at Town Hall. The person being appointed as a proxy will be required to take a statutory declaration before a Commissioner of Oath. The Clerk or his or her designate can administer the oath at the municipal office or at the voting place on Voting Day. Once completed, the voting proxy may be exercised at any advance poll or on Voting Day. The appointment of a proxy may only be made after 2:00 p.m. on Nomination Day (Friday, August 19, 2022) and is null and void after the final voting day.

## **Campaign Expenses**

Expenses that are incurred by a candidate or a registered third party with a disability, that are directly related to the disability, are excluded from the permitted spending limit for the candidate.

## **Voting Methods**

**Ballot:** The Town of Hearst uses paper ballots, which consists of the certified candidates' names for an office (Mayor or Councillor) being listed on a paper ballot and the voter marks the names of the individuals he/she would like to see elected.

## **Communications**

The Town of Hearst is committed to making the information contained in this document available to the public and intends to do so by the following methods:

1. On the Town of Hearst website: [www.hearst.ca](http://www.hearst.ca);
2. A hard copy available at the Municipal Offices, 925 Alexandra Street;
3. By verbal communications regarding questions which may arise from it.

## **Service Disruptions**

From time to time and/or for unforeseen circumstances beyond the Town's control, temporary service disruptions may be experienced. In the event of a temporary accessible service disruption, Election Officials will commit to making reasonable efforts to ensure that services are reinstated as quickly as possible and that alternative services are provided where feasible.

The Town will provide reasonable notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the municipal office or to the services usually used by persons with disabilities.

Accessible Services in relation to this plan include the voting places (925 Alexandra Street and 75, 9<sup>th</sup> Street), election materials and/or voting provisions for electors with disabilities at the voting places.

In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of the voting location during the advance vote or on the final voting day, Notices of Disruption will be posted in real time:

1. On the Town's website;
2. On the Corporation of the Town of Hearst Facebook page;
3. Posted at the site of disruption; and
4. Where applicable, a media advisory will be issued.

## **Feedback**

The Town welcomes feedback to help identify areas where changes need to be considered and ways in which it can improve the delivery of an accessible election.

Such feedback can be submitted to the attention of the Clerk in any one of the following ways:

1. by email: [townofhearst@hearst.ca](mailto:townofhearst@hearst.ca)
2. in person or by mail: Town of Hearst, 925, Alexandra Street, P.O. Bag 5000, Hearst, Ontario, P0L 1N0
3. by telephone: 705-372-2813

The feedback process provides election staff with an opportunity to take corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences, address training needs, enhance service delivery and provide alternative methods of providing election information and services.