Procedure Governing the Provision of Election Information and Services to Persons with Disabilities

Town of Fort Erie

Municipal Election 2026

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Introduction

This plan addresses the specific accessibility requirements for the 2026 Municipal Election for the Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie (the Town). The Town is committed to making municipal elections accessible to all citizens of Fort Erie – including electors, candidates, employees and volunteers who participate in the election administration.

The Clerk is responsible for the proper legislative and administrative conduct of municipal elections in the Town of Fort Erie. In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996,* the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, the Clerk is authorized to establish procedures and implement appropriate measures, within budgetary limits, to provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to participate fully in Municipal elections. Accordingly, the 2026 Municipal Elections will be conducted in such a manner to ensure that:

1. Candidates and electors with disabilities have reasonable access to all election information and services.

2. Persons with disabilities have full access to Voting Places.

3. Persons with disabilities have access to alternative methods of voting assistance that will permit them to vote independently and privately mark their ballot and, in the event, their disability cannot be accommodated through such alternative methods as are provided, a person with disabilities will have access to assistance from an Election Official who has received accessible customer service training in accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

4. Feedback regarding the conduct of the 2026 Municipal Elections from persons with disabilities is collected and documented so that in future Municipal Elections, available resources for the accommodation of persons with disabilities can be effectively directed to best satisfy community needs.

Staff training and election assistance

Staff Training

All staff carrying out election duties will be trained to recognize and ensure that persons with disabilities are served in a way that accommodates their needs. Training will include:

1. How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities.
2. How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person.
3. How to use voting equipment, and assistive devices to deliver election services.
4. What to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services.

Provision of Election Information

All reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that candidates and electors with disabilities are able to receive information and copies of election documents in a format that considers their disability. The format may be agreed upon between the requester and the Town Clerk.

Candidates with disabilities may access the election information available on the Town's Election Website using personal assistive technology such as screen readers.

Staff Assistance

The Clerk's staff is available to assist with any issues that may arise with respect to providing a barrier-free election and can be reached by way of the contact information provided below:

1. Telephone: 905-871-1600
2. In Person: Office of the Clerk, 1st Floor, Town Hall
   1 Municipal Centre Drive, Fort Erie, ON
   L2A 2S6
3. Fax: 905-871-4022
4. Email: PTodd@forterie.ca
   Elections@forterie.ca
5. Mail: Office of the Clerk,
   1 Municipal Centre Drive, Fort Erie, ON
   L2A 2S6

In addition, the following member of our election team can be contacted directly for assistance:

Brooklyn Bergstrand, Election Coordinator
Email: BBergstrand@forterie.ca
Phone: 905-871-1600 extension 2224

General Inquiries: elections@forterie.ca

Assistance to candidates

Service Animals

Candidates and scrutineers are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at all Voting Places and other designated election locations.

Campaign Expenses

Expenses that are incurred by a candidate with a disability that are directly related to the disability and would not have been incurred but for the election to which the expenses relate to are excluded from the permitted spending limit for the candidate.

Assistance to electors

Online Voting

Voters may cast their ballot using an electronic device on the online platform at any time when the portal opens on October 5, 2026 at 10:00 a.m., to the close of voting on election day at 8:00 p.m.

An online voting help station will be available at Town Hall for anyone who does not have access to the internet, personal device, or requires assistance. Voters are asked to bring their voter information card with them as it has a unique PIN required to login to the voting platform.

Voting Assistance

Persons with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person within the Voting Place. In addition, the Deputy Returning Officer in each Voting Place can assist the voter in casting their vote. Prior to entering the voting booth, the Deputy Returning Officer shall, in conjunction with the person with the disability, determine the extent to which they need assistance and the best way in which the assistance can be provided. This may include actually marking the ballot as directed by the person with the disability. All persons assisting a voter with a disability will be required to swear an oath.

A Deputy Returning Officer is authorized to attend any place within a voting location to serve a voter.

Where a Voting Place is located in an institution or retirement home, the Deputy Returning Officer can attend to voters in their specific living areas or at their bedside to assist them to vote. All Deputy Returning Officers are sworn to an oath of secrecy.

Accessible Voting Ballot Marker Device

This device allows an accessible voter the ability to mark their paper ballot, using an audio presentation and a hand-held vote selector device (or paddles device, or sip-and-puff device). Once the ballot is marked by the device, it is indistinguishable from a ballot marked by hand, since the vote markings printed on the ballot are actual random images of hand-made marks stored on the unit. This maintains accessible voter privacy, since accessible ballots cannot be discerned from ballots marked by hand. Once the accessible ballot is marked, it is fed into the tabulator and scanned, as per normal. The tabulator running the Ballot Marker Device also simultaneously services standard voters, who insert their hand-marked ballots into the tabulator while the accessible voter is using the Ballot Marker Device feature. The fact that one tabulator can service both standard voters and accessible voters at the same time greatly increases efficiency in the voting locations. In addition, the process creates an equal voting experience for all voters of differing abilities.

Voting Locations

Each location has been specifically chosen due to meeting and/or exceeding legislated accessibility requirements. Thorough inspections have been completed for each location before proceeding with the location as a poll.

Parking

Designated or reserved parking for people with disabilities is to be provided close to the entrance of the Voting Place where possible. Accessible parking spaces will be clearly posted and easy to see from the road and marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility. The number of designated parking spaces will be increased at voting locations on Voting Day, where possible. Routine checks of routes to the entrance of the Voting Place will be made throughout the day.

Service Animals

Electors requiring service animals are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at all voting locations.

Entrance to the Voting Place

Where the Voting Place has steps leading to the entrance, ramps will be provided to assist people using mobility aids or who have mobility impairments. Where possible, the slope of the ramp will conform to the barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code or the Canadian Standards Association Barrier-Free Guidelines and the ramp will be equipped with handrails. If the ramp is temporary, it will be securely attached to the steps so it cannot slip or wobble. Where the main entrance to the voting place is inaccessible, another entry point that is accessible will be used. Where possible the accessible entrance will be used as the main entrance for everyone.

The entrance for persons with disabilities will be clearly sign-posted, using the International Symbol of Accessibility. Every effort shall be made to ensure the door to the Voting Place is wide enough for a wheelchair or scooter to pass through easily; that door hardware is accessible and can be operated by a person using a closed fist or alternatively, if the doors are heavy, awkward to open or have handles that are out of reach, they will be propped open in a safe manner or manned.

Interior Voting Area

Access to the interior voting area and voting booth shall be level and easily traversed. Any doormats or carpeting shall be level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards. All voting areas will be lit and seating made available.

Accessible Voting Booths

At least one accessible voting booth will be available at each Voting Place. Such voting booth will be low in height and have a wide area to allow for individuals who use a wheelchair or scooter to vote independently and secretly. A large print Notice of Ballot shall be displayed in close proximity to the voting booth. Magnifying sheets will be made available to assist any individual with low vision.

Feedback process

Feedback about the manner in which election services are provided to persons with disabilities may be submitted to the Office of the Clerk through a variety of methods including:

1.	Telephone:	905-871-1600
2.	In Person:	Office of the Clerk, 1st Floor, Town Hall 1 Municipal Centre Drive, Fort Erie, ON L2A 2S6
3.	Fax	905-871-4022
4.	Email	PTodd@forterie.ca Elections@forterie.ca
5.	Mail	Office of the Clerk, 1 Municipal Centre Drive, Fort Erie, ON L2A 2S6

The feedback process provides election staff with an opportunity to take corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences, address training needs, enhance service delivery and provide alternative methods of providing election services. Feedback forms will be available in the Office of the Clerk, on the Town's Election Website, or with a poll worker on Election Day.

Feedback from our constituents gives us the opportunity to learn and improve.

Feedback may be provided by an individual with a disability in a format that is most convenient for them such as by telephone, in person, in writing, by email or by delivering a thumb drive. All feedback will be kept in strict confidence and used to improve the delivery of accessible customer service. A response to the feedback will be provided in the manner in which it was received.