

Date: January 23, 2023

To: Mayor Easton and Members of Council

From: Julie Kirkelos, Director of Legislative Services/Town Clerk

Subject: 2022 Municipal Election General and Accessibility Overview

This update is for information only as it fulfills the legislative requirement and statutory obligations under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (“MEA”). The MEA outlines accessibility related obligations and regulations upheld by the Clerk in every municipality in Ontario:

- Section 12.1 (1): “A clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities, 2009, c. 33, Sch. 21, s. 8 (8).”
- Section 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, part.”

Overall, the MEA outlines the provisions to conduct elections pertaining to municipalities in Ontario including, but not limited to, accessibility.

The following information regarding the implementation of the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election is being provided to fulfill the statutory obligations within the MEA and to reinforce that the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election was conducted in an accessible, transparent and accountable manner, providing an opportunity to foster excellence in the management of local government within the Town of Lincoln.

The following offices were to be elected for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election:

- One (1) Mayor
- Eight (8) Councillors, two (2) in each ward
- One (1) Regional Councillor
- Four (4) School Board Trustees
 - One (1) School Board Trustee for the Niagara Catholic District School Board
 - One (1) School Board Trustee for the Niagara Public District School Board

- One (1) School Board Trustee for the Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir (French Separate School Board)
- One (1) School Board Trustee for the Conseil scolaire Viamonde (French Public School Board)

The Mayor, Regional Councillor, School Board Trustees for the Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir (French Separate School Board) and Conseil scolaire Viamonde (French Public School Board) were acclaimed.

Voting Methods and Voter Turnout

Eligible electors were given the option to access the following voting opportunities during the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election:

- Internet Voting (October 5, 2022 – October 19, 2022); including Special Voting Opportunities (“SVO”) (October 11, 12, & 13, 2022) at five (5) Special Institutions
- Two (2) Advanced Voting In-Person with Accessible Devices at Town Hall (October 15, 2022 and October 19, 2022)
- Voting Day In-Person (October 24, 2022) at nine (9) accessible Voting Locations

Long-term care facilities expressed ongoing concerns surrounding COVID-19, as such, using the authority granted under Section 12 of the *MEA*, the Clerk allowed SVO’s to the long-term care facilities to ensure those wishing to participate in the electoral process had an opportunity to do so.

5,492 electors cast their ballots by internet voting and in-person voting opportunities, representing 28.14% of eligible voters. This is a significantly lower turnout than the 39.06% in the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election. Although voter turnout decreased, there was an increase to internet voting by 10.44% when comparing to the 2018 Municipal and School Board Election.

Total Voting Hours:

Internet Voting (Oct 5 through to 19, 2022)	346 hrs
Bethesda (Oct 11, 2022)	3 hrs
United Mennonite Home (Oct 11, 2022)	3 hrs
Golden Horseshoe Estates (Oct 12, 2022)	4 hrs
Albright Manor (Oct 13, 2022)	3 hrs
Lincoln Lodge (Oct 13, 2022)	1.5 hrs
Advanced In-person Voting (Oct 15 and 19, 2022)	20 hrs
Voting Day (Oct 24, 2022)	10 hrs
Total Voting Hours	390.5 hrs

A breakdown of voting opportunity and voter turnout is as follows:

Voting Opportunity	Electors Voted	Approximate Percentage of Voter Turnout
Internet Voting (includes SVO)	2,496	45.48 %
Advanced In-person Voting	350	6.37 %
Voting Day	2,646	48.18 %

While lower turnout could be a result of four (4) offices being acclaimed, most municipalities in Ontario did see a decline in voter turnout. Alternatively, it has been noted that Lincoln specifically, acclamations for both Mayor and Regional Councillor and overall feedback heard was that the community is pleased where the municipality is at with delivery of services and programs.

Legislative Services & Communication Initiatives

A major focus for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election was to engage the public and provide electors with election related information in a timely manner. Legislative Services collaborated with the Communications Department over the course of 2021 and 2022 to tailor an effective and well-timed engagement plan for Town of Lincoln electors.

Below is a summary of election related initiatives that took place over the course of the election year:

Date	Initiative	Objective
September 2021-October 2021	Survey for the 2022 Municipal Election – Voting Methods available on Speak Up Lincoln.	To be an informative tool to learn how our the electors feel about alternative voting methods as well as receive feedback on previous municipal election experience. The goal is to make voting easier for residents and ensure flexibility for any future COVID-19 restrictions and encourage those eligible to vote
March 2022 – Ongoing	Election information live on Town of Lincoln website	Provide candidates and electors with up-to-date information of the election including dates, voting locations, and information on candidate nominees

March 2022 – Ongoing	elections@lincoln.ca email address activated	Email address provided solely to communicate all correspondence election related including elector inquiries
April 28, 2022	Candidate Information Night (hosted by local area municipalities in Pelham)	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided potential candidates with information and resources pertaining to running in the municipal election
April 2022-June 2022	Seat at the Table	Promoted the initiative called Niagara Region Seat at the Table sessions which aimed to increase the number of women in municipal government.
April 2022 – Oct. 24, 2022	Election related social media posts	Remind electors of the election, including how to get on the voters list, as well as providing electors up-to-date information related to the election
June 2022	Promotional mailing insert into the June tax bill	Included promotional information inserts to advise voting information and nomination period, as well as encourage electors to verify their information to get on the voters' list
July 2022-September 2022	Cross Departmental eNewsletters (Museum, Community Services, Economic Development and Beamsville Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA))	Article space for timely reminders for the upcoming 2022 Municipal and School Board Election including information on how to get on the voters' list.
August 2022	GoVaxx buses (mobile indoor COVID-19 vaccine clinics)	Opportunities to place election information at Lincoln GoVaxx mobile vaccination clinics and at Town of Lincoln community centres
August 2022	Promotional inserts provided in Summer Swim	Election staff worked with Community Services staff

	Program. Collaboration with Community Services Summer swim program)	to include election reminders and voter information affixed to summer swim program report cards
August 2022	Promotional Video to get on the voter's list	Town Clerk promoted social media video to remind residents of the election, and encourage those eligible to vote to get on the voters' list and confirm their information using the voters registration tool provided by MPAC
September 9, 2022	Public Service Announcement – Confirm Voter Information	Reminder to resident to confirm they are on the voters' list
September 20, 2022	Public Service Announcement – Voter Information Notice for 2022 Municipal Election	Advise residents that voter notifications were mailed out, which provided voter information of when and where to vote, including advanced and internet voting information.
September 2022 – October 25, 2022	Election Hotline active	Hotline provided for election to assist electors with helpful information and answer questions related to the election up to Election Day.
September 29, 2022	Internet Voting Workshop at Lincoln Community Centre	Election staff held a workshop to provide resources outlining steps for internet voting and educate electors on the internet voting process
September 30 2022	Voting Information Workshop at the Jacob Seniors Living	Election staff held an information drop-in session to provide residents with their voting notification letters and information outlining voting options, as well as answering general election inquiries

October 3, 2022	Public Service Announcement – Alternate Voting Options	Notice provided to residents to inform of alternate voting options available
October 14, 2022	Public Service Announcement – Advanced Voting Reminder	Reminded voters of advanced voting opportunities
October 24, 2022	Public Service Announcement – Election Day Reminder	Provided residents with Election Day Information
October 26, 2022	Media Release – Official Results	Provide residents with official Election results
ONGOING	Open Walk-In Policy at Town Hall	Ensure that electors and candidates were always provided with sufficient information and resources pertaining to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.
ONGOING	Public Inquiry Email & Telephone Line	Provide a timely and adequate response to electors that had questions related to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

In addition to the initiatives taken on by the Elections Team to engage the public during the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, a large volume of advertisements were circulated via radio, newspaper and social media posts to inform the public of important information regarding the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election.

Below is an outline of the advertisements that the Election Team and Communication Team worked together to inform residents:

Communication Initiative	Number of Released Advertisements
Media Releases (Niagara Votes)	9
Newspaper Advertisements (Niagara Votes)	3
10 sec Radio Traffic Tags (HTZ, MOVE, 101.1FM & GiantFM)	5
Social Media Advertisements (Niagara Votes)	3
Newspaper Advertisements (Town of Lincoln)	13
Facebook Posts/Stories (Town of Lincoln)	89
Instagram Posts/Stories (Town of Lincoln)	82
Twitter Posts (Town of Lincoln)	87

This initiative reached scores of readers, listeners, and social media followers. The Town of Lincoln's election social posts doubled in 2022 and thus there was a notable uptick in the overall reach for both Facebook and Instagram over seven (7) months, from April 2022 to October 24, 2022.

Election Email and Phone

Over the period of seven (7) months from activation, close to 500 emails and over 120 phones calls from residents were received to the dedicated election email and telephone hotline with Election staff responding to each one in a timely manner. These calls assisted with the voters' list, voter information notices, and general inquiries pertaining to 2022 Municipal and School Board Election. This does not include emails and phone calls that were directed to the Election Teams' individual email or extension as well as in-person drop in inquiries.

Election Staff

The success of Election Day would not have been possible without the Town of Lincoln staff and public election workers. The 2022 Municipal and School Board Election saw an increase in TOL staff, from twenty-three (23) in 2018 to almost to forty-three (43) in 2022. With the increase of staff volunteering to assist on Election Day, the number of public election workers was decreased, utilizing nineteen (19).

The forty-three (43) Town of Lincoln staff members were trained in supervising roles such as: Deputy Returning Officers, Tabulator Operators, and support staff to ensure that Voting Day ran smoothly at every Voting Location as well as at Election Headquarters. The nineteen (19) public election workers were trained to fulfill the responsibilities and duties as Information Officers/Cleaners, Poll Clerks and Revision Clerks.

In addition, the Town of Lincoln hired a Elections Coordinator on a temporary contract to assist between April 2022 and December 2022. As well, the Town of Lincoln's Enterprise Services Department also assisted to ensure user-friendly web tools for electors were available for electors to look up their Ward information and assist on Election Day in displaying the results electronically.

Election Equipment

The 2022 Municipal Election worked with the following contractors to deliver the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election:

- Dominion Voting Systems – Internet Voting and Tabulator Voting Service Provider
- DataFix – Voters' List and Electoral Data Management
- DataMedia – Voter Information Notices Mailouts
- Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) – Voters' List Provider

It should be noted that for the next 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections, opportunities for shared services may be an option amongst the local area municipalities.

Election Equipment & System Testing

The internet voting application provided by Dominion Voting System underwent significant web application penetration and security testing by a third-party provider, Digital Boundary Group. The testing was done in partnership with fourteen (14) other municipalities across Ontario, which lasted for approximately two (2) weeks and provided a final report to all municipalities that participated which confirmed the secure voting system prior to voting.

Further, the Legislative Team conducted rigorous logistics and accuracy testing for each tabulator utilized in the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, including the 3 spares in the case of a contingency with 14 tabulators in total. The testing verified the election equipment was functioning and configured properly.

In addition, the internet voting application underwent the same testing process to ensure that all stages of the application were functioning appropriately.

Accessibility

In accordance with the requirements of the *MEA*, staff undertook preparations for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election, identifying accessibility barriers by:

- Reviewing past election accessibility initiatives and best practices
- Using internet voting as an accessible voting method
 - Providing public training on how to utilize the voting application and accessibility features.
- Providing the use of accessible devices (such as the sip-and-puff device, audio ballots, voting paddles, etc.) at advanced in-person voting opportunities
- Providing detailed step-by-step instructions for electors to use if they wished to cast their ballot via internet voting; and
- Offering electors that ability to vote by proxy.

The Elections Team sought to remove and prevent any potential barriers for electors that would use all methods of voting by:

- Providing communications initiatives and information in alternative formats for candidates and electors upon request
- Posting all information on the Town of Lincoln's website and social media
- Providing all candidates with information regarding campaign expenses and specific rules affecting candidates with disabilities
- Implementing and updating the Accessible Election Policies and Procedures to provide equal access to all persons with disabilities in the Town of Lincoln

Voting locations were accessible and maintained secrecy and accountability by:

- Conducting site visits to the Voting Locations and ensuring that the necessary accessibility standards were provided and met
- Providing a fully accessible Voting Location on Advanced Voting Days with accessible voting equipment (sip and puff, paddles, proxy voting etc.)
- Providing appropriate lighting and signage
- Permitting the use of service animals and support persons
- Establishing a notification procedure in the case of a service disruption
- Ensuring that there was sufficient designated parking for persons with disabilities.
- Providing in-depth accessibility training for all Town staff and election workers
- Electors were provided with the option of using voting aids at the Voting Locations such as magnifying sheets, the proxy voting option, assisted voting and the option for a translator

With many institutions still being under strict COVID-19 restrictions, SVO's were provided to five (5) institutions/retirement homes in the municipality, offering an equal opportunity to residents to cast their ballots electronically via internet voting during the advanced voting period. The Director of Legislative Services/Town Clerk hand delivered notices to several areas and complexes throughout the Town of Lincoln. Further, the Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy Clerk and Election Coordinator travelled to each SVO on pre-arranged days and times during the advanced internet voting period to provide electors with this unique online voting opportunity.

Upon each visit, both the Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy Clerk and Election Coordinator adhered to the COVID-19 protocols outlined for each institution, including completion of rapid testing, temperature taking, donning masks and gloves, and sanitization of all materials before and after each use. This convenient voting method for long-term care facilities, retirement homes and medical institutions provided residents with limited mobility and disabilities the capability to cast their ballot electronically with the support of the members of the Election Team and their facility staff.

In conclusion, the conduct of the election is undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the *MEA, Municipal Act, 2001* and supporting local policies and procedures that outline and instill principles which include:

1. The secrecy and confidentiality of individual votes is paramount.
2. The election should be fair and non-biased.
3. The election should be accessible to the voters.
4. The integrity of the process should be maintained throughout the election.
5. There be certainty that the results of the election reflect the votes cast.
6. Voters and candidates should be treated fairly and consistently within a municipality.

The 2022 Municipal and School Board Election in the Town of Lincoln proved to be cost-effective, transparent, and accountable. Looking forward to the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election, there will be legislative changes as all municipalities will be utilizing the Elections Ontario voter's list instead of Municipal Property Assessment

Corporation (MPAC). Legislative Services will continue to work with partners, local area municipalities and review procedures, communication strategies and feedback provided by both staff and the public from this past election to ensure that the Town will be able to make the necessary improvements and effective changes for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.