



2018 Markham Municipal Election Post-Election Accessibility Report



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2018 Markham Municipal Election: Post-Election Accessibility Report

As the City Clerk and Returning Officer for the City of Markham, I am committed to providing excellent customer service to all eligible voters in our community, and to treating everyone with dignity and respect. This means providing all eligible voters with a barrier-free municipal election process. In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, I was authorized to establish policies and procedures to ensure persons with disabilities had the opportunity to participate fully in the 2018 Markham Municipal Election.

In preparation for the 2018 Markham Municipal Election held between October 12 and October 22, 2018, the City Clerk's Office developed an Accessibility and Diversity Strategy outlining Markham's plan to ensure accessibility and easy access to election information for all eligible voters. This included strategies guiding election decision-making, the selection of accessible Voter Assistance Centres (VACs), and the general conduct and administration of the election.

This Report was created in recognition of the importance of making voting accessible to all eligible voters. It identifies the actions taken leading up to and during the 2018 Markham Municipal Election to identify, remove and prevent barriers to full electoral participation, as well as opportunities for improving the accessibility of the municipal election process in the City moving forward.

Kimberley Kitteringham
City Clerk and Returning Officer



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1. Introduction

Markham's Returning Officer is responsible for the proper legislative and administrative conduct of municipal elections in the City. In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, the Returning Officer was authorized to establish policies and procedures that ensured that persons with disabilities had the opportunity to participate fully in the 2018 Markham Municipal Election.

Accordingly, the 2018 Municipal Election was administered to ensure that:

- Persons with disabilities had full and equal access to election information and services;
- Persons with disabilities had full access to Voter Assistance Centres (VACs);
- Persons with disabilities could independently and privately mark their ballot; and,
- Persons with disabilities could receive assistance with voting using alternative methods.

The following report identifies the actions taken leading up to and during the 2018 Municipal Election to identify, remove and prevent barriers to full electoral participation, as well as opportunities for improving the accessibility of the municipal election process in Markham moving forward.



2. Voting

Online Voting

The 2018 Markham Municipal Election was conducted over an 11 day period beginning at 10:00 AM on Friday, October 12, 2018, and ending at 8:00 PM on Monday, October 22, 2018. During that time, eligible Markham voters could cast their ballot at any time of the day from anywhere with access to the internet. This model supported increased accessibility in the voting process by allowing voters to cast their ballot from the comfort of their own homes or workplaces without the need to visit a physical voting location.

Eligible voters who did not have access to a computer or mobile device or who required in-person assistance with voting online were able to attend any of 12 Voter Assistance Centres (VACs) located across Markham on October 22, 2018. Eligible voters could also visit any Markham Public Library branch during the Voting Period and cast an online ballot using a Public Access Computer (PAC) and the information provided in their unique Voter Information Package (VIP).

The City's online voting platform was created to be equally accessible to all voters, including voters with disabilities. The platform was configured in compliance with the Worldwide Website Consortium website principles including organization, functionality, readability, and alternative ways of representing information. It was also compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0 Level AA) so that persons with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online ballot.

Any assistive devices or software used when browsing the internet could also be used to cast an online ballot. The online voting platform was configured to support visually impaired voters using screen readers (JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver) as well as those with motor disabilities using input devices (sip and puff, paddle buttons, joysticks).

Potential Barriers Identified:

- Through consultations with various seniors groups and user experience data collected from voters, some individuals noted that the online platform's Declaration of Qualification and Acknowledgement of Offences screen was quite lengthy.
- Many voters expressed frustration at the configuration of the CAPTCHA challenge and the length of time required to complete the security process.



Future Opportunities:

- Consider potential options for modifying the Declaration of Qualification and Acknowledgement of Offences page to minimize confusion while maintaining core messaging around voter responsibilities and electoral process rules and preserving the security of voter access.

Paper Ballots

Between October 12 and October 19, 2018, eligible Markham voters also had the option to vote in-person with a paper ballot. Voters wishing to vote in person during these days could vote at any of 7 designated VACs located across the City during operating hours, regardless of which ward they live in.

All paper ballots for the 2018 Municipal Election were designed in accordance with CNIB Clear Print Standards.

Special Voting Provisions

Special Voting Locations

In accordance with section 45(7) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Returning Officer designated 13 assisted living and long-term care facilities in Markham as Special Voting Locations for the 2018 Municipal Election. Paper ballots were offered at each of these locations, with voting made available only to the residents of the facilities. Voting took place for one day at each facility, on various dates throughout the Voting Period (October 12 – 22) in coordination with each facility's administration staff. Election Officials offered bedside voting opportunities for residents who could not attend the designated voting room at the location.

On October 17, 2018, the Election Office administered a Mobile Voter Assistance Centre (MVAC) at the Markham Seniors Activity Centre. In coordination with the facility's administrators, Elections Officials established a temporary voting place during the hours of 10 AM and 12 PM and supplied Online Voting Kiosks for eligible voters requiring assistance with voting online. Election Officials were available to make revisions to the Voters' List and to assist voters in navigating the online ballot.



In-Home Assistance

For eligible voters who were unable to vote online or visit a Voter Assistance Centre without unreasonable difficulty due to injury, illness or disability, the Election Office offered in-home voter assistance during the Early Voting Period. Eligible voters requesting an in-home visit could schedule an appointment with the Election Office, during which Election Officials would be available to issue the voter the appropriate paper ballot and provide any assistance as required directly at their residence. Completed ballots were placed in a secure envelope and delivered by Election Officials to the nearest VAC, where they were processed through a vote tabulator.

During the 2018 Municipal Election, the Election Office received requests from and provided in-home assistance for two eligible Markham voters.



3. Voter Assistance

Voter Assistance Centres (VACs)

For those voters without access to a computer or mobile device, or for those seeking assistance from trained Election Officials, Voter Assistance Centres (VACs) were established throughout Markham at major City-owned facilities. For maximum convenience, eligible voters could vote at any of the VACs. During the Early Voting Period (October 12 – 19), eligible Markham voters were given the opportunity to vote in-person using a paper ballot at any of 7 designated VACs located across the City of Markham. On Final Voting Day (October 22), eligible voters could visit any of the 12 VACs to receive assistance with voting online using an Online Voting Kiosk.

Comprehensive site reviews and accessibility audits were conducted for each of the spaces designated as a VAC for the 2018 Markham Municipal Election. In selecting each VAC, the Returning Officer took into consideration:

- **Centrality:** A VAC was located within a driving distance of 7 minutes from every residence in the City of Markham, based on analyses conducted by the City's Applications & GIS Division.
- **Accessible Routes:** All designated VACs were located along accessible transit routes serviced by York Region Transit. Large print signage on exterior and interior routes as well as on all entry points were used to identify the facility as a voting place.
- **Parking:** Accessible parking spaces were located in close proximity to all VAC entrances. All accessible parking spaces were clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility and were on firm and level ground.
- **Entrances/Egress:** Access points to all VACs for persons with disabilities were clearly marked using the International Symbol of Accessibility. Every VAC included entrances equipped with automatic doors and doorways wide enough for individuals using assistive devices or service animals to travel safely.
- **Interior Voting Areas:** The layout for each voting room was configured to provide for sufficient space between Election Official stations and voting booths. Throughout the Voting Period, seating was available at each Election Official station for voters to sit while they waited in line, as well as behind each ballot marking area. During the Early Voting Period (October 12 – 19), the voting spaces at certain VACs were located on the upper floors of the facilities. This was arranged to offer voters maximum in-person voting opportunities while



minimizing disruption of community centre programming in central activity spaces. Fully accessible elevators were available to access all voting rooms located on upper floors.

Parking

Potential Barriers Identified:

- Several voters advised that the proximity between the accessible parking and designated voting spaces at certain VACs presented a challenge for those with mobility impairments.
- The elevator located in the parking structure of the Cornell Community Centre was inoperative for a considerable portion of the Early Voting Period. A Service Disruption Notice was prepared for this instance and voters were encouraged to attend at another VAC, if required.

Future Opportunities:

- Explore opportunities to reserve additional spaces for temporary accessible parking at identified VACs closer to rooms designated as voting places.

Interior Voting Areas

Potential Barriers Identified:

- Some voters remarked that the elevators to upper floor voting places were not marked with sufficient signage and were difficult to find.
- Some voters noted that the designated voting places at certain larger VACs were too spacious and required too much walking between Election Official stations.
- Some voters advised that there were too many Online Voting Kiosks at certain smaller VACs, which resulted in limited space for navigation in between the voting booths.

Future Opportunities:

- Review opportunities to reserve central ground floor spaces at all VACs during all days in which in-person voting opportunities are offered.
- Ensure that elevators to any upper floor voting places are clearly marked and that there is sufficient signage to provide direction from all building entrances



- Re-evaluate VAC layouts to minimize excess space while ensuring maximum voter privacy and accessibility.
- Re-assess number of Online Voting Kiosks required at each VAC to ensure sufficient space and privacy in voting places.

Accessible Voting Technologies (Paper Ballots)

Throughout the Early Voting Period (October 12 – 19), magnifying sheets and pen grips were available at each VAC to assist voters in marking a paper ballot.

During the Early Voting Period, each VAC was also equipped with a ballot marking device (AutoMARK) offering voters with disabilities the ability to mark their ballot privately and independently. Each unit was programmed with an audio function providing voters with visual impairments the opportunity to listen to the list of candidates through headphones and confirm their selections for each race. Voters could adjust the volume and speed of the content for each office/race, and repeat all content and selections through a playback function. Each unit was outfitted with assistive input tools such as paddle buttons as well as sip and puff attachments for voters with motor impairments.

All Managing Deputy Returning Officers at designated VACs received training in the operation of the ballot marking devices and were available to provide instruction and guidance to voters.

Despite efforts to promote use of the AutoMARK units, there were no reported uses at any VAC during the Early Voting Period.

Potential Barriers Identified:

- Some voters using magnifying sheets and pen grips still experienced difficulty marking a paper ballot.

Future Opportunities:

- Expand consultations with disability support organizations to further gauge the effectiveness of supportive technology and assistive aids for paper ballot voting.
- Continue to emphasize to Election Officials working at VACs during paper ballot voting days to proactively advise voters of the availability of ballot marking units.



Online Voting Kiosks

On the Final Voting Day (October 22), eligible voters without access to a computer or requiring assistance from trained Election Officials were able to attend any of the 12 designated VACs and cast an online ballot using an Online Voting Kiosk. Election Officials were available to assist voters with the login process and to provide assistance with navigating the online ballot.

Potential Barriers Identified:

- Some voters with low vision reported having difficulties in reading the screens on the Online Voting Kiosks.
- Some voters with limited computer skills experienced difficulties completing the CAPTCHA challenge required to access the online voting platform.
- Some voters expressed frustration entering the 16-digit online voting PIN contained in their Voter Information Package (VIP) on the Online Voting Kiosks.

Future Opportunities:

- Consider reserving a certain number of Online Voting Kiosks equipped with assistive devices or software for voters with disabilities.
- Explore the feasibility of employing barcode scanners integrated with the Online Voting Kiosks to alleviate the requirement for manual PIN entry.
- Adjust VAC staffing model to devote more Election Officials to facilitate the log-in process for voters using Online Voting Kiosks.

Voters' List

In accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Voters' List is provided by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). The City of Markham received the preliminary Voters' List from MPAC in September, at which point voters could register to be added to the Voters' List or update their existing information through the City's Online Voter Registration tool. Voters were able to remotely submit copies of their required identification for review and approval by the Election Office. This significantly enhanced the accessibility of the 2018 Markham Municipal Election, allowing voters to confirm their eligibility and receive a Voter Information Package (VIP) containing an online voting PIN without ever having to visit a physical location.



Between September 5 and the close of voting at 8:00 PM on October 22, 1,325 eligible Markham voters were added to the Voters' List through the City's Online Voter Registration tool, with an additional 436 updates made to existing information.

Between September 5 and October 19, eligible voters were also able to register to be added to the Voters' List or update their existing information at any Markham Public Library branch by completing an Application to Amend the Voters' List and presenting the required identification.

Election Officials

Over 350 Election Officials were involved in the 2018 Municipal Election, providing support in various capacities at designated Voter Assistance Centres. This included providing translation services, making revisions to the Voters' List, and assisting eligible voters with understanding and navigating the ballot.

Recruitment

In recognition of the diverse linguistic and cultural communities across the City, diversity was a main priority in the selection of Election Officials. Interested applicants were asked on their employment application to identify whether they spoke any additional languages. Applicants who identified fluency in any of the 6 most commonly spoken languages in Markham (based on the 2016 Census) were given priority in the selection process. This was to ensure that the individuals working at the various VACs reflected the demographics of the area and could assist in providing on-site language support to voters.

Training

Prior to their day(s) of work, all Election Officials were required to attend a mandatory training session hosted by the Election Office. These sessions included training in the provision of accessible customer service and how to interact with persons with disabilities to ensure dignity and respect throughout the voting experience.

Over 125 Election Officials, including all VAC supervisors, were full-time City of Markham employees. All City of Markham employees receive formal accessibility training upon hiring, including training on accessible customer service standards under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

Information pertaining to the *Accessible Customer Service Standard* and serving persons with disabilities was included in all Election Worker Training Manuals provided to Election Officials. As part of their training package, all Election Officials also received



a pamphlet on Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07).

Potential Barriers Identified:

- While the Election Office received no negative feedback from voters regarding the level of customer service at designated VACs, some Election Officials expressed hesitation about how to effectively assist voters with disabilities and/or limited English language skills while respecting the confidentiality of the vote.

Future Opportunities:

- Devote more time during staff training sessions for scenario-based exercises focused on assisting voters with disabilities and voters with limited English language skills.



4. Communications

In light of the significant change in Markham's election model for 2018, it was essential that the City lead a detailed communication campaign providing effective outreach and support to eligible Markham voters. Accordingly, in the months leading up to the election, the Election Office implemented and executed a robust communications strategy to engage and educate voters on the City's election model, with a particular emphasis on the enhanced accessibility and convenience of the voting process.

Election Information

All information regarding the 2018 Municipal Election was made available on the City's dedicated election website. The use of a singular, user-friendly election website was designed to engage eligible voters and increase accessibility of information by providing eligible voters, candidates, and third party advertisers with a seamless one-stop experience for all election communications. Information and resources related to the electoral process including key dates, certified candidates, voter qualifications and ID requirements, how to get on the Voters' List and vote online, and provisions for accessibility were made available to the public on markhamvotes.ca. The election website was continuously updated throughout the election year to reflect the most recent developments and information.

The City's election website was configured and presented in compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level AA guidelines and was compatible with assistive software and devices. In accordance with AODA Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, all documents and information published on markhamvotes.ca were made available in alternative formats upon request.

In addition to the City's election website, information was communicated through a variety of channels including robocalls, social media, videos, infographics, eBlasts, local and cultural newspapers, radio, display materials at community centres and City facilities, and billboards positioned at major intersections across the City.

In recognition of Markham's diverse voting population, key voter information and materials developed by the Election Office were provided in additional languages. Sample Voter Information Packages (VIPs) were translated into French as well as the 6 most commonly spoken languages in Markham (based on 2016 Census) and were made available on markhamvotes.ca. Information on how to vote online, voter ID requirements, and voting with confidence was also made available in these languages. This provided eligible voters with limited English language skills the capacity to understand and fully participate in the election process.



Community Outreach

To ensure the accessibility of the City's voting model for 2018, members of the Election Office actively sought feedback from key accessibility groups and stakeholders within the City of Markham. This included discussions with the City's Advisory Committee on Accessibility, Seniors Advisory Committee and Race Relations Committee. The City's online voting platform, 'Vote Anywhere' model (for both paper and online voting), and multi-channel communications strategy were all well received and endorsed by each committee as supporting increased accessibility in the electoral process.

Leading up to the 2018 Municipal Election, the Election Office also consulted with a number of seniors associations, religious groups, and community and social organizations. Members of the Election Office attended 60+ local community events and centres in order to engage leaders of these various groups and promote the City's accessible voting model. During these consultations, the Election Office conducted focus groups on the online voting platform and distributed key election information to members of the organizations. Posters, pamphlets and other materials promoting the accessibility of the City's 2018 voting model were displayed in group centres in the months leading up to the election.

In advance of the Voting Period, members of the Election Office attended a number of major City events to engage with eligible voters and communicate information about the election, including information about accessible voting. Some of these events included:

- Unionville Festival (June 2-3, 2018)
- Markham Seniors' Crafts Fair (June 19, 2018)
- Taste of Asia (June 23-24, 2018)
- Canada Day Celebration and Seniors Luncheon (July 1, 2018)
- Markham Rotary Ribfest (July 6-8, 2018)
- Night It Up (July 13-15, 2018)
- Unionville Exotic Car Show (July 29, 2018)
- Markham-Milliken Children's Festival (August 25, 2018)
- Applefest at Markham Museum (September 22-23, 2018)

Between September 5 and September 29, 2018, the Election Office hosted 30 in-person Voters' List revision opportunities at various community centres across the City of Markham. During these events, members of the Election Office provided eligible voters with information about the election and the City's 2018 voting model, including the enhanced accessibility provisions for voters with mobility impairments and limited English language skills. In an effort to acclimate eligible voters to the online voting and



the accessibility features of the online voting platform, members of the Election Office provided one-on-one tutorials of the platform through the use of a demo ballot and provided a “How to” video online (transcripts translated in multiple languages).

Feedback

The City welcomes any feedback regarding the accessibility of the 2018 Markham Municipal Election. Input received will provide the Election Office with opportunities to improve future municipal elections in Markham by:

- Taking corrective measures to prevent similar recurrences;
- Addressing training needs;
- Enhancing service delivery; and
- Providing alternative methods for supplying election services.

Additional feedback about the manner in which election services were provided to candidates and eligible voters may be submitted to the Election Office by:

1. Email: vote@markham.ca or clerks@markham.ca
2. Telephone: 905.477.7000 x8683 (VOTE)
3. Mail: Clerk’s Office, 101 Town Centre Blvd, Markham ON L3R 9W3
4. In-person: Clerk’s Office, Main Floor, 101 Town Centre Blvd, Markham ON