ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY PLAN



2026 **MUNICIPAL** ELECTIONS

This Plan is for use in the 2026 Municipal Election in conjunction with the Township's current Accessibility Plan and IASR Standards.

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Accessible Election Mandate

With respect to Accessibility, the mandate for the Township of Laurentian Valley Municipal 2026 Election is as follows:

"It is the goal of the Township of Laurentian Valley to ensure that Electors in the Township who have a disability or an issue with accessibility are provided with the best opportunity to vote as independently as possible in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election."

Municipal Elections Act Requirements

In addition to our pre-existing accessibility requirements the township's current Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy, the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996 S.O. 1996, c.32*, as amended (the Act), section 12 states:

"12.1 (1) A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the need of electors and candidates with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (8).

Plan re barriers

(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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

Report

(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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11.

The Act further provides:

Section 41. (3) The clerk shall make such changes to some or all of 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).

Section 45. (2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities. 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (23).

Section 52 (1), par.4. The deputy returning officer may permit an elector who needs assistance in voting to have such assistance as the deputy returning officer considers necessary.

Objectives

This plan is intended to highlight measurers that the Township will be implementing to ensure equal opportunity for all electros and candidates. These objectives include:

- That all voting locations are accessible;
- That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates;
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate or election official;
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Township's website and social media.

Development of the Election Accessibility Plan

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

This plan is a "living" document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities of improvement arise.

During the development process of the initial Election Accessibility Plan, the following steps will be implemented:

1. In accordance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and consultation with accessible election guide for municipalities produced by CNIB, review proposed Accessibility Plan to substantiate needs are being met;
2. Establish staff training standards and practices directly related to the Election to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in a positive environment, and ensure that all Election Officials recognize that in every way possible a voter's needs are to be accommodated whenever possible; and
3. Following the Election, submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.

Communications

The 2026 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan will be made available at The Township of Laurentian Valley Municipal office and by way of notice on the Township's website. Alternate formats will be made available upon request.

Regard for the Needs of Electors with Disabilities

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

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 persons of any age.

Some examples of barriers to people with disabilities:

Types of Barriers	Examples
Attitudinal barriers are those that discriminate against people with disabilities.	• Thinking that people with disabilities are inferior • Assuming that a person who has speech impairment can't understand you
Information or communications barriers happen when a person can't easily understand information.	• Print is too small to read • Websites that can't be accessed by people who are not able to use a mouse • Signs that are not clear or easily understood
Technology barriers occur when a technology can't be modified to support various assistive devices.	• A website that doesn't support screen-reading software
Organizational barriers are an organization's policies, practices or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities.	• A hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities
Architectural and physical barriers are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for people with disabilities.	• Hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair, electric scooter or walker • Poor lighting for people with low vision • Parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair

Types of Disabilities

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

Physical Disabilities: There are many types and degrees of 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 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 an intervener, a professional 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, as a result 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.

Voting

Telephone/Internet Voting (e-voting)

E-voting combined with everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can present opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity. There is the potential to eliminate long line-ups at polling stations and better address accessibility issues for persons with disabilities, those suffering from illness, those serving in the military or living abroad, those away on personal travel and other groups of citizens such as single parents who may find it difficult to visit a traditional

polling station. Internet voting afford electors the opportunity of being able to vote at any time, a feature that further enables electors' ability to cast a ballot. Internet and telephone voting could allow greater secrecy for special populations of electors with disabilities (including visually or hearing impaired). By voting electronically and therefore unassisted, these electors are afforded a greater degree or anonymity when casting a ballot. Enabling secrecy for these groups enhances the equality of the vote. E-voting has the greatest potential to positively impact accessibility for voters.

For the 2026 Municipal Election, the Township is offering an opportunity to cast a ballot from the comfort and convenience of a familiar setting, complete with the tools, equipment and/or software that assist citizens with disabilities in the day-to-day activities is addressed with internet and telephone voting. Telephone and Internet voting will be available for Voting from 10:00 a.m. on October 16, 2026 and will be available until the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on October 26, 2026. During this time period, individuals will be able to cast their vote from anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day from any kind of phone or computer. With this system, voters are able to vote from the comfort of their homes and it provides for easy voting for voters with any disability.

Paper Ballot

On Voting Day (October 26, 2026), a Voting Place will be located at The Laurentian Valley Municipal Office, from 10:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. for Paper Ballots as well as Internet Voting.

The Paper Ballot system employs paper ballots on which the names of all candidates are printed. Voters record their choices by marking the circle next to the candidate they select, place the voted ballot in the ballot secrecy sleeve, provide it to the Election Official, and watch as the Election Official feeds it in the tabulator. The Elector will see the ballot cast symbol on the tabulator once the ballot has been successfully cast. A paper ballot allows the use of various means, (magnifying glass, large print, etc.) to read the text and allows improved accessibility for voters.

Voting Place

For the purpose of this plan, voting place includes the exterior parking and walkways associated with the location.

In order to ensure that each voting place is accessible to Electors with disabilities, a Site Evaluation Form (Appendix A) will be completed prior to confirming the site as a voting place.

The Evaluation Form will include the assessment of the following areas within the voting place:

- Exteriors
- Parking Areas
- Entrances
- Elevators (if applicable)
- Fire and Life Safety
- General Layout and Services
- Interiors
- Public Washrooms
- Facility Signage and Information Systems

Upon completion of the Evaluation, a list of the barriers which have been identified will be reviewed to determine if they can be rectified in order to accommodate Electors with disabilities. This may include the implementation of site-specific accommodations for that voting place on Election Day.

Voting Place Institutions

The Municipal Elections Act requires that on voting day, a voting place shall be provided on the premises of the following:

"S. 45 (7)

1. An institution for the reception, treatment or vocational training of members or former members of the Canadian Forces.
2. An institution in which, on nomination day, 20 or more beds are occupied by persons who are disabled, chronically ill or infirm.
3. A retirement home in which, on nomination day, 50 or more beds are occupied"

The Township of Laurentian Valley does not have any of the above listed institutions in its municipality.

Election Materials

Alternate Format

Alternate formats are other ways of publishing information besides regular print. Some of these formats can be used by everyone while others are designed to address the specific needs of a user.

The Township and the person with a disability may agree upon the format to be used for the document or information.

In the event the information is not generated by the Township or is supplied by a third party, the township will make every effort to obtain the information from the third party in an alternate format and/or will attempt to assist the Elector by providing assistive equipment.

General Election Materials

Large Print – Printed material generated by the Township will be provided in Arial font, 12 point and can be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

Optical Character Recognition – This software converts text that is displayed on a computer monitor to voice (using a speech-synthesizer). Should the Elector not have access to OCR software, the township can provide assistance through public access computers at Pembroke Public Library to assist in viewing Election material prepared by the Township.

Website – Information generated by the City on the website in relation to the election will be in a format for which OCR software can be utilized. In addition, website font can be sized in three (3) levels to aid the user in reading the information.

Voting Materials (Ballots)

Assistive Devices – Each voting place will be equipped with magnifiers as well as the assistance of Election Officials.

Voting Provision for Electors with Disabilities at the Voting Place

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

Support Persons – In relation to a person with a disability, a Support Person accompanies him or her in order to help with communications, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

The Deputy Returning Officer may permit an Elector who needs assistance in voting to have such assistance as the Deputy Returning Officer considers necessary. The Support Person, upon the completion of the prescribed oath, may accompany the Elector behind the voting screen to assist the Elector in the voting process.

Assistive Personal Equipment – Assistive personal devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

Each voting place will be equipped with magnifiers. Personal assistance from an Election Official is also available.

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 his or her disability, for example a guide dog wearing a harness. Service Animals will be permitted in all voting places.

Physical Disabilities – Voting places including parking areas, entrances and voting areas will be selected and/or setup in a manner that enables Electors with physical disabilities to vote.

In the event an Elector is unable to access the established voting area due to a physical disability, the Deputy Returning Officer may attend to the Elector anywhere within the voting place.

Vision Loss – Each voting place will be equipped with magnifiers.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss – Each voting place will be equipped with a pad of paper and pen 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.

Accessible Voting Booths

Accessible voting booths will be available at each Voting Place. Voting booths will be low in height and have a wide area to allow individuals utilizing mobility aids to vote independently and secretively. A large print Notice of Ballot shall be displayed in close proximity to the voting booth. Magnifying sheets will be available to assist any individual with low vision.

Accessibility Training for Election Officials

All Election Officials have received accessible customer service training. are required to complete the Township’s general Accessible Customer Service training which includes:

- The purpose of the Act
- How to interact with people with various disabilities
- How to interact with people who use the assistance of a service animal or support person

Election Officials will be provided with access to Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication published by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario Ministry and Community and Social Services and AODA Customer Service Guide (https://www.aoda.ca/customer-care-guide/) to assist them in delivering and maintaining accessible customer service by:

- Being aware of accessibility features at/for the voting place
- Providing tips on how to maintain these accessibility features
- Being aware of various tools available to assist with customer service such as assistive devices
- Knowing when and how to report a disruption of service
- Knowing how to collect Customer Feedback

In addition to the Township's general Customer Service Training, all Election Officials will be provided with customized training on this plan and the related materials contained within, as well as the following:

- A requirement to monitor Electors with disabilities to ensure that their needs are met, i.e. if an individual with a walker is in a long line, staff are to observe, and if it is felt that the Elector is having difficulties, then offer a chair, ensure that their place is saved in the voting line-up, etc.;
- A requirement to ensure that Electors are aware that assistance (in varying forms) is available if required;
- Direction for Election Officials to observe Electors during discussions with them, and if it appears that the voter is having difficulty understanding, ensuring that the voter is able to clearly see the speaker;
- Encouraging Election Officials to approach an Elector if it appears that the Elector requires assistance to get around in the voting place, offer assistance;
- Conduct routine checks of the voting place to ensure accessible features are maintained (eg. Check the access doors frequently);
- Offer assistance and watch for Electors unable to easily enter the building;

Reporting

As per the Municipal Elections Act:

"S.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. 2016, c. 15, s. 11."

The said report will be made available to the public via the Township's website.

Additional Information

Customer Service Feedback

The Township welcomes customer feedback to identify areas where changes need to be considered and ways in which the Township can improve the delivery of an accessible Election.

The Accessibility Request Form can be accessed on the Township's website, alternatively contact the office at 613-735-6291 or by email at info@lvtownship.ca to provide customer service feedback. Inquiries may be mailed or faxed to:

Township of Laurentian Valley
Attention: Accessibility Coordinator
460 Witt Road
Pembroke, ON K8A 6W5
Phone: (613) 732-6291
Fax: (613)-735-5820

Accessible Service Disruptions

From time to time and/or for unforeseen circumstances beyond the Township's control, temporary service disruptions may be experienced. In the event of a temporary accessible service disruption, Election Officials will commit to making reasonable efforts to ensure that the services are reinstated as quickly as possible and that alternative services are provided where feasible.

In these instances of service disruptions, the Township shall provide reasonable notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by persons with disabilities.

Notice of these temporary disruptions shall be provided in a conspicuous place and manner at the respective locations and information shall also be posted on the Township's website.

This notice shall include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Accessible services in relation to this plan include voting places, election materials and/or voting provisions for Electors with disabilities at the voting place.

Appendix A

Voting Place Site Evaluation Form

Name of Voting Place:

Address:

Phone Number

Contract Name:

Checklist

Exteriors	Yes	No
Accessible pedestrian route(s) or paths are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, scooters, or other mobility devices		
Curb cuts or ramps are wide enough for wheelchairs and scooters, have a non-slip finish and are kept clear of snow and ice in winter weather		
Routes are not obstructed by poles, plants, bicycle racks, etc.		
Accessible entrances are clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility		
Building and route signage is provided in large, high-contrast lettering		
Accessible passenger loading zone accommodates accessible vehicles		
On exterior steps, forward edges are highly colour-contrasted for easy visibility		
On both sides of ramps or exterior stairs, continuous handrails are a bright contrasting colour and have horizontal or vertical rails to prevent people from slipping through		
Parking Areas	Yes	No
Accessible parking spaces are clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility		

There is a safe, clearly marked, accessible pedestrian route from the designated parking area to an accessible building entrance or elevator lobby		
Accessible pedestrian route is made of firm, level material		
Entrances	Yes	No
Entrances are accessible to people using wheelchairs or scooters		
Accessible door: • opens automatically • has power-assisted door operators, or • can easily be opened with one hand		
Mats are level with the floor and door thresholds are beveled so they do not create a tripping hazard		
People can easily find information, at a reception counter, an accessible call bell or information phone for persons requiring assistance		
Elevators (if applicable)	Yes	No
Elevator doorways are wide enough and stay open long enough to allow persons using wheelchairs to pass through easily		
Braille signage and controls can be easily reached, and a two-way emergency call system or telephone is provided		
Audible signals announce floors and up/down direction of elevator cars		
Fire and Life Safety	Yes	No
A fire policy and/or fire safety plan is available to Election Officials and includes provisions for the evacuation of people with disabilities		
Main exit routes and exit doors are easily accessed and used by people using mobility aids		
Exit instructions are printed in large text, and mounted in an accessible, highly visible location		
Fire alarms have both visual and audible signals		
Fire hose cabinets and fire extinguishers are in a highly contrasting colour		
A first aid station/kit is available to Election Officials		
General Layout and Services	Yes	No
Queuing areas and serving aisles are wide enough for people using mobility aids including electric wheelchairs and scooters		

Counter/tables are accessible to and useable by patrons using wheelchairs or scooters		
Appropriate lighting is installed to ensure that people with vision disabilities may clearly identify colours, patterns and signage		
Interiors	Yes	No
Floor finishes have non-slip surfaces under wet and dry conditions		
Open-concept, accessible routes are marked by bright colours or textural changes at floor level, to provide directional cues for people with vision disabilities		
There are no protruding objects or tripping hazards in accessible routes, and if so, they are clearly marked with a bright colour, a cane-detectible floor finish, or a guard		
Where floors are carpeted, the carpet is of firm, dense construction and easy for a wheelchair user to roll over without difficulty		
Thresholds are beveled to accommodate different floor materials		
Walls in busy areas, corridors, ramps or staircases are finished in smooth, non-glossy, non-abrasive finishes		
Colour of doors or door frames in hallways contrast with surrounding wall colours		
Public Washrooms	Yes	No
An accessible stall is provided for each sex when integrated into regular washrooms or in an accessible stand-alone unisex washroom is located nearby		
The following washroom features are accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities: • grab bars • coat hooks • flush controls • wash basins • toilet paper dispenser • mounted automatic hand-dryers or paper towel holders • lever-handled faucets or automatic faucets		
Facility Signage and Information System	Yes	No
Show the International Symbol of Accessibility		
Include appropriate pictograms wherever possible (e.g. on washroom doors)		

Include large high-contrast text, clear, light-coloured lettering or symbols on a dark background, or dark characters on a light background		
Are mounted at a convenient height for both wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities		

Person who Completed Evaluation:

Areas of Concern:

Site Selected: Yes: _____ No: _____

Special Accommodations for Site: