

Cobourg

Cobourg Council Candidate



Municipal Elections

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

This topic concerns everyone, people of all ages and abilities. I would take a practical, common sense, community-wide approach to community safety.

Council can address policies to direct and support municipal administration. Responsive policies and effective oversight protocols are informed by listening to residents about concerns and where they are experiencing problems. Society has created institutions to get things done together. Council has a role in making sure municipal bylaws are enforced consistently, and working with the Police Service, County and community organizations where issues extend beyond the municipality's direct responsibilities.

I also believe good urban planning contributes to safety. Well-designed streets, parks and public spaces - including appropriate lighting and accessible facilities - can make a meaningful difference to how safe people feel and how public spaces function.

As a town councillor, I have supported clear and consistent rules for the use of public spaces. I also believe citizens must have meaningful opportunities to provide input before significant changes are made. My approach would be to combine enforcement where it is necessary with prevention, good design and community engagement

How would you address issues related to mental health and addiction of individuals living rough, giving specific steps or actions by council?

The municipality cannot solve mental health, addiction and homelessness by itself, especially when as a lower tier municipality within Northumberland County Cobourg does not have the jurisdiction to do so. But, Council can help create the conditions for better solutions in context of broader societal values. Addressing complex issues includes setting expectations and boundaries.

I would support a Town Council role in working to require clarity of a coordinated approach to service delivery. This includes regular communications with lead service provider Northumberland County, the health unit, police, other service providers and community organizations to identify any gaps in services and making the connections eliminating the gaps. Town Council has an important role as a service systems check for the community by considering all aspects and listening to local citizens. The Town may be able to help through policies and partnerships.

Any person may find themselves in a place of needing help and kindness. Each story is unique. But no one should be expected to tolerate or excuse anti-social behavior when the result can be harm to one's self or others. With personal rights comes responsibilities.

The municipality has an important role in ensuring rules are clear and consistent, and to act in the best interest of the community. Consider, for example, as a lower tier municipality, the Town of Cobourg does not have direct jurisdiction for providing housing or social services. Local government can, however, advocate on behalf of local citizens to the provincial and federal governments asking they do better in addressing the unintended consequences. For example, shortages of affordable housing which can result from the 'financialization' of housing. In addition, the County has an important role to treat all member municipalities fairly and equitably in provision of services.

How effective do you think the Emergency Care Bylaw is in addressing the needs of unsheltered people who need a temporary home? What, if anything, would you change?

The Emergency Care Establishment By-law has an important role, but it is primarily a health, safety and licensing tool; it is not itself a housing strategy.

The Town should continue to ensure emergency-care facilities are safe, properly operated and accountable. At the same time, we need to recognize that emergency accommodation is temporary by definition. People need pathways from emergency accommodation into appropriate transitional and, ultimately, longer-term housing. Any ECE license application needs to include a description of these pathways and related partnerships.

A Council policy or bylaw should be reviewed periodically, to assess what works well and what may need revisions or improvement. I would ask for periodic review of the bylaw by Council based on evidence from its implementation - what has worked, what has not. For example, are requirements helping or hindering making emergency accommodation effective

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?

Affordable housing needs both more supply and better use of the tools available to a municipality.

During my term I would focus, firstly, on municipal planning tools to enable more housing choices within neighbourhoods. Our Official Plan and Zoning need to accommodate appropriate intensification, additional housing forms and well-designed development. Growth and progress rely on sustainable and resilient solutions.

Secondly, adaptive and creative reuse of existing buildings with available existing infrastructure must be taken more seriously.

Thirdly, consider, for example, recent innovation of programs by some local organizations to help seniors and lower income families stay in their homes by providing repair services and coordinated services. Council could assist by ensuring any related municipal permit program is responsive.

In another example, the legacy Golden Plough Lodge which is no longer suitable as a long term care home could be adapted into transitional housing and related support services offices, including taking some pressure off the local hospital by accommodating people with needs who need temporary assistance but not necessarily in a hospital setting.

On your question of how many units, it depends on a number of factors including scale. An important goal is healthy, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods

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

Right idea, poor approach. The legislation in attempt to address a housing crisis, including affordability, has dismantled key consultation and protection processes.

There is need to have multiple approaches including allowing a community to determine what fits best. Participation by all levels of government is important. For example, the federal government made a recent funding announcement to help housing co-ops stabilize rents and preserve housing.

First, we need to acknowledge the fact Cobourg was ahead of the province on this one! Cobourg has been well organized and progressive in planning for new development. Provincial priorities for municipalities, if viewed through a clear lens here in Cobourg would acknowledge – and adapt where needed - our community's foresight and progressive view towards a future which includes housing choices and a diverse economy. And, it can be argued that some aspects of more recent provincial legislation has resulted in extra costs and harm to existing citizens and taxpayers. For example, as-of-right development can have negative impacts on neighbours.

We are currently in the process of updating Cobourg's Official Plan and this presents an important and strategic opportunity for citizens to decide the future of their community, for Cobourg.

Secondly, it is my view Town Council has a duty to consult the citizens of the community and to respect the existing taxpayer. We also need to ensure staffing levels are appropriate in order optimize service delivery, manage public assets; and, maintain quality and appropriate standards for infrastructure, accessibility, public safety, urban design and environmental protection

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

I believe Council must work transparently and with clear accountability. Informed discussion and debate in an open public forum are essential to good governance.

Councillors need to have meaningful opportunities to scrutinize decisions and their financial implications. The Mayor has additional powers under provincial legislation, but that should not mean collaboration and public accountability disappear. Processes designed without adequate information and consultation across Council or advisory committees/task forces, present concerning risk which could lead to poor decisions and unnecessary costs. Results include a mayor's power to arbitrarily set agendas and longer council meetings.

My experience on Council has reinforced for me the importance of a good governance model which includes timely input from citizens in a public forum

What specific steps would you take to support local business?

A healthy local economy is one of my five priorities.

I would focus on maintaining regular communication between Council and the business community; and, ensuring municipal policies support appropriate business and local economy initiatives, and do not create unnecessary barriers.

Specifically, I would:

establish regular meetings between Council, Town staff and local business organizations;
review and maintain municipal licensing, permitting and approval processes;
support downtown revitalization and related economic initiatives; and
ensure major planning and infrastructure decisions support and benefit a diverse economy and consider their effect on existing businesses as well as opportunities for new investment

What are your plans to support recreational facilities and parks?

Parks and recreation are part of the quality of life that makes Cobourg a community.

I would continue supporting implementation of priorities established through public consultation and based on condition, usage, accessibility and long-term costs. This includes asset management now required. Natural assets, like the urban tree canopy for healthy neighbourhoods and storm water pond/wetland systems for effective storm water management, are expected to be added in the next round of asset valuations.

I would prioritize maintaining and improving existing built facilities before committing to major new facilities where possible, because preserving the assets we already own can help keep future tax pressures under control.

I would also continue to support environmentally sustainable and accessible public spaces. As a councillor, I moved a motion to establish a task force for restoration of the West Headland and West Beach in an environmentally sustainable and accessible manner

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

I believe taxpayers deserve a predictable, responsible approach to taxation rather than an arbitrary promise of either zero tax increases or unlimited spending.

My starting point would be to target an annual municipal levy increase around 2–3 per cent, recognizing that inflation, infrastructure requirements, contractual obligations and provincial requirements can make a particular year's number higher or lower.

To achieve that, I would look first at:

protecting and strengthening reserves so that large capital expenditures do not create sudden tax increases;
reviewing discretionary operating expenditures and administrative efficiencies;
prioritizing maintenance of existing infrastructure before adding new assets;
using appropriate user fees where there is a clear user-specific benefit;
seeking provincial and federal funding for eligible services and infrastructure; and
preserving municipal assets and considering long-term lease or partnership arrangements rather than unnecessarily disposing of them.

My goal would be sustainable taxation, including assessing the proposed budgets in context of strategic vision plan objectives and key performance indicators

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

I support adequate funding for public safety, but I would also expect a rigorous examination of the Police Service budget and deliverables before asking taxpayers to fund substantial increases.

I would not set an arbitrary percentage without first reviewing the Police Services Board's detailed submission, including time and process to seek clarifications and alternatives. For example, does Cobourg receive funding yet from the province to provide local provincial court security and administration services?

My priorities would be to protect frontline services, emergency response, community safety patrol and crime prevention while looking carefully at administrative costs, technology, procurement, overtime, contracted services and the use of reserves and other revenues. Relatedly I would like to see a comprehensive review of related services including bylaw enforcement and contract security

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

One initiative I would like to introduce is a more effective public engagement and pilot project process.

Residents should have meaningful opportunities to understand proposals, provide input and see what happened to that input. For selected initiatives, I would also like the Town to use pilot projects, measure their results and then decide whether they should be expanded, changed or discontinued.

I would combine the public engagement and pilot project process with a stronger focus on equitable access to municipal services and amenities, so that decisions about parks, recreation, transportation, public spaces and community facilities among other things, consider resident citizens of different ages, abilities and circumstances. For example, a top ask from citizens in the recent Parks and Recreation Master Plan update was for more trails. This suggests connections everyone can use safely every day.

Good local government should not simply announce decisions. It must listen, test, measure and improve.

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

What I bring is a combination of lived experience in Cobourg, professional expertise in how communities are designed, experience on Council and a strong commitment to listening and research before making decisions.

I was raised here, I have operated a business here for decades, and I have spent much of my adult life volunteering in the community. I am a landscape architect, and my professional work and travels have given me perspective in the connections between built environment and natural environments and quality of life.

I have also served on Council and on numerous community and municipal advisory organizations, including planning, heritage, accessibility, environmental, active transportation, parks and recreation, and, community centre committees. I have served as President of the Victoria Hall Volunteers and the Northumberland Land Trust, among other community roles.

And for the guilty pleasure: gardening. I am a garden design specialist, so perhaps that's not a very surprising guilty pleasure!

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