

Advisory Committee of Council Staff Report



To Accessibility Advisory Committee
Date Tuesday, December 19, 2023
Subject **2026 Municipal Election Alternative Voting Methods and Accessible Voting Service Enhancements Resolution**

Recommendation

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee provide a motion to recommend alternative voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements to staff and Council for the 2026 municipal election.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek a Committee motion following the year long engagement process in 2023.

Key Findings

Following a year long engagement process in 2023 with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), including consultation on options to be researched, comparator benchmarking, community stakeholder engagement reporting and input on decision-making criteria, the City Clerk's Office is seeking a recommendation from the Committee to inform a staff recommendation and a staff report to Council in Q2 2024.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This report aligns with the strategic plan pillar of working together for our future. Engaging with and seeking a resolution from the AAC on alternative voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements will improve how the City communicates with residents and delivers services by improving front-line customer service and communications for the next regular municipal election.

Financial Implications

Financial implications to the election reserve budget will be considered in light of the recently approved 2024 to 2027 multi-year budget and once the Committee's recommendation is received. Financial implications will be presented publicly and to Council when making a decision on alternative voting methods.

Report

The City of Guelph is committed to providing accessible and barrier free election services. 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 2024 for implementation during the 2026 municipal election.” This resolution was passed on November 22, 2021.

[A memo](#) outlining an initial timeline for this engagement was shared with the AAC as part of the April 18, 2023 agenda. Following the engagement plan, the AAC has been engaged as follows:

- April 18, 2023 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- August 15, 2023 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
- October 3, 2023 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)
 - workshop re-scheduled due to a lack of quorum
- November 14, 2023 – [agenda](#) and [minutes](#)

What we heard

A summary of what was heard during the November 14, 2023 workshop is included as Attachment 1 to this staff report for reference.

During the workshop, the Committee indicated that the recording of the workshop should be used as summary notes may not capture the full intent and meaning of what was shared by members. A [link to the recording](#) from November 14, 2023 workshop is provided here for that purpose.

Human rights considerations

Staff heard what the Committee shared during the workshop in regard to human rights considerations and liability. The City is committed to proactively planning for accessible election services and designing those services inclusively. The ability for voters to mark their ballot independently and ensure the confidentiality of a vote is paramount.

Staff also understand the duty to accommodate. If established service options do not support a voter, accommodations are offered in line with the principles of respect for dignity, individualization, integration and full participation. Due to the principle of individualization, each person’s unique needs are considered on a case-by-case basis when an accommodation request is made.

Committee motion

Staff are seeking a motion from the AAC regarding alternative voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements for the 2026 municipal election. A summary of engagement materials and feedback received to date is shared below for transparency and information:

- April 18, 2023
 - [AAC engagement on voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements memo](#)
 - [AAC engagement on research for voting methods and accessible voting service enhancements presentation](#)
- August 15, 2023 – agenda and minutes
 - [2026 Municipal Election research findings and decision making criteria presentation](#)
- October 3, 2023 – workshop re-scheduled due to quorum
- November 14, 2023 – agenda and minutes

- [2026 Election Alternative Voting Methods Workshop presentation](#)
- [Committee of Council memo](#)
- [Memo appendices](#)

During the workshop, staff heard that the Committee did not want a draft motion prepared in advance of the meeting. Staff respect this and no draft motion will be provided. The Committee can draft and pass a motion on December 19.

Next steps

Staff will receive the Committee's motion during the December 19, 2023 meeting and it will inform the staff recommendation to be developed early next year. Staff will be coming back to the Committee to share the final staff recommendation in Q1 2024. The motion and all feedback received from the AAC will also be transparently shared and publicly available through the staff report in Q2 2024.

Financial Implications

Financial implications to the election reserve budget will be considered in light of the recently approved 2024 to 2027 multi-year budget and once the Committee's recommendation is received. Staff intend to evaluate the cost of all options early in 2024 to assess market updates and inflationary impacts prior to the 2026 election. Full financial implications will be presented to Council when making a decision on alternative voting methods in Q2 2024.

Consultations

During the research phase of this work comparator municipalities were benchmarked and consulted including Oakville, Chatham-Kent, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, Mississauga, Greater Sudbury, Cambridge, Barrie and Burlington. We also reached out to three cities that have a larger population than Guelph; Vaughan, Ottawa and Toronto.

Eight broader community stakeholders were consulted including Canadian Hearing Services, Community Living Guelph Wellington, Guelph Independent Living, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Immigration Services Guelph Wellington, T2ACOI, Guelph Wellington Senior Association and a First Nations group (who asked not to be named) were engaged for this project. City staff attempted but were unable to engage with the Disability Justice Network of Ontario, Canadian Abilities Foundation, Kerry's Place and the ADHD and Spectrum Center.

Any feedback received through this engagement process, including the AAC motion staff are seeking, will be transparently shared as part of the staff report to Council in Q2 2024.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Facilitator workshop notes

Departmental Approval

None.

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This report was approved by:

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