



Corporation of the Town of Hearst

2026 Elections Accessibility Plan

Overview

This plan addresses specific accessibility requirements in relation to the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections in the Town of Hearst.

In an effort to ensure that the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections are consistent with the core principles of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, this planning document was developed in advance of the elections, in order to identify measures to be taken and reported on 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 to persons with disabilities:

- Section 12.1 (1) - A Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.
- Section 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.
- Section 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.
- Section 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).
- Section 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)*, “disability” is defined 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 to independently cast their vote and verify their selection, and that assistance is available if desired;
- 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 and School Board Elections 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 election communications, the Town's website and social media.

Development of the Plan

This Plan is a living document that will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and opportunities for improvement arise.

Voting Locations

The following locations are the designated voting places for the Town of Hearst's Municipal and School Board Elections. For the purpose of this Plan, the voting locations include the exterior parking, walkways and property.

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

To ensure that voting locations are supportive to the needs of electors and election officials with disabilities, an accessibility audit of each voting location will be conducted prior to Voting Day.

Parking

Accessible, free parking shall be available at all voting locations. The designated parking space(s) shall be clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility and shall be on firm and level ground, close to the entrance of the voting location.

Entrance/ Exit to the Voting Places

Entrances to voting locations shall be accessible, unobstructed and wide enough to allow for an individual using a wheelchair, mobility scooter, other assistive device, and/or service animal to travel safely. Doors into the voting area shall be accessible and easy to open or shall remain propped open for the duration of the voting location hours.

Lineups and the flow of voters into and out of voting locations shall remain unobstructed as much as possible, and clear barrier-free pathways of travel shall be maintained. Access to emergency exits shall be unobstructed and fully accessible in the event that evacuation is required. Routine checks of entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the day.

Interior Voting Areas

Interior voting areas shall have level surfaces and be designed for ease of navigation. Any door mats or carpeting shall be level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards.

The voting area shall be well lit, and seating shall be available throughout the space, including at each voting table and booth.

A wheelchair and walker will be available at the reception area for persons with reduced mobility.

Support Persons

Electors with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person within the voting areas. In addition, an election official at the voting place may assist an elector in casting their vote. A designated support person other than an election official will be administered an oath of secrecy/confidentiality by an election official prior to providing any such assistance to an elector.

Before entering the voting booth, the election official shall determine, together with the elector with a disability, the extent to which assistance is needed and the best way to provide it. This may include assistance in marking the ballot according to the elector's directions.

Persons requiring additional support are encouraged to contact municipal election staff in advance of Voting Day so an individualized plan can be arranged.

Election Official Training

All staff carrying out election official duties shall be trained to recognize and ensure that persons with disabilities are provided customer service in a way that accommodates individual needs. A record of all election official training shall be maintained.

Assistive Personal Equipment

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

Service Animals

Service animals will be permitted in voting places. Persons who intend to bring a service dog into voting areas are invited to contact the municipal office in advance of Voting Day to coordinate the person's needs with the practical aspect of lineups and crowds.

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

Voting Methods

Traditional Paper Ballot: The Town of Hearst uses traditional paper ballots that include the names of certified candidates for an office (Mayor or Councillor). The elector identifies the names of the persons they wish to see elected.

Vision Impairment

Each voting booth shall be equipped with magnifying sheets. All words on the ballots shall be printed in large font and candidate names in larger font to accommodate electors with visual impairment.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness

Each voting location shall be equipped with a notepad and pen to facilitate communication with individuals who are hearing impaired, if needed.

Proxy Voting

An elector with a disability who is confined to their home or who is unable to travel to the voting locations may appoint another person to act as a proxy to vote on their behalf. The appointment must be made on the prescribed form available at Town Hall. The person appointed as proxy will be required to make a statutory declaration before a Commissioner of Oath. The Clerk or their designate may administer the oath at the municipal office or at the voting place on Voting Day. Once completed, the proxy may be exercised at any advance poll or on Voting Day. A proxy appointment may be made only after 2:00 p.m. on Nomination Day (Friday, August 21, 2026) and is null and void after Voting Day.

Campaign Expenses

Expenses incurred by a candidate with a disability, that are directly related to the disability, are excluded from the candidate's permitted spending limit.

Communications

The 2026 Elections Accessibility Plan shall be available at Town Hall, on the Town's website www.hearst.ca, and in the candidates' nomination package. Alternative formats will be made available upon request.

Service Disruptions

From time to time and/or due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the Town's control, temporary service disruptions may occur. In the event of a temporary disruption to an accessible service, election officials will make reasonable efforts to ensure that services are restored as quickly as possible and that alternative services are provided where feasible.

In the event of disruptions to services or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of the voting locations during the advance vote or on Voting Day, notices of disruption will be posted in real time:

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

These notices shall include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Accessible services in relation to this Plan include, but are not limited to, voting places (925 Alexandra Street and 75 – 9th Street), election materials and/or voting provisions for electors with disabilities to exercise their right to vote.

Feedback

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

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

Telephone: 705-362-4341, Extension 1001
Email: townofhearst@hearst.ca
In person: Town Hall, 925 Alexandra Street, Hearst, ON
Mail: Town of Hearst, P.O. Bag 5000, Hearst, ON, P0L 1N0

Feedback received will help election staff take corrective measures to prevent recurrence, address training needs, improve service delivery, and provide alternative methods for providing election information and services.

Reporting

Pursuant to Section 12.1(3) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, within 90 days after Voting Day, the Town Clerk shall publish a report on the implementation of the 2026 Elections Accessibility Plan, including details on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

Revised: March 25, 2026