

**The Municipal Corporation of the Township of
Woolwich**

**ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2026
MUNICIPAL ELECTION**



**WOOLWICH
TOWNSHIP**

This document is available in alternate formats, upon request

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1. Introduction

This plan is for use in the 2026 Municipal Election in conjunction with the Municipality's current Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and Policy 2024-2027.

The Township of Woolwich abides by the following principles when conducting the Municipality's Election:

- Integrity of the process is maintained throughout election
- Secrecy and confidentiality of each individual vote is safeguarded
- Election is fair and non-biased
- Election is accessible to all voters
- Results reflect votes cast
- Voters and candidates are treated fairly and consistently

This plan is presented to fulfill the requirements of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended, in respect of the regular election held on October 26, 2026.

2. Accessible Election Mandate

With respect to accessibility, the mandate of the Township of Woolwich Municipal 2026 Election is as follows:

“It is the continued goal of the Township of Woolwich to ensure that Electors who have a disability or experience accessibility barriers are provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2026 Municipal Election.”

3. Municipal Election Act Requirements

The Clerk is responsible for the proper legislative and administrative conduct of municipal elections in the Township of Woolwich. This includes establishing policies and procedures that ensure that all electors can fully participate in the 2026 municipal election.

In addition to the Municipality's current Accessibility Plan and 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).

Plan re: barriers

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.

Report

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.

41. (3) The clerk shall make such changes to some or all 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). 1996, c.32, Sched. s.41 (3); 2001, c. 32, s. 30(1).

45. (2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that the voting place and drop off locations are accessible to electors with disabilities.”

4. Review and Amendments

This plan will address the specific requirements pertaining to accessibility in relation to the 2026 Municipal Election in the Township of Woolwich.

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

The Clerk, who is responsible for conducting the election, shall act on any accessible matters which may arise during the election as deemed necessary.

5. Definitions

“**disability**” means,

- i) 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,
- ii) a condition of mental impairment, disorder, or a developmental disability,
- iii) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- iv) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, defines “**barrier**” as anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of a disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission notes that a, “**disability**” covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and some not visible. A disability may

have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

Training will be provided to all election staff to ensure that persons with disabilities are supported throughout the municipal election.

6. Regard for the Needs of Electors with Disabilities

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

Barriers to People with Disabilities

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 a person of any age.

Some examples of barriers to people with disabilities:

1. **Physical Barrier** – example: a doorknob that cannot be operated by an elderly person with limited upper-body mobility and strength.
2. **Architectural Barrier** – example: a hallway or door that is too narrow for a wheelchair or scooter.
3. **Informational Barrier** – example: typefaces which are too small to be read by a person with low vision.
4. **Communicational Barrier** – example: a speaker at a meeting who talks loudly when addressing a deaf participant.
5. **Attitudinal Barrier** – example: a campaign event that discourages persons with developmental disabilities from participating.
6. **Technological Barrier** – example: Information on a website which cannot be accessed by a person who is blind or visually impaired and who has reading software on a computer
7. **Policy or Practice Barrier** – example: a practice of announcing important messages over an intercom that people with hearing impairments cannot hear clearly.

Types of Disabilities

Listed below is a brief description of types of disabilities. Understanding people's needs and challenges may help with better communication.

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, colour blindness and low vision. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a 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 principally 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 someone 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, because 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 don’t 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. Election Accessibility Plan

Consultation Initiatives

- Review comments from electors, candidates, and election workers regarding the 2022 election.
- Consult with Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) early for feedback on potential barriers and methods to overcome these barriers.
- Collaborate with individuals and community groups to increase understanding of providing an accessible election and to receive feedback on this plan.

Communication Initiatives

- Provide election information in an accessible format and provide alternative formats upon request and free of charge.

- Provide election information that is informative, clear, and easy to understand.
- Dedicate a section of the Township’s election website to accessibility.
- Continuously update the Township’s election website before and throughout the 2026 Election.
- Ensure web pages are W3C Consortium WCAG 2.2 Level AA Compliant.
- Collaborate with accessibility groups and networks to help disseminate election information through the Township’s website, social media, etc.

Candidate Initiatives

- Provide candidates with election information on how to make their campaigns and election information accessible..
- Hold candidate information session(s) in accessible location(s).
- Alternative formats for information regarding a candidates’ campaign will be available upon request.
- Provide candidates with accessible resources upon request.

Election Help Centre Initiatives

- Inspect election help centre locations to ensure all are accessible using checklist attached to this plan.
- Establish voting places at retirement homes and institutions in accordance with the Act (if required) to assist electors.

8. Voting Process Initiatives

The Township of Woolwich Council has approved Internet and Paper Ballot voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Election.

- Internet voting allows electors to cast their ballot from anywhere with an internet connection, whether the elector is coping with an illness, working days or nights, has a disability or has trouble travelling.
- Internet voting allows electors to vote using accessibility features like screen magnifiers, brightness or high contrast views, screen readers, or any other assistive device they may require.
- Internet voting allows electors to use translation software if they are more comfortable reading a different language.
- Internet voting means travel to polls is not necessary. However, Election Help Centres will be available to assist voters.
- Election staff will be trained to assist voters with a disability upon request.

- Notepads will be provided to increase communication and to assist electors who are hard of hearing or deafened.
- Chairs or stools will be available at election help centres for electors waiting in line who cannot stand for a prolonged period.
- Electors will be notified in the event of an emergency or service disruption.

9. Election Materials

- The Municipality is required, as per the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Reg. 429/07*, to give a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that considers the person's disability.
- Printed material generated by the Municipality is provided in Arial font, 12 point and may be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

10. Election Website and Notices

- All election information produced will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Any information that is created from the municipal office and posted to Township's website will be in an accessible format. The Township website also has nonvisual access capabilities that allows persons with disabilities to listen to the website.

11. Voting Provisions for Electors with Disabilities at Help Centres

The following provisions are in place to accommodate the voting needs of Electors with disabilities at Help Centres:

- Support Persons:** In relation to a person with a disability, a Support Person accompanies them to help with communications, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with access to voting.
- 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 a disability for example a guide dog wearing a harness. Service Animals will be permitted in all voting places.
- Physical Disabilities:** The location, including the parking area and entrances, will be selected and/or set up in a manner that enables Electors with physical disabilities to vote.
- Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss:** Help Centres 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.

12. Accessible Service Disruptions

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as an accessible washroom or an automatic door that is under repair. If a disruption in service is planned, and/or expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

Whether a planned or unplanned disruption, notice of the disruption will be posted on the affected area(s). Accessible service in relation to this plan includes voting places, election materials and/or voting provisions for Electors with disabilities at the voting place.

13. Additional Information Customer Service Feedback

Feedback from the public gives the Township of Woolwich opportunities to learn and improve. The Municipality recognizes that it is the right of the public to make a complaint, compliment or make suggestions on ways to improve our services. To assist the Township of Woolwich in ensuring that the delivery of goods and services to those with disabilities is provided in an effective and timely manner, the public is invited to provide their feedback as follows:

In writing, in person, e-mail, or telephone, addressed to:

Jenn Horndl, Accessibility Specialist
the Township of Woolwich
24 Church Street West,
P.O. Box 158,
Elmira, ON N3B 2Z6
Email: clerk@woolwich.ca
Phone: 519-669-1647
Toll Free: 1-877-969-0094

To assist in a proper response, callers will be asked to provide their name, address, phone number and any other contact information necessary.

The comments provided will be reviewed by staff, and the Deputy Clerk will respond either in writing, in person, e-mail or telephone acknowledging receipt of the feedback and will set out the actions to be taken in response to any complaint or suggestion.

14. Post-election Accessibility Report

After the Election, the Township will release a post-election report assessing initiatives to address accessibility barriers and determine if the initiatives can be improved and/or continued in subsequent elections.

15. Accessible Elections – Location Check List

Ward:

Location:

Date of Inspection:

Name of Inspector:

Getting to the Voting Location and Inside

- Name and address of location is visible from the street or Sidewalk?
- Is accessible parking available? At least 1 spot close to building entrance
- Is the accessible space easily marked?
- Is the space level? Is there a curb cut?
- Is the space large enough for an accessible vehicle equipped with a lift?
- Are snow and ice removed (if necessary)
- Is the route wide enough for a wheelchair or scooter?
- Are signs easily identified?
- Are signs easy to read?
- Is the entrance accessible (ramp, accessible door openers, etc.)?
- Is the ramp safe?
- Is door hardware accessible (use the fist test)?
- Are doorways wide enough?
- Is the door easy to open?
- Is the entrance easy to see?
- Is the entrance well lit?

Getting to the Ballot Box

- Is there level access from the entrance of the building to the voting place?

- Are there doormats? Are they level?
- Is the flooring non-slip?
- Is the voting location inside well lit?
- Are seats, chairs, or stools available for voters to rest?
- Are hallways and corridors clear of debris?
- Is there enough space inside the voting area for a wheelchair or scooter to manoeuvre through the location?

Voting

- Is the voting booth and surrounding area low and wide enough to enable a wheelchair user to vote without barrier?
- Are magnifying sheets available in the voting booth to help read a ballot?
- Curbside Voting – when needed and an internet connection outside an Election Location is available, Election Officials can assist voters with online voting.

Other Accessibility Notes

PROVISIONS FOR A SUPPORT PERSON - They may mark ballot or read the ballot. No specific oath for this but the Clerk may ask to have the support person take an appropriate oath

SERVICE ANIMALS - Must be allowed to stay with the person who has the disability

TRAIN ELECTION OFFICIALS - Always ask if help is needed – do not assume. Train officials on how to provide customer service to people with different disabilities.