

City of Hamilton Election Accessibility Plan 2026



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Purpose	4
Plan Development and Review	4
Legislative Requirements – Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended.....	5
Accessible Customer Service	6
Definitions and Barrier Types	6
City of Hamilton’s Multi-year (2020 – 2025) Accessibility Plan – Strategic Goals.....	8
Key Areas of Focus in the Elections Process.....	8
Elections Communication and Information	9
Initiative 1: Provide an informative and accessible election website.	9
Initiative 2: Provide election information in alternative formats and through multiple channels.....	10
Voting Places	10
Initiative 1: Ensure all Voting Places are accessible to voters with disabilities.	11
Measures:	12
Initiative 2: Ensure all Voting Place access routes and entrances are clearly identified.....	12
Initiative 3: Ensure all Voting Place owners and managers are aware of accessibility requirements, and have included all in the contracts.	13
Initiative 4: Provide a system to deal with accessibility issues, concerns or complaints.....	14
Initiative 5: Provide information on the accessibility features available at each Voting Place	14
Voting Methods.....	15
Initiative 1: Provide accessible voting opportunities.	15

Initiative 2: Provide voting opportunities in institutions and long-term care facilities and for underserved communities.	16
Initiative 3: Provide assistance to voters with disabilities as requested.	17
Initiative 4: Provide instructions on the use of accessible voting equipment.	18
Recruitment and Staffing	18
Initiative 1: Provide accessibility training to all workers who participate in the election.	18
Initiative 2: Ensure the recruitment process for applicants is accessible.	19
Assistance to Candidates	20
Initiative 1: Provide Candidates with a dedicated resource that will assist them throughout the campaign process.	20
Initiative 2: Provide candidates with access to information in alternative and accessible formats.	21
Post-Election Report.....	21
Feedback.....	22

Introduction

The City of Hamilton is committed to making the 2026 Municipal and School Board election accessible for all voters, candidates, staff, and volunteers involved in election administration. The City's 2026 Accessible Election Plan reinforces and builds upon the City's existing policies, its 2020–2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, and its ongoing dedication to meeting the needs of persons with disabilities.

Purpose

Under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (MEA), the Clerk responsible for conducting an election must consider the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. The MEA also requires that all voting locations be accessible to electors with disabilities.

In accordance with Section 12.1 of the Act, the Clerk must prepare a plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities, and make this plan publicly available before voting day in a regular election.

The Accessible Election Plan 2026 sets out to:

- a) Ensure electoral services are fully accessible to all eligible voters and candidates;
- b) Collaborate with equity-seeking groups and citizen advisory committees to identify additional barriers to voting;
- c) Remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities; and
- d) Deliver a positive, inclusive voting experience for every elector.

Plan Development and Review

To prepare for the 2026 Municipal Election, Election staff collaborated with a range of stakeholders, including Talent & Diversity Specialists, Diversity and Inclusion Specialists, the AMCTO Municipal Election Project Team, Accessible Transportation Services (ATS), and DARTS, Seniors Advisory Committee, Corporate Facilities Specialists, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD), and

Community Service providers, such as the YWCA, YMCA, Good Shepherd, Neighbour to Neighbour, Centre Francophone Hamilton, and the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre.

Throughout the development of this Plan and all related policies and procedures, careful attention was given to ensuring that approaches uphold the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities and align with the principles of the following Acts and policies:

- a) *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*
- b) *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*
- c) *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*
- d) City of Hamilton's Equity and Inclusion Policy
- e) City of Hamilton's Customer Service Standards Policy
- f) City of Hamilton's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2020–2025)

The Office of the City Clerk is committed to ongoing learning and improvement. The Accessible Election Plan 2026 will be reviewed and updated as new opportunities and best practices emerge.

Following the election, the City Clerk and the Manager of Elections will evaluate the implementation of the Plan with the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities to identify areas for improvement and address any barriers experienced during the election. A report on the outcomes and performance of the 2026 Accessible Election Plan will be presented to City Council within 90 days after voting day.

Legislative Requirements – Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended

The City Clerk is responsible for conducting municipal elections and establishing policies and procedures that ensure every voter has the opportunity to fully participate in the 2026 Municipal Election.

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (as amended) includes the following key provisions:

- **Section 12.1(1):** The Clerk must have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

- **Section 12.1(2):** The Clerk must prepare a plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers affecting electors and candidates with disabilities, and make this plan publicly available before Voting Day in a regular election.
- **Section 12.1(3):** Within 90 days after Voting Day, the Clerk must prepare and publish a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers experienced during the election.
- **Section 41(3):** The Clerk may make changes to ballots as necessary to enable electors with visual impairments to vote independently.
- **Section 45(2):** When selecting voting locations, the Clerk must ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Accessible Customer Service

The City of Hamilton is committed to providing quality services that are accessible to all persons in accordance with the City of Hamilton's Customer Service Standards Policy. In addition, and in compliance with the customer service standards of *the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, employees working in support of the 2026 Municipal Election will be required to participate in training on Accessibility at the Polls, Customer Service, and Diversity and Inclusion aligned with the AODA 2005, Integrated Accessibility Standards and Customer Service Standards Handbook. By incorporating the above-noted policies and guidelines into the training of all election staff The City of Hamilton will provide services that respect the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities throughout the election process.

Definitions and Barrier Types

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 defines "disability" 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

Many different types of barriers may exist including:

- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Barriers that result when people think, and act based on false assumptions. Example: a receptionist who talks to an individual's support person because they assume the individual with a disability will not understand.
- **Information and Communication Barriers:** Barriers created when information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population. Example: print that is too small for some people to read, and public address systems that alert only people who can hear the message.
- **Technology Barriers:** Barriers occur when technology, or the way it is used, cannot be accessed by people with disabilities. Example: websites that are not accessible to people who are blind and require the use of screen reader software.
- **Physical and Architectural Barriers:** Physical barriers or obstacles that make it difficult for some people to easily access a place. Example: a doorknob that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility or strength, or a hallway or door that is too narrow to allow a person who uses a wheelchair to pass through safely.
- **Organizational Barriers:** Occur when policies, practices or procedures result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded. Example: a hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities.

When developing this plan and building an approach to support the administration of the election, staff considered the categories of barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Staff has worked to develop policies, practices and procedures that address barriers and enhance accessibility.

City of Hamilton's Multi-year (2020 – 2025) Accessibility Plan – Strategic Goals

1. Persons with disabilities receive equitable, inclusive and accessible customer service that meets their needs when accessing and utilizing City's services, programs, resources and opportunities.
2. Persons with disabilities who are potential employees will be accommodated and supported throughout the recruitment, assessing, selecting, and hiring process and when they are seeking advancement opportunities as employees.
3. Information and communication and supports including the City's website and self-service kiosks are fully accessible and available in accessible formats.
4. Persons with disabilities access barrier free services and programs when using Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) and Accessible Transit System (ATS).
5. City facilities are fully accessible and or will provide accessibility measures to meet the needs of persons with disabilities when accessing program, services, resources and opportunities.
6. Through training and experiential learning, staff is knowledgeable and able to recognize and identify barriers to accessibility when designing, planning, delivering and implementing services, programs and opportunities to the public as well as when procuring or acquiring goods, services or facilities.

Key Areas of Focus in the Elections Process

To prevent and address accessibility barriers for the 2026 municipal election, and to parallel the strategic goals outlined in the City's Multi-year Accessibility Plan, the following key areas were identified and focused on throughout the election planning process:

1. Elections Communication and Information
2. Voting Places
3. Voting Methods
4. Recruitment, Selection and Training of Election workers
5. Assistance for Candidates

Based on these areas of focus, a number of specific initiatives have been undertaken by the Elections team in support of greater accessibility for electors.

Elections Communication and Information

The City is committed to ensuring that communications and information is shared in a manner that is accessible for all electors.

Initiative 1: Provide an informative and accessible election website.

Strategies:

- a) Ensure election information is available in clear, simple language.
- b) Provide all forms in Accessible formats
- c) Continuously update election information posted on the City's website to reflect the most recent information
- d) Enhance the City's "Where Do I Vote?" web application to provide accessibility information about voting places.
- e) Ensure election web pages are W3C Consortium WCAG 2.1 AA compliant
- f) Establish a dedicated accessibility section on the election's website that provides information on the initiatives undertaken by the City Clerk's Office.
- g) Provide a feedback mechanism on the website for electors to provide feedback on accessibility in the election

Barriers Addressed:

- Information/communication

Technology Measures of Success:

- Feedback
- # of website hits
- # of inquiries related to accessibility
- Level of compliance

- # of users leveraging virtual assistant

Initiative 2: Provide election information in alternative formats and through multiple channels.

Strategies:

- a) Present information about election accessibility to stakeholder and community organizations
- b) Produce 'How to Vote' Resources in English and Additional Languages
- c) Produce an accessible "How to Vote" Video and post to the City's Website

Barriers Addressed:

- Attitudinal
- Information/Communication

Measures of Success:

- # of presentations and engagements
- # of stakeholders consulted
- # of resources provided
- # of video views
- # of questions asked
- # of users leveraging the technology

Voting Places

The City is committed to ensuring that voting places are accessible for all electors.

Initiative 1: Ensure all Voting Places are accessible to voters with disabilities.

Strategies:

- a) Engage with community stakeholders on voting place selection criteria.
- b) Review and update voting place accessibility checklist.
- c) Review all potential voting places with consideration for public transit access where applicable.
- d) Review all potential voting places for accessibility features, including:
 - i. door operators / accessible doors
 - ii. barrier-free parking
 - iii. accessible ramps and thresholds
 - iv. a barrier-free path of travel from the parking lot
 - v. adequate lighting
- e) Inspect all voting locations prior to Voting Day to ensure accessibility for all voters.
- f) In the event of disruption or unforeseen circumstances requiring a poll location to be closed, a back-up poll location identified and secured that meets accessibility standards.
- g) In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility of voting places during the Advance Vote or on Voting Day, notices of disruption will be posted as soon as possible:
 - i. on the City's website
 - ii. X "Twitter"
 - iii. Instagram
 - iv. at the site of the disruption

- v. When applicable, a media advisory will be issued.

Barriers Addressed:

- Organization
- Information/Communication
- Physical/Architectural

Measures:

- # of parties consulted
- # of voting places located directly on a public transit route # of voting places located less than 250 meters from public transit route
- # of voting places located greater than 250 meters from a public transit route
- # of poll locations reviewed
- # of features included
- # of locations inspected
- # of backup locations identified
- # of notices posted
- # of interactions on social media

Initiative 2: Ensure all Voting Place access routes and entrances are clearly identified.

Strategies:

- a) Ensure voters with accessibility needs are directed to the accessible voting entrance by prominent signage.
- b) Use large-print signage at voting places.
- c) Train election workers to communicate with people who are blind or have low vision.

- d) Consult on best practices in signage and identification.

Barriers Addressed:

- Physical/Architectural
- Information/Communication
- Attitudinal

Measures:

- # of accessibility signs at each voting place
- Feedback
- Information provided in election accessibility procedure manual and through training.

Initiative 3: Ensure all Voting Place owners and managers are aware of accessibility requirements, and have included all in the contracts.

Strategies:

- a) Notify all voting place owners and managers of legislative accessibility requirements in order to prevent last minute changes to voting places.
- b) Welcome the use of support persons and service animals in voting places.
- c) Educate elections staff on appropriate communication with voters and service animals.

Barriers Addressed:

- Attitudinal

Measures:

- # of facility owners and managers notified
- Information provided in election accessibility procedure manual and training.

- Information provided in election accessibility procedure manual and training.

Initiative 4: Provide a system to deal with accessibility issues, concerns or complaints

Strategies:

- a) Establish a website link to an accessibility feedback form so an elector who encounters an accessibility issue can contact Election or Accessibility staff.
- b) Use the received feedback to ensure that voting places are accessible to voters, as required by the Municipal Elections Act, 1996

Barriers Addressed:

- Information/Communication

Measures:

- # of accessibility related reports received
- # of modifications made based on feedback, if necessary

Initiative 5: Provide information on the accessibility features available at each Voting Place

Strategies:

- a) Provide details of accessibility features available to voters and candidates at Advance Vote locations on the City's website.
- b) Provide details of accessibility features available to voters and candidates at voting places on Voting Day on the City's website.

Barrier Type:

- Information/Communication

Measures:

- # of webpage hits

Voting Methods

The City is committed to providing electors with options for voting and ensuring that each method of voting is accessible.

Initiative 1: Provide accessible voting opportunities.

Strategies:

- a) Provide voters with the option of 'Voting Anywhere' within their ward.
- b) Provide voters with the option to vote by proxy.
- c) Review ballot design to increase legibility.
- d) Increase legibility of ballots through use of accessible font styles, appropriate case usage, and colours, where possible.
- e) Provide an accessible ballot-marking device at all advanced polls, and one in each ward on Election Day for independent voting via "sip-and-puff", the use of paddles, or a tactile device.
- f) Provide magnifiers, pens and paper at all voting places.

Barriers:

- Physical/Architectural
- Information/Communication

Measures:

- # of proxy forms received
- # of accessible voting machines
- # of opportunities to vote using accessible voting machines
- # of magnifiers at each voting place
- # of pen and paper pads at each voting place

Initiative 2: Provide voting opportunities in institutions and long-term care facilities and for underserved communities.

Strategies:

- a) Establish voting places at the following facilities in order to allow eligible residents of the facility the opportunity to vote:
 - b) any institution in which 20 or more beds are occupied by persons who are disabled, chronically ill or infirmed
 - c) a long-term care facility in which 50 or more beds are occupied.
- d) Provide pre-enumeration services to Institutions allowing the Voters' List to be updated in advance of voting day.
- e) Provide additional lead time for voting to occur at institutions to ensure all voters have time to cast their ballots by voting day.
- f) Establish Polls in locations that fall outside of those legislated, but which specifically provide seniors, post-secondary students, Indigenous electors, and electors experiencing homelessness, and indigenous with an additional and focused voting opportunity.
- g) Establish Community polls in line with the Province's whereby approximately 60 additional buildings will be identified and targeted for additional voting opportunities in their buildings.

Barriers Addressed:

- Physical/Architectural

Measures:

- # of long-term care and retirement homes where voting process was implemented
- # of Special Advance Polls established
- # of Ballot on Demand Polls

- # of electors at each poll

Initiative 3: Provide assistance to voters with disabilities as requested.

Strategies:

- a) Ensure that voters using DARTS to get to a poll location on a voting day have front of the line access, reducing their time at the poll and ensuring that their transportation will wait for them.
- b) Upon request, provide voters with the opportunity to vote from anywhere at the voting place (including curbside) with assistance from a Managing Deputy Returning Officer and a Deputy Returning Officer.
- c) Upon request, assist the elector with voting or reading of ballot.
- d) Train Deputy Returning Officers to assist voters with voting process when requested
- e) Enable voters to swear an oath if they are unable to provide the required identification and/or documentation with a signature.
- f) Allow voters to bring a friend or interpreter to assist them as required with the voting process.
- g) Have created voting instructions in 20 languages.

Barriers Addressed:

- Physical/Architectural
- Organizational

Measures:

- # of trips to poll via Darts
- # of curbside accommodation requests
- average # of requests.

- # of Deputy Returning Officers trained to assist with voting
- # of oaths sworn

Initiative 4: Provide instructions on the use of accessible voting equipment.

Strategies:

- a) Produce videos that outline the voting process and the accessible voting technologies in use for the election. Videos will include accessible elements and captioning and post the videos on the City's website.
- b) Provide pictorial instructions on voting processes.

Barriers Addressed:

- Information/Communication

Measures:

- # of videos produced
- # of views
- # of pictorial instructions

Recruitment and Staffing

The City is committed to ensuring that recruiting and staffing practices are accessible, and that staff are trained and supported to provide accessible customer service.

Initiative 1: Provide accessibility training to all workers who participate in the election.

Strategies:

- a) Develop accessibility training and reference materials for all elections staff, including:
 - a) how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

- c) how to interact with people who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person.
- d) how to use voting equipment and assistive devices to deliver election services.
- e) what to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services.

Barriers Addressed:

- Organizational
- Attitudinal

Measures:

- # of manuals printed and distributed
- # of accessibility references materials printed and distributed,
- # of staff trained

Initiative 2: Ensure the recruitment process for applicants is accessible.

Strategies:

- a) Provide accommodations and special services for testing and interviews, upon request
- b) Ensure the worker's manual and/or other relevant materials are available in an accessible format, upon request.

Barriers Addressed:

- Physical/Architectural
- Information/Communication

Measures:

- # of accommodations requested

- # of reference materials produced in an accessible format

Assistance to Candidates

The City is committed to ensuring that Candidates with accessibility needs are provided with assistance and support as requested.

Initiative 1: Provide Candidates with a dedicated resource that will assist them throughout the campaign process.

Strategies:

- a) Recruit an Election Officer, Candidates and Outreach who will be responsible for ensuring all Candidates are provided information and assistance as required.

Barriers Addressed:

- Information/Communication
- Technology
- Organizational

Measures:

- # of candidates supported
- # of candidate inquiries received and responded to
- Average response time
- # of accessibility accommodations or supports provided
- # of accessible materials of alternative formats provided to candidates upon request
- # of outreach interactions
- Candidate feedback

Initiative 2: Provide candidates with access to information in alternative and accessible formats.

Strategies:

- a) Ensure the candidate guide and/or other relevant publications are available in an accessible format, upon request.
- b) Provide the City of Hamilton's Voters' List in an electronic format to candidates.
- c) Hold candidate information sessions in accessible locations and virtually.
- d) Provide accommodations and special information services upon request.

Barriers Addressed:

- Information/Communication
- Technology
- Physical/Architectural
- Organizational

Measures:

- # of accessible candidate guides distributed
- # of electronic Voters' Lists distributed
- # of information sessions held in an accessible location
- # of accommodation and special services requests

Post-Election Report

After the election, the City Clerk will work with stakeholders, including the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, to evaluate the outcomes of the Accessible Election Plan 2026. This review will identify areas for improvement and address any additional barriers experienced during the election for inclusion in future plans.

Within 90 days of Voting Day, the City Clerk will present a report to Municipal Council detailing the performance and results of the Accessible Election Plan. This report will be published on the City's website in an accessible format and shared with disability organizations and other stakeholders upon request.

Feedback

The City Clerk welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes and improvements can be considered and ways in which the City can improve the delivery of an accessible election. The feedback process provides the City Clerk's elections staff with an opportunity to carry out corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences; address training needs, enhance service delivery, and offer accessible methods of providing election services.

We encourage you to share your feedback so we can continue to improve the accessibility of Hamilton's municipal elections. Feedback can be submitted to the Elections Office through the following methods:

Telephone: 905-546-4365

In Person: 71 Main Street West Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Fax: 905-546-4905

Mail: Election Office 71 Main Street West Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Website: www.hamilton.ca/elections

Email: elections@hamilton.ca