

# Ontario polling places to get accessibility makeover before next election

Duncan McAllister

In September 2007, Premier McGuinty made an election promise to “develop an action plan to make provincial and municipal elections fully accessible to voters.”

In preparation for the Ontario 2011 elections, Elections Ontario is conducting a public review of accessibility for people with disabilities of all voting locations in the province.

There are no provincial standards regulating or defining accessibility for the type of locations where polling stations are put. However, the standards being applied to the proposed upgrades may even be more stringent than those used by the federal or municipal governments for their polling places.

“We developed a set of mandatory criteria for each location, like ramp slope, door width and accessible parking. It’s a rigorous standard” says Fowlie, “We put a lot of work into this initiative; almost a year in the making.”

Starting April 6, the Election Ontario website—[www.elections.on.ca](http://www.elections.on.ca)—will have a tool whereby an elector can find a list of all the proposed voting locations this fall. “It’s just one other way we are insuring voting locations are accessible,” says Alicia Fowlie of Elections Ontario.

The list will contain the location names and addresses of polling places, and will list any remediations required to aid in accessibility, such as temporary

ramps or staffing to assist.

There will be a hyperlink on each location, which will bring up a comments page with the opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the proposed location or to provide a potential location.

New voting locations have been built since the 2007 elections that may not have been inspected, and the feedback form is a means for the public to propose alternate sites.

The nature and cost of remediations required for local polling places is yet to be established.

There will be an announcement on April 6 that will include details of the entire accessibility program. Elections Ontario plans to respond to all feedback once the public consultation closes at the end of May.

## Club helpers sought

The Second Mile Club of Toronto is urgently seeking mature volunteers to assist with programming.

Volunteer tai chi instructors are needed on Tuesday mornings. Other jobs include being friendly visitors, medical escorts and interpreters, and transportation assistants.

Scheduling is flexible but daytime availability is preferred. Training is provided and no driving is required.

For details, contact Pauline Hui at [volunteering@secondmileclub.ca](mailto:volunteering@secondmileclub.ca) or (416) 597-0841 ext. 225.