



TOWNSHIP OF
Southwold

**2026 Municipal Election
Vote-By-Mail Accessibility Plan**

1. Introduction

The Township of Southwold is committed to ensuring that its municipal election is accessible to all electors and candidates, including persons with disabilities. This Election Accessibility Plan has been prepared for a vote-by-mail election and outlines the measures that will be taken to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility in accordance with:

- the Municipal Elections Act, 1996; and
- the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

This Plan applies to all aspects of the election process, including voter information, ballot distribution and return, election services, and candidate participation.

2. Legislative Authority

This Election Accessibility Plan is prepared pursuant to section 12.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, which provides that:

- the Clerk shall have regard to the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities;
- the Clerk shall prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities and make the plan available to the public before Voting Day in a regular election; and
- within 90 days after Voting Day, the Clerk shall prepare a report on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers.

The Township also recognizes its obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, including the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

3. Guiding Principles

The Township of Southwold will conduct the vote-by-mail election in a manner that:

- promotes equitable access to the voting process;
- preserves the secrecy and integrity of the ballot;

- supports independent participation where possible; and
- provides reasonable accommodation to address individual accessibility needs.

4. Voting Method – Vote by Mail

Accessibility Benefits of Vote by Mail

The Township recognizes that a vote-by-mail election supports accessibility by allowing electors to vote in the convenience and familiarity of their own home environment. This voting method can reduce or eliminate barriers commonly associated with in-person voting, including mobility, sensory, cognitive, and health-related barriers.

Vote by mail enables electors to make use of their personal supports, assistive devices, and communication tools when completing their ballot. This approach promotes dignity, independence, and privacy, while allowing electors to review voting materials at their own pace and seek assistance from a support person of their choice, where required.

Vote by mail is considered a flexible and inclusive voting method that is complemented by additional accessibility measures described in this Plan, including in-person assistance provided by trained election staff.

4.1 Accessible Ballots and Voting Materials

- Ballot packages will be prepared using clear, legible, high-contrast print and plain language instructions.
- Instructions will be structured in logical, step-by-step format.
- Alternate formats, including large-print instructions, will be made available upon request.

4.2 Ballot Package Contents

Each ballot package will include:

- the ballot;
- a secrecy envelope;
- a return envelope;
- clear voting instructions; and
- contact information for election assistance.

5. Voter Assistance and Accommodations

5.1 Assistance with Voting

Electors with disabilities may receive assistance with voting from:

- a support person of their choice; or
- the Clerk or Clerk's designate, upon request.

Assistance may include reading instructions, explaining the voting process, or marking a ballot as directed by the elector, while ensuring that the elector's privacy and secrecy of the ballot are maintained.

5.2 Service Animals and Support Persons

Electors may be accompanied by a service animal or support person when receiving any election-related services, in accordance with AODA requirements.

5.3 In-Person Voting Assistance at the Municipal Office

To address accessibility needs that may arise in a vote-by-mail election, the Township of Southwold will provide in-person election assistance at the Municipal Office.

Election staff will be available to assist electors at 35663 Fingal Line, Fingal, Ontario, during the following times:

- Regular municipal office hours throughout the voting period; and
- On Voting Day, until 8:00 p.m.

In-person assistance may include, but is not limited to:

- explaining the vote-by-mail process;
- assisting electors with disabilities to complete a mail-in ballot package, as directed by the elector;
- providing replacement ballot packages, where permitted;
- ensuring the elector's right to privacy and secrecy of the ballot is respected; and
- accepting completed ballots in accordance with established election procedures.

All staff providing in-person election assistance will be **trained and authorized to respond to accessibility needs and accommodation requests** in accordance with

the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

6. Communication and Information Accessibility

6.1 Accessible Election Information

The Township will ensure that election information provided through its website, printed materials, and direct communication is accessible and available in alternate formats upon request.

6.2 Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions

In the event of a temporary disruption to election-related services, public notice will be provided in accessible formats, including information about the nature of the disruption, its expected duration, and alternate arrangements.

7. Candidates with Disabilities

Candidates with disabilities will be accommodated throughout the election process, including:

- access to election information and forms in accessible formats;
- accommodation when filing nominations, financial statements, and other required documents; and
- assistance in accessing election-related services.

8. Staff Training

All election staff and designated officials will receive training that includes:

- interacting and communicating effectively with persons with disabilities;
- providing accessible customer service;
- understanding common accessibility barriers and appropriate accommodations; and
- responsibilities under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and the AODA.

9. Feedback and Post-Election Reporting

9.1 Accessibility Feedback

Electors and candidates will be encouraged to provide feedback on the accessibility of the vote-by-mail election process.

9.2 Post-Election Accessibility Report

Within 90 days after Voting Day, the Clerk will prepare a report identifying:

- accessibility barriers encountered during the election;
- measures taken to address those barriers; and
- opportunities for improvement in future elections.

The report will be made available to the public.

10. Contact Information

Township of Southwold – Clerk’s Office

35663 Fingal Line

Fingal, Ontario N0L 1K0

519-769-2010

election@southwold.ca

Election-related information and materials will be made available in alternative formats upon request, including large-print and other accessible formats, to meet individual needs.