



2026 Municipal Elections Accessibility Plan

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1. Introduction

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls is committed to providing all municipal election services in an accessible, inclusive, and respectful manner.

This Accessibility Plan has been prepared 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)*. It supports and enhances the Town's Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy.

The purpose of this Plan is to ensure that:

- Persons with disabilities are able to fully participate in the election process.
- Barriers to accessibility are identified, removed, and prevented.
- All electors can cast their vote independently, privately, and with dignity, with assistance available if required.

This Plan is a **living document**. It will be reviewed and updated as needed by the Clerk, both before and after each election, to ensure compliance with legislation and to continuously improve accessibility for electors and candidates.

2. Purpose and Scope

This Plan applies to all facilities, processes, and services used during the 2026 Municipal Election. It reflects the Town's commitment to:

- Respect the dignity of all electors and candidates.
- Provide equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process.
- Eliminate barriers to full participation.

3. Legislative Requirements

The Municipal Clerk is responsible for conducting the election and for implementing policies and procedures that ensure full participation of electors and candidates with disabilities.

Key provisions of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* include:

- **Section 12.1(1):** The Clerk shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities.
- **Section 12.1(2):** The Clerk shall prepare an accessibility plan and make it available to the public before voting day.
- **Section 12.1(3):** Within 90 days after voting day, the Clerk shall prepare a post-election report identifying measures taken to identify, remove, and prevent barriers.
- **Section 41(3):** Ballots must be modified, where necessary, to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without assistance.
- **Section 45(2):** All voting locations must be accessible to electors with disabilities.

4. Plan Development and Review

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls 2026 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan was developed by the Municipal Clerk with reference to the [Municipal Elections Act, 1996](#), the [Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001](#), and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#).

The Plan will be reviewed:

- Prior to each regular municipal election.
- Following each election, to identify areas for improvement.
- As required, to reflect legislative changes or in response to identified barriers.

5. Definitions and Barrier Types

5.1 Disability

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) defines *disability* as:

- a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness. This includes, without limitation: diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, brain injury, paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog, service animal, wheelchair, or other assistive device.
- b) A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability.
- c) A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.
- d) A mental disorder.
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

5.2 Attitudinal Barriers

Barrier that result from misconceptions, stereotypes, or negative assumptions about persons with disabilities.

Example: A receptionist directs conversation to a support person rather than the individual with a disability, assuming they cannot understand.

5.3 Information and Communication Barriers

Barriers that arise when information is presented in a format that is not accessible to all individuals.

Example: Printed materials in small font that cannot be read by individuals with low vision, or public announcements that only accommodate those who can hear.

5.4 Technological Barriers

Barriers created when technology, or the way it is implemented, is not accessible to persons with disabilities.

Example: A website that is incompatible with screen reader software used by people who are blind.

5.5 Physical and Architectural Barriers

Barriers related to the built environment that makes access difficult or impossible for some individuals.

Example: A doorknob that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility, or a hallway too narrow for wheelchair passage.

5.6 Organizational Barriers

Barriers that occur when policies, practices, or procedures unintentionally exclude individuals or provide unequal access.

Example: A hiring process that does not provide accommodations for applicants with disabilities.

6. Customer Service Policy

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls has adopted an Accessible Customer Service Policy, which is attached as *Appendix A*. This policy guides all municipal services, including election services, and ensures that persons with disabilities are treated with dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

7. Accessible Communications

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls is committed to ensuring that all election-related communications are accessible to electors and candidates. Election notices, guides, forms, and online content will be available in accessible formats upon request, including large print, accessible PDF, and plain language versions.

8. Training for Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers involved in election duties will receive training to ensure that persons with disabilities are served in a respectful and accommodating manner. Training will include:

1. Techniques for interacting and communicating with individuals with various types of disabilities.
2. Best practices for assisting individuals who use assistive devices or who require the support of a service animal or support person.
3. Proper use of assistive devices available to deliver election services.
4. Methods for providing accessible customer service, including what to do if an individual encounters difficulty accessing election information or services.

Election official will also receive comprehensive instruction on:

- The voting process,
- The tools and assistive devices available at voting place, and
- How to adapt services to meet individual elector needs.

The Town will also consider support and accommodation requirements for new hires and existing employees with disabilities involved in the election process. Accommodations are available upon request to ensure equal participation in election duties.

9. Notice of Temporary Service Disruption

If a planned or unplanned service disruption affects accessibility for electors, the Deputy Returning Officer shall immediately report the disruption to the Municipal Clerk. Examples of service disruptions include the temporary unavailability of assistive devices, services, or features that are normally available to enable or enhance access at a voting place.

The Municipal Clerk will be responsible for preparing and issuing a public notice of the disruption to ensure consistent communication. The notice will include:

- A description of the service disruption,
- The reason for the disruption,
- The anticipated duration,
- Alternative routes, facilities, or services available (if any), and
- Contact information for further assistance.

Notices will be communicated in a manner that is accessible and reasonable under the circumstances. Methods may include, but are not limited to:

- Posting notices in a clearly visible location at the voting place,
- Publishing updates on the Town's official social media channels (e.g., Facebook), and/or
- Using any other reasonable method under the circumstances.

10. Emergency Information and Procedures

All election staff will receive training on emergency evacuation procedures specific to their assigned voting location. This training will emphasize how to provide assistance to electors and candidates with disabilities in the event of an emergency.

The following measures will be in place:

- **Barrier-Free Evacuation Routes:** All evacuation routes at voting locations will be reviewed in advance to ensure they are free of barriers and accessible to persons using mobility devices, service animals, or other assistive aids.
- **Assistance for Persons with Disabilities:** Election staff will be trained to assist individuals with mobility, vision, or hearing impairments during emergencies, ensuring that all electors and candidates are evacuated safely and with dignity.
- **Communication of Emergency Information:** Emergency instructions will be provided in plain language and, where needed, in alternative formats or methods (e.g., written notes, visual cues, or spoken instructions) to accommodate various accessibility needs.
- **Coordination with Facility Management:** Where voting places are located in institutions, retirement homes, or other facilities, election staff will coordinate with facility staff to ensure emergency procedures are consistent and inclusive of accessibility requirements.

These measures align with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* and demonstrate the Town's commitment to ensuring the safety of all individuals during the election process.

11. Assistance to Candidates and Electors

11.1 Candidate Accessibility

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls is committed to ensuring that all candidates have equal access to election-related information and services. Nomination papers, financial filing documents, candidate guides, and all other election materials will be made available in accessible or alternative formats upon request.

To further support candidates, the Town will provide **Accessible Campaigning Guidelines** that outline best practices for hosting inclusive events, producing accessible campaign materials, and communication effectively with electors who may have disabilities.

Election staff will also ensure that candidates with disabilities are able to access election services in full compliance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*. Through these measures, the Town demonstrates its commitment to reducing barriers and fostering an inclusive and equitable democratic process for both candidates and electors.

11.2 Campaign Expenses

Expenses incurred by a candidate with a disability that are directly related to the disability, and that would not otherwise have been incurred but for the election, are exempt from the candidate's spending limit in accordance with Section 67(2) 8.2 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.

11.3 Support Persons

Electors with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person at any voting location. No elector with a disability will be denied access to their support person while on Town premises.

Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) may also assist electors with disabilities in casting their ballot. Before entering the voting booth, the DRO and the elector will determine the extent of assistance required and the most appropriate method of providing it, which may include marking the ballot as directed by the elector.

Where a voting place is located in an institution or retirement home, DROs may attend in residents' living areas or at their bedside to facilitate voting. Electors unable to enter the voting place may request curbside voting, in which case a DRO may provide a ballot to the elector at their vehicle or another accessible location and immediately return the marked ballot to the ballot box.

Support persons assisting voters will be required to take an oath of confidentiality and to confirm that they will mark the ballot only as directed by the elector. All DROs are sworn to an oath of secrecy.

11.4 Service Animals

Candidates, electors, and representatives are permitted to be accompanied by service animals at all voting places and other designated election facilities.

11.5 Assistive Devices and Aids

Electors with disabilities may use personal assistive devices, including but not limited to wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, note-taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks, and grasping devices.

- **Vision Loss:** Each voting place will be equipped with magnifying sheets to assist electors with low vision.
- **Hearing Loss:** Each voting place will have paper and pens available to facilitate written communication with electors who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.

12. Voting Locations

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls is committed to ensuring barrier-free access to all voting places. A checklist will be used to review each location to identify and remove barriers wherever possible.

A site map of all advance voting and election day locations will be available on the Town's election website. Maps will indicate accessible parking and entrances. Appropriate signage will clearly identify accessible entry points. For the purposes of this Plan, *voting location* includes exterior parking areas and walkways.

12.1 Legislative Requirements

Under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*:

Section 45(7): On voting day, a voting place shall be provided on the premises of the following:

- An institution for the reception, treatment, or vocational training of members or former members of the Canadian Forces;
- An institution in which, on September 1, 20 or more beds are occupied by persons with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or infirmities;
- A retirement home in which, on September 1, 50 or more beds are occupied.

Section 45(8): The DRO may attend to an elector in an institution or retirement home to facilitate voting.

Section 45(9): The DRO shall attend to any elector with a disability within the designated voting place area to allow them to vote.

For the 2026 municipal election, Smooth Rock Falls Hospital has been identified as an advance voting location.

12.2 Parking

Accessible parking spaces will be provided as close as possible to each voting place entrance. Parking areas will be clearly marked, on firm and level grounds, and routinely monitored throughout voting hours to ensure accessibility.

12.3 Entrances

Where a primary entrance is not accessible, an alternative accessible entrance will be designated and used as the main entrance whenever possible. Entrances will be clearly marked, wide enough to accommodate a mobility device, and staffed if doors are heavy

or difficult to operate. Where necessary, doors will be propped open during voting hours. Routine inspections will ensure entrances remain barrier-free.

12.4 Interior Voting Area

The interior of each voting location will be fully accessible, with level flooring and hazard-free walkways. Mats or carpeting will be flush with the floor to prevent tripping. Voting areas will be well lit, with seating available for those who require it.

12.5 Voting Booths

Accessible voting booths will be available at every voting place. Booths will be low in height, wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs or scooters, and designed to allow electors to vote independently and privately. Magnifiers will be available for electors with low vision.

12.6 Floor Plans

Floor plans of voting locations are available in *Appendix A* and will be posted on the Town's election website.

12.7 Site Audits

Prior to voting day, the Municipal Clerk will conduct site audits of all voting locations to ensure accessibility standards are met. These audits will confirm that entrances, routes, signage, and voting areas are barrier-free and properly prepared to accommodate electors with disabilities.

13. Feedback

The Town of Smooth Rock Falls welcomes feedback on the accessibility of the municipal election. Feedback helps identify barriers, improve services, and enhance accessibility for electors and candidates.

Requests for this Plan in alternative formats or feedback submissions may be directed to the Municipal Clerk using the contact information provided below.

All feedback regarding the accessibility of the election will be formally recorded and reviewed by the Municipal Clerk. All feedback will be considered in the preparation of the post-election report, as required under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, and will be used to improve accessibility measures in future elections.

14. Post-Election Report

As required under Section 12.1(2) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the Municipal Clerk shall prepare an Accessibility Plan and make it available to the public prior to voting day in a regular election.

Further, as required under Section 12.1(3) of the *Act*, the Municipal Clerk shall, within 90 days after voting day, make public a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affected electors and candidates with disabilities during the election.

This post-election report will be published on the Town's website and made available in accessible formats upon request. The findings will be used to inform future Accessibility Plans and to improve accessibility in subsequent municipal elections.

15. Contact Information

For questions, feedback, or comments regarding this Accessibility Plan or the accessibility of the 2026 Municipal Election, please contact:

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