

Committee of Council Memo



Date April 11, 2023
To **Accessibility Advisory Committee**
From Jennifer Slater, Manager Information, Privacy and Elections/Deputy City Clerk
Service Area Corporate Services
Department City Clerk's Office
Subject **2023 voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements engagement overview**

The City of Guelph is committed to providing accessible and barrier free election services. Ahead of each municipal and school board election, the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is engaged to provide input on various areas of election planning, including voting methods ahead of a Council decision, accessible voting considerations before an Accessibility Plan is prepared and publicly posted and after the election to identify lessons learned and future opportunities.

For the 2022 regular election, the AAC was engaged from December 2020 to January 2023. Nine meetings were held with members of the AAC as follows:

- December 22, 2020 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- March 9, 2021 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- April 20, 2021 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- February 15, 2022 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- May 25, 2022 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- July 5, 2022 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- August 16, 2022 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- December 20, 2022 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- January 17, 2023 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)

During the 2022 planning process, City Council passed a resolution “that staff be directed to research and investigate further accessible voting service enhancements, including the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) method, in consultation with the AAC, in advance of the 2026 municipal and school board election and report back to Council by Q2 of 2024 for implementation during the 2026 municipal election.” This resolution passed on November 22, 2021.

[A memo](#) outlining an initial timeline for this engagement was shared with the AAC as part of the February 7, 2022 agenda. This memo provides more detail on timelines and approach for 2023 engagements planned with the Committee.

Key definitions

Accessible voting service enhancements means options that support a voter with a disability to mark and cast their ballot as independently as possible at an in-person voting location. For example, accessible audio-tactile voting equipment, braille sleeves, masked/scent free location, City Hall as a central hub for accessible enhancements, American Sign Language (ASL) translation or magnifying sheets.

Alternative voting methods means ways that a voter marks and casts their ballot in addition to in-person voting at a physical voting location. For example, internet voting, vote from home, vote by mail, vote by phone, remote accessible vote by mail (RAVBM).

Decision making criteria means principles, requirements or guidelines that are used to make a decision.

2023 AAC engagement timeline

April 18, 2023 – Engagement on voting method or accessible voting service enhancement options to be included before research begins.

August 15, 2023 – Engagement on decision making criteria and information share on research findings before the September workshop with the AAC.

September 2023 – Workshop with the AAC to engage and receive feedback on all voting method and accessible voting service enhancement options.

October 17, 2023 – Presentation of findings and feedback received from the Committee following the workshop. Staff will request a Committee resolution with final recommendations to staff and Council.

December 19, 2023 – Presentation of final staff recommendation to the AAC.

The above approach and timelines were developed by the City Clerk's Office and Accessibility Services staff in consultation with Community Engagement staff.

Scope of 2023 AAC engagements

The following is in scope for this project:

- Discussion, identification and recommendations on alternative voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements.

The following is out of scope for this project:

- Anything legislatively required by the [Municipal Elections Act](#), 1996 (MEA). For example, the day that is set as Voting Day or how decisions are to be made on alternative voting methods.
- Discussion about vendors or Committee member outreach to vendors who offer voting methods. Election vendors are subject to the City's [Purchasing By-law](#) and must go through competitive procurement processes. Vendors who offer voting method options should be identified to staff as part of the engagement process.
- Any election related matter other than alternative voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements.

Additional engagements are planned with the following groups as part of the research process:

- City of Guelph comparator municipalities that hold direct elections.
- Additional municipalities that are leading in the area of municipal elections may also be engaged with. For example, the City of Ottawa or City of Toronto.
- Additional election organizations identified who have used new voting methods or accessible voting enhancements identified with the Committee.
- The Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP).
- Community support agencies including the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), the Canadian Council for the Blind and Community Living.
- Election subject matter experts.
- Vendors offering voting method or accessible service enhancement options.

Members are asked to consider each voting method and accessible service enhancement on its own rather than in combination with other options as Council may decide to permit any combination of methods.

Next steps

City staff and the AAC share the same goal of offering an accessible municipal election. Committee members will be engaged, and feedback will be used to inform every step of the project to evaluate voting methods and accessible service enhancements for the 2026 regular election.

Our goal is to seek one (1) comprehensive Council decision on alternative voting methods. Staff will plan for accessible service enhancements based on Committee feedback and any Council direction received for the next municipal election. This will help Council make a decision that considers all engagement feedback, ensures all voices are heard, and that staff have enough time to plan and carry out Council direction. The timeline for this decision is firmly set as Q2 2024 as directed by Council.

Committee feedback and recommendations will be used by staff when finalizing the staff recommendation and report for Council in Q2 2024. Budget and staffing capacity requirements will be included in the staff report to Council. Feedback from the Committee will be one of many decision-making criteria that will inform a staff recommendation to Council. Committee recommendations will be shared transparently as part of the staff report so that all information is available for Council to make a decision.