



---

## **2025 Municipal By-Election**

---

# **Accessible By-Election Policies and Procedures**

# **2025 Municipal By-Election**

## **Accessible Election Policies and Procedures**

### **1. Introduction**

The Office of the City Clerk is responsible for the legislative and administrative conduct of municipal elections in the City of St. Catharines.

Section 12.1(1) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, states that

“a Clerk who is responsible for conducting an election shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.”

Section 12.2(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act*, 1996, states that

“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”

In accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (AODA) the City Clerk is authorized to establish procedures and provide appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate fully in the 2025 Municipal By-Election.

Accordingly, the 2025 Municipal By-Election will be conducted in such a manner to ensure that:

- Candidates and electors with disabilities have full and equal access to all election information and services.
- Persons with disabilities have full access to Voting Locations.
- Persons with disabilities can independently and privately mark their ballot and have access to alternative methods of voting assistance.

Before the by-election the City Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and the plan will be made available to the public before voting day. Within 90 days after voting day the City Clerk will submit a report to Council concerning the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and shall make the report available to the public.

## **2. Training and Election Assistance**

### **2.1 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 due to a disability. Training will include:

- How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disability.
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person.
- How to use voting equipment and assistive devices to deliver election services.
- What to do if a person is having difficulty accessing election information or services.
- Review of the purposes of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Customer Service Standard's requirements of Ontario Regulation 191/11 for the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation.

### **2.2 Provision of Election Information**

Candidates and electors with disabilities, upon request, will be able to receive information and copies of election documents in a format that takes into account their disability. The City Clerk, or designate, shall consult with the requester and shall provide or arrange for the provision of a suitable format. The City of St. Catharines website is fully compliant to WCAG 2.0.

### **2.3 Notice of Temporary Service Disruption**

If there is a temporary disruption in the delivery of election information or services, the Office of the City Clerk shall provide public notice in accordance with AODA. The notice shall include the reason for the disruption, anticipated duration and a description of alternative methods of delivering the information or service. Every effort shall be made to provide alternative methods of providing the information or service to persons with disabilities.

### **2.4 Staff Assistance**

The Office of the City Clerk staff are 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:

**Telephone:** 905.688.5601, ext. 1517

**TTY:** 905.688.4TTY (4889)

**Email:** clerks@stcatharines.ca

**Mail:** Office of the City Clerk, 50 Church St., P.O. Box 3012, St. Catharines, ON,  
L2R 7C2

**In Person:** The Office of the City Clerk, Third Floor, 50 Church St., St. Catharines  
The following members of our election staff can be contacted directly for assistance:

**Donna Delvecchio, Acting City Clerk**

Call: 905.688.5601 ext. 1506 or Email: [davelvecchio@stcatharines.ca](mailto:davelvecchio@stcatharines.ca)

**Leah LaPlante, Clerks Service Leader,**

Call: 905.688.5601 ext. 1560 or Email: [llaplante@stcatharines.ca](mailto:llaplante@stcatharines.ca)

**Meredith Kirkham, Deputy Clerk,**

Call: 905.688.5601 ext. 1512 or Email: [mkirkham@stcatharines.ca](mailto:mkirkham@stcatharines.ca)

### **3. Candidates**

#### **3.1 Service Animals, Support Persons, Assistive Devices**

In accordance with O. Reg. 191/11 candidates and scrutineers with disabilities are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal, support person, or assistive device at all voting locations and other designated election locations, unless prohibited by law.

According to the AODA's Customer Service Standards, one of two conditions must apply for an animal to be considered a service animal.

1. The animal is easily identifiable as relating to your disability (for example, is a guide dog or other animal wearing a vest or harness).
2. Provide documentation from a regulated health professional confirming the animal is required due to a disability.

If a service animal is excluded from the premises by law, staff will work the individual to identify alternative methods for the person to access municipal goods, services and facilities.

#### **3.2 Campaign Expenses**

In accordance with Section 88.19(3) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended*, expenses that are incurred by a candidate with a disability or a registered third party who is an individual with a disability, are directly related to the disability, and would not have been incurred but for the election to which the expense relate are eligible expenses; however, not subject to the spending limit to the candidate or third party provided by the City Clerk or designate.

### **4. Assistance to Electors**

#### **4.1 Voting by Proxy**

Eligible electors, including a person with a disability who is unable to attend at a voting location, may appoint another person to act as a voting proxy to cast a ballot on his or her behalf. The appointment must be made on the prescribed form available at the Office of the City Clerk and on the City of St. Catharines website. The person being

appointed as a proxy is required to take a statutory declaration before the City Clerk or a Commissioner of Oaths. Staff in the Office of the City Clerk can administer this Oath (Third Floor, City Hall, 50 Church Street).

Voting Proxy forms can be submitted after nominations have been certified by the City Clerk on Monday, March 3, at 4:00 p.m., unless additional nominations are required under Section 33(5) of the Act.

Proxy appointments cannot be issued after 4:30 p.m. on Voting Day, Monday, April 14, 2025. . Voting Proxy applications may be presented for certification at the Office of the City Clerk (Third Floor, City Hall, 50 Church Street) Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. On the Saturday of an advanced voting day, applications may be presented for certification at the polling location from noon to 5:00 p.m. On all other advance voting dates, applications may be presented at the voting location from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Once completed, the voting proxy may be exercised at any advance voting location or on voting day. On voting day, the proxy must be exercised at the poll of the person for whom the proxy is voting and does not remain in force after Election Day – Monday, April 14, 2025.

#### **4.3 Voting Locations**

Each voting location shall be accessible to electors with disabilities. Advanced voting locations are selected for their highly accessible attributes and may be considered to provide greater accessibility than older buildings that may be used as voting locations on Voting Day. A map of all advance voting and voting day locations will be available on the City of St. Catharines website and using the map, persons with disabilities can determine the availability of accessible attributes.

#### **4.4 Transit to the Voting Location**

Proximity of the voting location to accessible public transit routes shall be considered in selection of voting locations, however, the location may not necessarily be located on the same street as the transit stop. Electors requiring specialized transit services are encouraged to contact Niagara Region Transit at 1-833-678-5463.

#### **4.5 Parking**

Designated or reserved parking for people with disabilities who display a valid Ontario Accessible Parking Permit (APP) is to be provided close to the entrance of the voting location where possible. Accessible parking spaces will be clearly posted and marked with the international Symbol of Accessibility. Barrier free paths of travel between parking and the voting location entrance should be provided.

#### **4.6 Service Animals, Support Persons, Assistive Devices**

Electors requiring a service animal, support person or assistive devices are permitted to be accompanied at all voting locations.

According to the AODA's Customer Service Standards, one of two conditions must apply for an animal to be considered a service animal.

1. The animal is easily identifiable as relating to your disability (for example, is a guide dog or other animal wearing a vest or harness).
2. You can provide documentation from a regulated health professional confirming the animal is required due to a disability.

If a service animal is excluded from the premises by law, staff will work the individual to identify alternative methods for the person to access municipal goods, services and facilities.

#### **4.7 Entrance to the Voting Location**

Every voting location shall be audited for accessibility. If the main entrance to the voting location is inaccessible due to steps or other barriers, an alternative entry point that is accessible will be used and clearly signed. Wherever possible the accessible entrance is to be used as the main entrance for everyone. All entrances will be clearly marked and any alternative accessible entrances will be clearly signed using the International Symbol of Accessibility.

Where possible the door hardware is to be accessible, if the doors are heavy, awkward to open or have handles that are out of reach, where possible they will be propped open in a safe manner. Where it is not possible to prop the door open, an election official will be assigned to operate the door for all electors entering and exiting the voting location.

#### **4.8 Interior Voting Area**

Access to the interior voting area and voting booth shall be level and easily accessed. All voting areas are to be well lit and have seating available (where possible). Any doormats or carpeting shall be level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards. All voting areas are to have sufficient space to maneuver a mobility device.

#### **4.9 Voting Location Standards**

Each potential voting location shall be physically attended and inspected by the City Clerk or designate. A standard Polling Place Accessibility Checklist shall be completed for each facility. The inspector shall at the conclusion of the inspection, complete the Accessibility Report Card, based on the following:

- Parking
- Building Exterior
- Building Entrance
- Building Interior

#### **4.10 Accessible Voting Booths**

Accessible voting booths will be available at each voting location. Voting booths will have a wider area of access to allow individuals who use a mobility device to vote independently and secretively. A large print Notice of Ballot example shall be displayed in close proximity to the voting booth. Magnifying sheets, or reading glasses are available upon request the election staff.

#### **4.11 Accessible Voting Technologies – Advance Voting**

Two advance polls will be equipped with a ballot marking device. The Ballot Marker Device produces a human and machine readable marked paper ballot from a blank sheet of paper, completely indistinguishable from a paper ballot marked by hand. The voter is provided with headphones to listen to the ballot presentation (or refers to an instruction card) and uses an accessible voting controller, with braille labels and buttons of different colours and shapes for voters with visual impairments, to control the voting session and select votes. The controller can also be operated by assistive devices such as sip and puff, and/or foot paddles can be used to press selection buttons.

When a voter wishes to use the accessible voting features, the poll worker will offer to assist the voter behind the privacy screen near the tabulator equipped with the ballot marking device.

#### **4.12 Voting Assistance**

Persons with a disability may be accompanied by a support person within the voting location. Alternatively, the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) in each voting location 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 a disability, determine the extent to which they need assistance and the best way in which this assistance can be provided. This may include actually marking the ballot as directed by the elector.

Where a voting location is located in an institution or retirement home, the Deputy Returning Officer can visit 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.

### **5. Additional Information**

#### **5.1 City of St. Catharines – Office of the City Clerk**

The Office of the City Clerk is located at City Hall on the Third Floor, 50 Church Street, St. Catharines. The Office of the City Clerk election staff can answer any questions about running for office, the election in general or specific provisions for persons with a disability. See Section 2.4 for additional contact information.

## 5.2 City of St. Catharines Website

The City of St. Catharines website is continuously updated to reflect the most recent developments and information. Visit the site for an up-to-date list of candidates and other important messages or events throughout the election year at [www.stcatharines.ca/election](http://www.stcatharines.ca/election).

## 5.3 Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The website [www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-municipal-affairs-housing](http://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-municipal-affairs-housing) contains information about municipal elections, the Province of Ontario 2022 Municipal Elections Candidates Guide and the Ministry's commitment to promote greater accessibility for voters and candidates with a disability.

## 5.4 Ministry of Community and Social Services

The Ministry of Community and Social Services provides information on accessibility and accessibility legislation. For more information visit: [www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws](http://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws)

## 5.5 Service Ontario – e-Laws

This website contains all current statutes including the Municipal Elections Act, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, [www.ontario.ca/laws](http://www.ontario.ca/laws)

## 6. Feedback Process

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

1. Telephone (905) 688-5601 ext. 1517
2. In Person City of St. Catharines  
Office of the City Clerk  
50 Church Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, City Hall
3. Email [clerks@stcatharines.ca](mailto:clerks@stcatharines.ca)
4. Mail Office of the City Clerk  
City of St. Catharines  
50 Church Street  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7C2

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.

## Advance Polls and Election Day

There will be two (2) advance polls; locations and times to be announced at a later date, check the City's website for more information.

**Election Day is Monday, April 14, 2025 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.**