



Report to: General Committee

Date Report Authored: January 8, 2015

SUBJECT: Accessibility & Diversity Objectives for the 2014 Municipal Election

PREPARED BY: Kimberley Kitteringham, City Clerk (ext. 4729),
Martha Pettit, Deputy Clerk (ext. 8220)

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report entitled “Accessibility & Diversity Objectives for the 2014 Municipal Election” be received for information purposes; and,
- 2) That the Returning Officer consider feedback obtained during the 2014 Municipal Election with respect to accessibility as part of future electoral event planning.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to outline the City’s accessibility and diversity objectives for the 2014 Municipal Election. The report satisfies Subsection 12.1 (1) of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (the Act) which requires each Ontario Returning Officer to submit a post-election report to Council outlining what steps were taken in the 2014 Municipal Election to identify, remove and prevent barriers for voters and candidates with disabilities.

BACKGROUND:

Prior to the 2010 Municipal Election, the Act was amended to include a provision that the Returning Officer “shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities” [12.1 (1)]. In addition, like other municipal services, Ontario Regulation 429/07 (Accessibility Standards for Customer Service) applies to Municipal Elections. This Regulation requires the City to provide: 1) all election officials with specialized accessible customer service training; and 2) all voters with a mechanism to share feedback on the accessibility of municipal election services as well as access to alternative formats for election information.

The Returning Officer established the identification, removal and prevention of barriers for persons with disabilities, as well as assistance for voters who experience English language comprehension barriers, as important objectives for the 2014 Municipal Election. These objectives enhance customer service and provide for improved dignity and respect for individuals in the electoral process. They also compliment Markham’s leadership in accessibility and diversity planning as evidenced by initiatives such as the corporate Accessibility Strategy and Diversity Action Plan.

As in the 2010 Municipal Election, the Accessibility & Diversity Objectives for the 2014 Municipal Election were comprehensive in nature and were informed by consultation with the City’s Accessibility Advisory and Senior’s Advisory Committees. In addition, the City contacted various Accessibility and Diversity Organizations in York Region to solicit

feedback and help promote the 2014 Municipal Election and all of the steps the City had taken to remove participation barriers.

OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:

Internet Voting

The City of Markham has offered the option of internet voting in municipal elections since 2003 and the City is considered a global leader in the provision of this type of alternative voting method. Internet voting provides a platform for eligible voters to cast a ballot from the convenience of any location that offers an internet connection. In the 2014 Municipal Election, improvements to this method of voting included the ability to vote from electronic devices such as tablets and smart phones which allowed eligible voters to vote without having to be at a stationary structure (i.e. they could vote on the bus, on the train, etc.) at a time and location that was convenient to their individual schedule. The internet voting platform used conformed to the accessible requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and allowed voters with a disability to vote from the convenience of their home using their own technical assistance devices (and often independently).

Preliminary results from a Province-wide, voluntary survey¹ conducted by the University of Toronto (U of T) during the 2014 Municipal Election supports the notion that **accessibility** and **convenience** are the number one reasons eligible voters choose internet voting over in-person voting. In Markham, over 11,000² eligible Markham voters cast their ballot online in 2014. Of the 1,612 Markham internet voters who completed the U of T survey, the majority (61%) indicated they were *very* satisfied with the internet voting process (29% were fairly satisfied). The Returning Officer will review the City's internet voting platform (and all of the feedback received from a variety of sources) prior to the 2018 Municipal Election in order to further refine and improve the internet voting process.

In-Person Voting

All of the voting places utilized by the City in 2014 underwent a comprehensive inspection to ensure that no physical barriers existed. Accessible voting devices were also made available at all early voting places to enable voters with disabilities to mark their ballot independently with the help of special appliances and devices such as paddles, sip/puff indicators and audio ballots. As well, magnifying sheets and ballot marking pen grips were made available at all voting places on Voting Day to assist voters who may have had difficulty viewing the ballots (i.e. they forgot their reading glasses) or who had difficulty grasping the ballot marking pens. The Returning Officer will review the City's in-person voting process prior to the 2018 Municipal Election in order to further refine and improve accessible accommodation requirements.

¹ The survey is a research project that is designed to study the effects of internet voting on Ontario municipalities in 2014. The University of Toronto has received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for the purpose of conducting the Project under the leadership of Dr. Nicole Goodman, Munk School of Global Affairs.

² In 2006, 10,639 eligible Markham voters cast their ballot online. In 2010, 10,597 eligible Markham voters cast their ballot online.

Partnership with Public Libraries

As in previous elections, voters were able to look themselves up on the Voters' List (online and in person) prior to Voting Day in order to determine if they were on the List or if their information was accurate. For voters that were not on the List, or whose information was incorrect, they were required to complete an "Application to Amend the Voters' List" (in accordance with the Act) and submit it in person with the appropriate identification. Previously, this Application could only be completed at the Civic Centre during regular business hours. However, for the 2014 Municipal Election, the City partnered with the Markham Public Library to allow for completion of these Applications at any of the City's seven library locations (during regular Library business hours). Offering this expanded service option allowed eligible voters greater convenience to correct or amend the Voters' List prior to Voting Day. The response from voters to this initiative was very positive, with approximately 2,000 voters attending a Library for this service. The Returning Officer will be reviewing ways to further expand opportunities to amend the Voters' List prior to the 2018 Municipal Election.

Accessible Customer Service Training for Election Officials

During the 2014 Municipal Election, over 800 temporary Election Officials received in-person training in two hour classes for their specific job duties and responsibilities. Accessible Customer Service was a common component for all of the training sessions provided which included: (1) an outline of accessibility and language support services available to voters; (2) specific training for staff using supportive technologies; (3) feedback mechanisms and identification of the process to access alternative formats; (4) training on how to interact with a variety of persons with disabilities to ensure dignity and respect; and (5) how to interact with persons with disabilities who use service animals. In addition, an "Accessibility Standards for Customer Service" pamphlet was produced for the 2014 Temporary Election Officials as a quick reference guide (see Attachment "A"). Interactive E-learning modules (on-line) of the training materials were created to allow Election Officials to revisit at their convenience and refresh their knowledge on the roles and responsibilities assigned to them once they had completed the in-person training sessions. These E-learning modules were created in partnership with the Markham Public Library and were very effective. Candidates in the 2014 Municipal Election were also advised of the accessible opportunities available in their Candidate's Guide and at each of the Candidate Information Sessions that were offered. The Returning Officer will continue to provide specific training for Election Officials for future elections and it is anticipated that E-learning will play a greater role in future electoral events.

Language Assistance

In accordance with the Act, "Notices, forms and other information are to be made available in English only, unless the council of the municipality has passed a by-law". Markham City Council passed By-law 2010-30 to permit election information to be provided in languages other than English in accordance with Subsection 9 (2) of the Act.

As in previous Markham municipal elections, the City translated key election information into the City's top 5 most widely-spoken non-English languages: Chinese (Modern & Traditional), Punjabi, Tamil and Urdu in addition to English and French. The key election information that

was translated included the Voter Information Package letters (a complete translation was made available on the election web page); ID requirements postcards (a complete translation of ID requirements was outlined on the election web page); posters used in voting places showing ID requirements and how to mark a ballot (see Attachment “B”).

In addition, advertisements and notices outlining key election-related dates were placed in various local ethnic media outlets, including a special production on OMNI TV (Mandarin edition) featuring a demonstration on how to register to vote online. As well, the availability of the City’s “Language Service Line”, which provides for translation services in a broad number of languages, was advertised on the City’s webpage and social media accounts.

Recruitment and placement of temporary Election Officials included the identification of specific language skills to ensure election personnel were placed in those areas of the City where that language was widely spoken. More than half of the Election Officials hired by the City indicated that they spoke at least one language other than English and French. The Returning Officer will continue to review the provision of election information in languages other than English for future elections.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE:

Costs associated with communications, printing, translation and other objectives identified in the Strategy were accommodated in the established Municipal Election budget of \$1.2 million.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This report aligns with the City’s Strategic Priorities related to accessibility and diversity.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Human Resources Department

RECOMMENDED BY:

19/01/2015

19/01/2015

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Kimberley Kitteringham
City Clerk/Returning Officer

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Trinela Cane
Commissioner, Corporate Services

[Attachment “A” – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Pamphlet](#)

[Attachment “B” – Samples of Translated Key Election Information](#)