

Brighton

Brighton Council Candidate



Municipal Elections

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First Name *

Jeff

Last Name *

Wheeldon

Campaign address *

PO Box 872, Brighton ON, K0K 1H0

Website and social media *

jeffwheeldon.ca

How would you characterize the amount of growth in Brighton and what specific steps should be taken to manage the future?

Brighton is growing significantly, though not as quickly as the provincial average. Growth is managed mostly through the Official Plan, which sets the rules on what can be built where in accordance with provincial legislation and guidelines, and which is administered by the Planning department. This term we adopted a Secondary Plan, which applies policies for future growth in the areas around the edges of our urban area (either side of town along hwy 2, down by Presqu'ile Parkway, and up around Dunnett Orchards/Georgina St); the Secondary Plan is attached to the Official Plan. The majority of the Official Plan is due for a review, which we plan to begin in 2027; this will be one of the more consequential projects of the term, and one that I hope residents will pay attention to and contribute to at public meetings.

The development proposals that have come through council this term are already more or less sufficient to provide the housing growth we'll need for the coming decade or more, and staff tell me that there are more in the pipeline. That doesn't mean that they'll be built right away, it only means that they're planning for the future. At the same time, the municipality has purchased land on the east side of town for a development of our own design, recognizing that while the market supports building more low-density housing, our community would benefit significantly from some medium- to high-density housing, community and institutional space, and more commercial space that we otherwise don't expect to see proposals for from private developers. This land banking project, in which the municipality holds land until it can be developed to meet our needs, isn't intended to compete with the market, but rather to provide for needs the market will not otherwise address.

What role do you see Brighton council playing social issues such as poverty, homelessness and mental health/addiction within the community? Explain with specifics.

This term the Municipality of Brighton created a Brighton Homelessness Task Force, of which I was the Chair. The final report of the Task Force outlined 17 recommendations, which council agreed to implement, but which have not yet been implemented. These include providing training opportunities for local volunteers and nonprofits, such as board or communications training, to support the unofficial, grassroots safety net that operates in our community; providing training to staff, particularly By-Law enforcement staff, to be sensitive to the impacts of their work on residents who are experiencing housing instability and poverty, and awareness of County-level resources to support them in that; continued support for the Land Banking project, which aims to provide a significant amount of affordable housing; continued support of Quinte Transit to expand access to affordable transportation; and perhaps especially a commitment to develop a local implementation plan for the County-level Community Safety and Well-Being Plan; among others.

I would also love to see Brighton continue to delegate a member of council to the Northumberland Inter-Municipal Task Force on Housing and Homelessness, to provide focused input into the issue and in support of our residents who are experiencing poverty and homelessness in addition to the work of our mayor on County Council.

Name one or more specific actions you would take to address voter's concerns related to community safety?

I've yet to see much in the way of expressed concerns about community safety from residents. A few years ago I had a complaint about the presence of an unhoused resident in a public space; but that resident has long since been housed. I can't think of any other public safety concerns that have come my way this term.

However, I do hear from many residents about a broader sense of insecurity, frustration, and disempowerment. We're overwhelmed with wars, trade wars, AI wars, mis- and disinformation, political and corporate scandals, the rise of fascism around the world, surging markets and market bubbles, and more. Many of us live in an almost constant state of threat. Personally, I have felt much better since I deleted my Facebook account and focused my attention on my own community, where my actions can actually make a difference. As a councillor I intend to spend the coming term looking for more opportunities to engage with residents in person, to talk about issues and frustrations, and look for ways to engage people in real action in the community. I find that the feeling of fear is very often rooted in a feeling of powerlessness, and so I want to help people make real change for themselves and their neighbours.

How would you address the creation of affordable housing, giving three specific items you would introduce during your term on council? How many units would you want to see created by the end of your term?

This term Brighton Council moved ahead on the Land Banking project, that began in the previous term largely as a response to the County's Affordable Housing Strategy. We have purchased the land, and hired Urban Strategies Inc to design a neighbourhood and a business model for the development of the property. In the coming term we will finalize those plans and get shovels in the ground. While we don't yet know exactly what that will look like, in principle it will be a mixed-use (residential and commercial together), mixed-income (with housing of many different types and sizes to meet different needs, and with a mixture of market-rate, workforce housing, and deeply affordable housing), complete community (with places to live, work, and play), of transit-level density (which is to say, enough units to facilitate regular routes for Quinte Transit from that location).

The amount of deeply affordable (which is to say, subsidized) units in the project will largely depend on Northumberland County's capacity for investment. Last I heard, there's a 6-year waitlist for affordable housing in Brighton; I would love for this project to eliminate the waitlist entirely, however many units that takes, with the caveat that we want the neighbourhood to be truly mixed-income (i.e., we aren't going to build a whole neighbourhood of subsidized housing). My sense right now is that this goal is possible from the perspective of our design, but that it will take significant political will from the County to invest that kind of money in it. That said, I also want to ensure that even market-rate housing in this neighbourhood includes nonprofit housing, such as housing co-ops.

How would you implement the More Homes Built Faster Act locally. giving two examples?

The Act includes many things that are already implemented locally, such as the deferral of Development Charges until the time of occupancy or the reduction or removal of those DCs for developments that include significant community benefit.

Other measures aimed at getting "more homes built faster" are being applied or exceeded through the recommendations of the report from the Housing Solutions Workshop, of which I am a co-author. The report, an outcome of an event hosted by the Northumberland Inter-Municipal Task Force on Housing and Homelessness, was endorsed by all Northumberland municipalities but one, and includes directing CAOs and Planners to work together on our upcoming Official Plan reviews so that we might move in the same direction and implement the other recommendations of the report to help streamline the development process and better facilitate affordable housing.

I'm also currently working with the Task Force to plan an event for November to orient new councils and the public to that task of renewing the Official Plan, exploring changes in the field of municipal planning and envisioning what our communities could look like with more thorough and thoughtful planning approaches.

What are your views on Strong Mayor powers and their use?

I think that Strong Mayor powers are anti-democratic. At the provincial and federal levels, party leaders have consolidated massive amounts of power within party structures so that, when their party is elected, the party leader (who has thus become the premier or the prime minister) has almost absolute power, reducing every other elected official to either a cheerleader or a critic; the institution of Strong Mayor powers attempts to import such a model to the municipal level, which up to now has been the only level of government that is not subverted and undermined by partisanship and the will to power. I'm not necessarily an anti-monarchist, but I very much appreciate that the king of Canada is purely a figurehead; we don't need a king of Brighton in any way, shape, or form.

My understanding of Strong Mayor Powers is that they are not optional, but nonetheless that they do not need to be used outside of changing the way that budgets are formed. Since the introduction of Strong Mayor Powers, Mayor Ostrander has done a good job of avoiding their usage and ensuring that where they are required to be used (through the Mayor's Budget) council remains informed and participatory. I sincerely hope that whoever gets elected to the office of mayor this year will behave in a like manner.

What specific steps would you take to support local business?

As a local businessperson I make a regular effort to keep in touch with my peers, as well as participating in Economic Development events oriented around understanding the local businesses and their needs. I support the department's continued efforts to develop our Industrial Park, and the Land Banking project's goal of creating a mixed-use (commercial and residential) neighbourhood on the east side of town.

I have also been working for most of the term with the Northumberland County Food Policy Council to encourage municipal planners in the region to update planning policies to allow for smaller farms, which are more suited to market gardens and agritourism operations such as farmgate sales and roadside markets, farm retreats and accommodations, etc. In conjunction with that I'm currently serving on the steering committee for a project called Northumberland Can Feed Northumberland, which is currently getting feedback from participants in our local food systems to help us map those systems, which will allow us to target policies and programs toward enhancing food systems in Northumberland to make them more economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. As an historic farming community, Brighton's economy still hinges largely on agriculture; we need to do more to support a generational transition in that field.

What are your plans to support recreational facilities and parks?

This term council created a committee to explore the possibility of new/renewed recreation facilities, including exploring the possibility of a pool. The committee eliminated the pool as a possibility, citing extremely high costs; I have asked to see those costs so that council (and residents) can have a clear sense of what that would cost us in both capital expenditure and ongoing user fees. The committee also produced a report on possibilities for renewing our arena and curling rink. The cost of doing so is very high, and I tend toward wanting to spend that money on necessities (like wastewater treatment, affordable housing, etc), but I would love to hear from residents about how they feel about a proposed rec centre renewal and how to pay for it. I support access to recreation, but not all recreation is equal, with pools and rinks being the most costly options. If we have a strong base of support for new rinks, then I would support a user fee structure that ensures strong financial support from the heaviest users while also supporting equitable access for other residents through occasional free events, etc.

What is a reasonable municipal tax rate or increase? How would you achieve this, giving specific budget areas or line items?

Council should not operate on the level of budget line items; it's a recipe for overreach. Council operates at a strategic level, which is to say that we determine what should be done (informed by cost), and then staff tell us how. We can do this from the top-line and bottom line figures. If we get into the budget much further than that, we're in the weeds and need to pull back. There are few things less useful and more frustrating than a council meeting where we debate the cost of materials or the like, nickel and diming staff who are only trying to successfully implement the programs and goals that we've directed them to.

I have found it shockingly common for budget negotiations to start backwards, with someone saying "what kind of number are we comfortable with?" Almost inevitably, that happens to be a round and completely arbitrary number, like 5%, and then the whole budget is trimmed back to somehow meet that arbitrary number, very often in ways that undermine staff's efforts to implement our strategic plan. The budget should not be based on what I'm comfortable with, it should be based on what is needed.

In Brighton we have a \$7M infrastructure gap (which is to say, we're very far behind on taking care of our infrastructure), and the lowest tax rate among all urbanized communities in Northumberland (lower than Port Hope, Cobourg, Cramahe, and Trent Hills). If we taxed at the same rate as Port Hope we would have an extra \$5M/year to work with, significantly shrinking our infrastructure gap; but I can't imagine such a significant increase would go over well! So we need to consider what residents are able and willing to pay, against what we need to provide the services they rely on. I will not support a strategy that keeps taxes low and sets the next generation up for failure; in many ways that's what we have inherited, and this council spent much of our time and money this term catching up from years of under-investment. We can't do that forever - we have borrowing limits - so I expect that we'll still have an infrastructure gap at the end of the term. But "spending within our means" needs to consider the low end as well as the high end: if we're impoverishing our future, we are not spending within our means, we're robbing our children.

What is a reasonable increase to the OPP budget? Give specific services or line items you would adjust to reach this goal?

We have no control of the OPP budget. Communities with their own police forces might have more control, but as with the municipal budget, they should stay out of the weeds. Things cost what they cost, and staff can only deliver adequate levels of service if they are funded adequately.

Name four new initiatives you plan to implement over your term to improve the quality of life for everyone in the municipality?

Proudly, I have taken part in initiating several major programs this term. Sadly, none of them have been implemented, which is one of the key reasons I want to come back for another term to see them through! This includes:

-Brighton's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, which was started because I asked for it (repeatedly), and which was adopted just a few weeks ago. If implemented, it will increase our urban forest canopy, reduce our greenhouse gases by 2,300 tons annually, and better prepare us for floods and heat waves, among other things. Each item in the plan will need to be moved and funded, and I'm here for it.

-The recommendations of the Brighton Homelessness Task Force need to be implemented. In particular I hope to see a local implementation plan for the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan that operates at the county level; the implementation of training for local volunteers and nonprofits; and the provision of municipal space and facilitation for the coordination of nonprofits and volunteer organizations that serve the same residents or groups.

-I want to see a final plan for the Land Banking project, including both the urban design plans and the business model, and I want to see us break ground on at least a few developments there before the end of the term. This neighbourhood could provide significant new amenities to existing residents, as well as affordable housing, and could serve as a beachhead for transit services returning to our community.

-I've already drafted a motion to call for a moratorium (via Interim Control By-Law) on AI data centres in Brighton (in recognition of one recently being approved in Quinte West); and for the development of policies regulating the use of AI and requiring full transparency on its use in municipal operations. Sadly, I've run out of time in this term to get that through council, as we have only one meeting left this term.

How are you uniquely qualified to be elected to council that no one else can provide, but also giving at least one guilty pleasure?

During this term I completed a Diploma in Municipal Administration, graduating with honours. This is the same training that our Clerks and CAO have taken, helping me understand municipal governance from both sides of the council/staff table. This has been very helpful in me shaping policy and supporting staff's implementation, not to mention helping residents understand why things are the way that they are and how they might be different if we are bold enough to change them. Similarly, I have a deep understanding of Planning policy because of my work as a REALTOR® and planning consultant, which has helped me to make policy recommendations that are already being implemented to improve our systems. My background in federal and provincial politics, as a past candidate and member of federal Shadow Cabinet, give me a good sense of where municipalities are in the governance structure; and my broad network among nonprofits and agencies in Northumberland and beyond help me understand the power of community beyond the municipal corporation, and how we might be better served by supporting nonprofits rather than expanding government services. I have treated council like it's a full-time job this term, and at the risk of braggadocio, I'm pretty darn good at it.

I have many guilty pleasures! Here are a few:

- going to municipal conferences. Some folks think it's a waste of money to send me, but I love it, and it makes me better at the job, so I go anyway. I just feel bad about it.
 - missing an occasional committee meeting. It happens very, very rarely, which makes it feel so much better when I decide to send regrets.
 - humblebrags, like the two above. See what I did there? :)
 - painting miniatures and playing tabletop games. You know an activity is truly leisure if it requires complete and utter attention and achieves nothing but pure enjoyment and satisfaction.
 - going out to "support the community" via snacking, and then again to buy clothes that fit.
 - buying more books, when I haven't read the books that I already have.
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