



2026 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan

If you require this document in an alternate format, please contact
the Clerk's Office

by phone: 519-776-7336 ext. 1146 or

by email: elections@essex.ca



Introduction

The 2026 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan has been developed in advance of the 2026 Municipal Election to ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in the election process.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 all public and private sector organizations must meet the requirements of accessibility standards established by regulation. The Town's commitment to providing accessible customer service is reflected in the Accessible Customer Service Policy approved by Council on October 19, 2009, as well as the Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy approved by Council on February 4, 2013.

In addition to municipal policies and provincial legislation governing accessibility, the following sections of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (S.O. 1996, chapter 32, Schedule), define the requirements related to providing accessible customer service when conducting an election:

Duties of clerk

11(1) The clerk of a local municipality is responsible for conducting elections within that municipality.

Electors and candidates with disabilities

12.1(1) A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.

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.

Ballots - Variations for electors with visual impairments

41(3) The clerk shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as they consider necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without the assistance referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 52 (1).

Number and location of voting places

45(1) The clerk shall establish the number and location of voting places for an election as they consider most convenient for the electors.

Accessibility

45(2) In establishing the locations of voting places, the clerk shall ensure that each voting place is accessible to electors with disabilities.

Attendance on electors with disabilities

45(9) To allow an elector with a disability to vote, a deputy returning officer shall attend on the elector anywhere within the area designated as the voting place.

Objectives

This plan is intended to identify measures that the Town of Essex will implement to ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in the election process. Objectives include the following:

1. That all voting locations are accessible;
2. That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection;
3. That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to information on eligible candidates and where and when to vote;
4. That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the municipal election as an elector, candidate or election official; and
5. That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are made aware of the Town's accessibility measures through multiple communication channels, including print advertising, social media, and the Town's website (essex.ca).

Accessible Customer Service Training

All individuals participating in election duties will be trained to recognize and ensure that persons with disabilities are served in a way that accommodates their needs.

This 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. How to provide accessible customer services and what to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services.

Election officials shall be well informed of the voting process, as well as all the available tools and assistive devices and how they may be used.

All election officials will be provided with a copy of the Town of Essex Accessible Customer Service Policy, which sets out general practices, procedures and guidelines to be followed.

Assistance to Candidates

The Clerk's Office will be available throughout the election period to assist candidates with any issues that may arise with respect to providing a barrier-free election. The Clerk's elections office can be contacted by phone at 519-776-7336 ext. 1146 or by email: elections@essex.ca

Accessibility-related information that may be of particular interest to candidates includes the following:

Accessible Campaigns

Accessibility measures for candidates to consider with regard to their campaign literature and messaging will be included in an information package provided to all candidates upon filing their nomination papers.

Voting Method and Accessible Voting Technologies

The 2026 Municipal Election will be conducted using paper ballots together with optical scanning vote tabulators. Accessible voting technologies will be available at designated advance voting locations and voting day locations. Detailed information about the voting method and the accessible voting technologies is set out in the 2026 Municipal Election Procedures and Forms report, available on the municipal website or from the Clerk's Office.

Each candidate will be provided with a copy of this report to ensure that they can instruct electors with disabilities on the options available.

Service Animals

Candidates and scrutineers are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at any designated election locations.

Campaign Expenses

Expenses 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, are excluded from the permitted spending limit for the candidate in accordance with section 88.19 (3) of the Municipal Elections Act.

Assistance to Electors

To further the objectives of this plan, the Clerk's Office has identified the following series of measures that will be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in the election process.

Voting Locations

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

To ensure that each voting location is accessible to electors with disabilities, a "Voting Location Accessibility Audit Checklist" will be completed prior to confirming each site as a voting location. The checklist is included as Appendix "A" in this document.

Prior to the election, a map of all advance voting and voting day locations will be made available on the Town's election webpage.

Accessible Route

An easily navigable route will be marked for entry into the voting location and into the voting area within the location. The voting area will be identified with clear and understandable signage.

Parking

Designated parking for persons with disabilities will be available close to the entrance to voting places, where possible. Accessible parking spaces will be clearly marked and will be on firm and level ground. Routine checks will be made to ensure all entrances remain barrier free throughout the day.

Entrance/Exit to Voting Location

All entrances to voting locations will be easy to access and barrier free. Every effort will be made to ensure that the door into the interior voting area is wide enough for a wheelchair, scooter, other assistive device or service animal to pass through safely and easily. Should doors into the interior voting area not be accessible, the doors shall remain propped open for the duration of the voting location hours. Routine checks of the entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the day.

Interior Voting Area

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

Accessible Voting Booths

Voting booths that are easily accessible will be available at each voting place. Voting booths 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.

Voting Method and Accessible Voting Technologies

The election will be conducted using paper ballots together with optical scanning vote tabulators. Accessible voting technologies will be available at designated advance voting and voting day locations.

Accessible voting technologies will include a vote tabulator equipped with ballot marking devices, which permit the independent casting of ballots by persons with accessibility needs and those who cannot mark a paper ballot with a ballot marking pen.

Ballot marking devices will include a handheld controller with audio-tactile interface, used in conjunction with headphones to select "yes" or "no" to ballot options. Other devices include a sip-and-puff input interface and a paddle button input interface. Users will be able to adjust the volume and speed of the audio presentation, move between contests, select votes, and print their own marked ballot. The printed ballot will be indistinguishable from a ballot marked by hand and will move directly from the ballot marking printer into the attached vote tabulator.

Voting Assistance

Persons with accessibility needs may be accompanied by a support person within the voting place. In addition, an elections officer in each voting place may assist a voter in casting their vote. All elections officers are sworn to an oath of secrecy.

Prior to entering the voting booth, the elections officer shall, in conjunction with the voter, determine the extent to which they need assistance and the best way to provide the assistance. This may include marking the ballot as directed by the voter. Where a voting place is located in an institution or retirement home, the deputy returning officer may attend on voters in their specific living areas or at their bedsides to assist them in voting.

Attendance on Voter

To allow an elector with a disability to vote, a deputy returning officer shall attend on the elector anywhere within the area designated as the voting place.

Assistive Personal Equipment

Electors may use assistive devices, including wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, , personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping as well as note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, and assistive listening devices which includes an application on a personal phone or tablet.

Support Person

To allow an elector with a disability to vote, a support person may attend with the elector anywhere within the area designated as the voting place after taking an oath to secrecy and approval of the elector.

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 voting places.

Low Vision

Each voting booth will be equipped with a magnifying sheet to assist individuals with low vision.

Hearing Impaired

Each voting place will be equipped with a pad of paper and pen to communicate with the hearing impaired, if required.

Voting by Proxy

The Clerk's office will only issue the required Form 3 directly to qualified electors who wish to appoint another person to vote on their behalf. Such qualified electors can make an appointment to request and obtain the required Form 3 at Town Hall, 33 Talbot Street South,

Essex during specified times. Please refer to the Town of Essex Municipal Election Proxy Procedures Policy for further details.

Voting at Institutions and Retirement Homes

For the 2026 Election, the following institutions have been identified:

Harrowood Seniors Community, 1 Pollard Drive, Harrow

Iler Lodge Long Term Care Home, 111 Iler Avenue, Essex

On voting day, a voting place shall be provided on the premises at each institution. The deputy returning officer for these voting places may attend electors to allow them to vote.

Communications

The Town is required, as per the Accessible Customer Service Policy, to provide a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Alternate Formats

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 Town and the person with a disability shall discuss and agree upon the format to be used for the document or information.

In the event the information is not generated by the Town or is supplied by a third party, the Town 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

Printed material generated by the Town will be provided in a sans serif font, minimum 12 point, and can be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

Information generated by the Town on the municipal website (essex.ca) regarding the election will be compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level A, and allow for assistive software to be utilized. In addition, the website font size can be adjusted within the browser to aid the user in reading the information.

Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions

The elections officer at a voting location, under guidance of the Elections Coordinator, shall provide notice of each planned or unplanned disruption that could affect the public, such as

the unavailability of an assistive device, service or feature that is regularly available to enable or enhance access to services.

The notice of service disruption shall include the following information:

- Description of the service disruption
- Reason for the service disruption
- Anticipated duration of the disruption
- Alternate routes, facilities and services, if any, that are available
- Contact information

Notice will be given by posting the information in a visible place on the premises (on doors, at service counters, on bulletin boards, etc.), by posting on the Town's website, and by such other method as is reasonable under the circumstances.

Emergency Information and Procedure

Election staff will be aware of the emergency evacuation procedure and plans at their designated voting location. They will be informed on how to assist staff and electors with disabilities in the event of an emergency.

Feedback

The Clerk welcomes feedback to identify areas where changes need to be considered and ways in which the Town can improve the delivery of an accessible election.

Customer feedback can be provided on the feedback form available on our website.

In addition, feedback can be provided by any of the following methods:

Telephone: 519-776-7336 ext. 1146
Fax: 519-776-8811
Email: elections@essex.ca
In Person: Essex Town Hall
33 Talbot Street South, Essex, Ontario
By Mail: Town of Essex Clerk
Town of Essex
33 Talbot Street South, Essex, Ontario N8M 1A8

The feedback process provides election staff with an opportunity to take corrective measures to address training needs, enhance service delivery, and provide alternative methods of providing election information and services.

In addition, staff members at Town Hall are available throughout the election to assist with any issues that may arise with respect to providing a barrier-free election.

This accessibility plan is a living document that will continue to undergo changes, as needed.

Additional Information

Clerk's Department

The staff in the Clerk's Department can answer any questions you may have about running for office, the election in general, or specific provisions for persons with accessibility needs.

Town Website

During the 2026 Election year, the Town of Essex website (essex.ca) will host an election specific page which will be updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent developments and information. Visit the website for an up-to-date list of candidates and other important messages or events throughout the election year.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs

The Ministry's website contains information about municipal elections, including a Candidates' Guide and a Voter's Guide.

e-Laws

Current statutes for the Province of Ontario can be found on the e-Laws website (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws>). Statutes pertaining to municipal elections and accessibility include the following:

- Municipal Elections Act, 1996
- Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Appendix "A"

2026 Municipal Election Voting Location Accessibility Audit Checklist

Facility Name: _____

Facility Address: _____

Audit Date: _____

Audit Conducted By: _____

Criteria	Yes/No	Comments
Entrance		
Is the main public entrance a barrier free, accessible one?		
If not, is there an alternative entrance that is accessible?		
Are interior entrances to the voting place barrier free and accessible?		
Is the entrance well lit?		
Is the entrance easy to see from the parking area?		
Parking Lot		
Is accessible parking available?		
Are the accessible parking spots clearly marked with signs and marked on the pavement?		
Ramps		
Are ramps provided as an alternative to stairs?		
Are handrails provided on both sides of the ramp?		
Doors		
Do the doors have a minimum clear width of 860mm (34 in.) as measured between the door stop and the edge of the door in the 90-degree open position?		
Are automatic doors provided?		
If there is no automatic door, are lever handles or D-shaped pulls provided?		
Are the handles at an appropriate height?		
Is there a maneuvering space of 600mm (24 in.) on both sides of the door?		

Floor Space		
Are the widths of corridors, hallways and paths wide enough (minimum 1.2 meters/4 feet)?		
Is the path of travel free of furniture or equipment?		
Is adequate headroom height of minimum 2.03 meters (6 feet, 8 inches) provided?		
Is there space for wheelchair seating in the voting location?		
Stairs		
Are the stair risers closed in?		
Is there colour or texture contrasted tread nosing?		
Are handrails provided on both sides of the stairs?		
Elevators		
Do the doors open wide enough to accommodate a person in a wheelchair (at least 915mm or 36 in.)?		
Do the doors stay open for at least 7 seconds?		
Are the internal dimensions minimum 1.725m x 1.5m (5 foot, 8 inches x 5 feet)?		
Are the buttons at an appropriate height (highest button no higher than 1.2 metres/4 feet, lowest button at least 920mm/36 inches from the floor)?		
Are the controls or floor buttons raised and done in Braille?		
Washrooms		
Are accessible stall(s) located within the current washroom facilities?		
If not, is there an accessible washroom available to both males and females?		
Does the entrance to the washroom open automatically or have an automatic door opener?		
Is there a clear turning space of 1.83m (6 feet) in diameter outside the accessible stall?		
Is the accessible stall or facility 1.83m x 1.83m (6 feet x 6 feet)?		
Are grab bars mounted on the wall behind the urinal and on the side wall?		
Is the toilet flush control automatic or located on the side where the individual would transfer from?		
Are faucets, fixtures, dispensers and light switches at an appropriate height?		

Additional Comments: