

Vote

Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Election

Monday, October 22, 2018

Accessibility Measures – 2018 Municipal Election

Section 12.1(1) of the *Municipal Elections Act* requires that the Clerk “shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.”

In accordance with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service regulation 429/07 municipalities must provide accessible customer service.

While the City of Sault Ste. Marie has always been sensitive to the needs of electors with disabilities, further steps were taken to improve opportunities for unassisted voting in the 2018 municipal election.

Consultation

The City consulted with persons with disabilities, advocates and service providers to identify barriers in the voting process and to receive input on solutions by:

- Collaborating with the Sault Ste. Marie Accessibility Advisory Committee regarding voting options, accessible customer service, and assistive devices, etc.

- Consulting with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and the Canadian Hearing Society to obtain input as to how best to assist individuals with visual impairments/blindness and the deaf community/hearing impaired

- Posting the Election Accessibility Plan on the City’s website

- Conducting special consultations such as reviewing accessibility of the ballot design; accessible customer service training; and voting locations

Communication and Information

Election information was provided through various channels and in alternate formats by:

- Working with persons with disabilities, community advocates, and disability service providers to publicize election information

- Advertising voting accommodations available on Advance Vote dates (i.e. sign language interpreter, FM amplification system, CNIB staff)

- Providing an informative and accessible election website ensuring online election information was available in clear and simple language and was continuously updated to reflect changes; ensuring election web pages complied with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, Level A, and adding a ‘Voter Accessibility’ section to the City’s website

Processes were established to facilitate notification of potential disruptions to service or last minute changes to voting places.

The introduction of an online tool enabling electors to check to see if they were on the Voters List and, if not, to register was well received. Approximately 565 electors were added to the List using this technology.

Voting Places

It was imperative that all voting places were accessible to electors. Site visits were made to each voting place to ensure:

- Barrier-free paths of travel from the parking lot/sidewalk

- Barrier-free parking

- Door operators or accessible doors

- Adequate lighting

One voting place required installation of a temporary ramp to improve accessibility.

Election staff were recruited to:

- Help open doors without automated power door openers

- Operate elevators where applicable

- Direct voters to an accessible entrance if it was different from the main entrance

All voting place access routes and entrances were clearly identified by:

- Providing appropriate signage at voting places

- Prominent signage of accessible voting entrances

- Where possible, making the accessible entrance the same as the main entrance

Voting Options and Accommodations

Use of support persons and service animals in voting places was welcomed.

Election officials in all voting places were trained to assist voters in casting their ballot when requested.

Electors who could not attend a voting place had the option of appointing a proxy to vote on their behalf.

Curbside voting was available for electors who were able to attend the voting location but unable to go inside the voting place

A Vote from Home program was offered for the first time in 2018. Electors who were unable to attend a voting place without unreasonable difficulty registered in advance and an election team brought ballots to them during the week prior to Voting Day (week of October 15). 66 voters took advantage of the Vote from Home program.

Sault Transit provided free transit to any elector showing a “You Vote at Card” on each of the three Advance Vote days as well as on Voting Day.

The following supplies were made available at all voting locations:

- Magnifying glasses and sheets to assist voters with low vision

- Notched ballots and ballot marking templates

- Large marking implements

- Note pads and pens to assist communication with voters who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Large print candidate lists

Prevention of Barriers

Three Advance Vote days were held at the Civic Centre providing enhanced services for electors with disabilities. Electors with disabilities were encouraged to vote on Advance Vote days through the City's website, news releases, and social media. Staff from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and from the Canadian Hearing Society were available on the Advance Vote day held Wednesday, October 10. 2,541 electors voted at Advance Vote days.

All voting locations were audited and modifications made to improve accessibility where required.

An inventory of way-finding devices was developed for each voting location (i.e. signage, directional arrows, etc.)

Voting opportunities were provided at all retirement home/residence locations as well as the Vote from Home program.

Accessible Customer Service

All election officials were provided accessible customer service training, including:

- How to interact and communicate with persons with various disabilities

- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person

- Various tools available to assist electors with disabilities

- How to provide opportunities for assisted voting (friend of an elector, assistance from election officials) and the oaths required

- How to set up the voting location (placement of furniture to allow passage of wheelchairs, etc.)

Feedback

Anyone who encountered an accessibility issue or wished to provide feedback was encouraged to contact the City Clerk's office by telephone, email or fax. Additionally, feedback forms were made available at all voting locations. Feedback has been compiled in order to make further improvements for the next municipal election.

