

Hamilton Township

Hamilton Township Council Candidate



Municipal Elections

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First Name *

Pat

Last Name *

McCourt

Campaign address *

9809 Corkery Road, Baltimore, Ontario K0K 1C0

Website and social media *

patmccourt.net

How will you maintain agricultural land in the face of increased pressure on development?

I believe that one of the most significant roles of a Council member is to provide stewardship of our resources. Viable agricultural land must be protected. Hamilton Township has done well in viewing development through a 'smart growth' lens. There is still room for development in our settlement areas. I will continue to regard viable agricultural land as sacrosanct.

The Hunco Farms lands was up for sale in 2024. Where would you stand if it were to come back for sale or development while you are in office?

I do not consider viable agricultural land as an option for development. However, it is important to remember that sometimes that option is taken out of the municipality's hands and the province will make the decision for us. When those occasions occur, it is as frustrating for council members as it is for the community at large.

How do you propose to ensure sufficient water supply for all residents in Hamilton Township, giving specific steps you would take?

A safe and sufficient water supply is important to everyone. I, like most people, am not an expert in all the aspects of maintaining safe and sufficient water. What I have done and will continue to do is monitor and review the reports that come to Council regarding water.

There is a great deal of provincial legislation in place to look after both safe and sufficient water. The Ontario Clean Water Act requires communities to have a Source Water Protection Authority for us it is the Ganaraska Regional Conservation Authority. It is their responsibility, and their expertise that allows for the development and implementation of science-based watershed plans. They do not work in a scientific bubble; they work collaboratively with the Trent Conservation Coalition Source Protection Region, which is a mandated committee of community stakeholders. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act adds further protection for our source water quantity and quality. Additionally, the Ontario Wells Resources Act is further legislation to deal with all aspects of wells. Finally, the Safe Drinking Water Act regulates municipal water testing.

All of this legislation can be costly for water users, but they protect us in the long-term and ensure safe, sustainable water. As a councillor, I am thankful that these measures are in place allowing my job to be reading the reports and ensuring we comply with the legislation.

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 has been a priority for me for the last 10 years, during my last term on Council (2018-2022) I advocated for decreasing our minimum residential floor space and including the ability for secondary units on residential lots. Both these initiatives have been put in place.

The next steps should include making people aware of the possibilities. I say people and not developers because alternative housing options is not just having developers include affordable housing in their development plans. It is also having people realize they may be able to put an apartment over their garage or add a secondary unit to meet the needs of a family member during a transition age in their life. These units could be turned into rental units in the future if so desired. I have spoken to many people in our community who did not know these were even options to be considered.

I would like some research to be done on success stories in other communities that we may be able to adapt to our needs. As well, we should consider if there are any incentives that can be put in place to encourage developers to want to construct some higher density housing in our settlement areas, keeping in mind the overall look of our community.

In terms of the second part of the question, I have no expectation of a specific number of units because municipalities do not build houses and I do not believe in setting an expectation that I do not have some control over.

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

This Act is looking to see 1.5 million new homes built by 2031 throughout the province. It does not mandate an individual municipality to meet a percentage for new builds. Affordable housing is lacking in our area and implementation of the suggestions given in my previous answer would apply. As well, I would support waiving fees for suitable building projects brought forward by groups such as Habitat for Humanity.

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

I was initially genuinely concerned about the role of the Strong Mayors Act, as I had the impression that decisions of Council could be quickly and easily overturned by exercising Strong Mayor powers. Further investigation into this Act alleviated that concern. There are a number of constraints in place within the Act. The mayor can veto almost any by-law that they consider is in contravention of Provincial priorities, for example the More Homes, Built Faster Act. However, Council with a 2/3s majority can vote to overturn the veto. The mayor does not have the ability to overturn by-laws connected to budget as these fall under the Municipal Act. These 2 limitations greatly reduced my concerns.

Additionally, although the Strong Mayors Act passed in 2022 with the primary identified goal of lessening the roadblocks to meeting Provincial priorities especially increased housing, it initially only affected the city of Ottawa and then Toronto. Over the years there have been other municipalities added to the list, but the Strong Mayors Act still does not apply to Hamilton Township. I believe this is because we have limited water service and no sewage service to make extensive development feasible. We also have an added layer of protection for our lands through the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act. At this time, I have no concerns about the impacts of the Strong Mayors Act on our municipality, if and when changes to the Act are made, I will reassess the situation.

What specific steps would you take to support local business?

Other than promoting "shop local" this can be a complex issue. Many of our local businesses have started and may continue to be home-based business. In past Council terms I have advocated for creating by-laws that were supportive of home business. However, if this business thrives and requires things like an increase in employees, more available parking, or causes disruption for the neighbours/ there is a need to move the business out of the home. Our municipality has limited space for industrial or commercial growth. This is largely due to the limitations we have on municipal water and private septic services. The initial costs to the municipality for new water facilities or a sewage treatment plant are not something that can be supported, this limits the feasibility of attracting new industrial opportunities. What I believe we can do is start investigating areas where we could promote smaller business growth. Then consider the necessary bylaws that could support the use of communal services, for example shared well and septic systems arranged through private agreements.

What are your plans to support recreational facilities and parks?

I am a firm believer that decent quality parks and recreational facilities are vitally important to the mental and physical health and well-being of all members of our community regardless of age. The costs of these facilities cannot be dependent on a user pay system as this can prove exclusionary to the very people who want to use the services. For example, hockey is already an expensive sport, if the cost of ice time goes up too high there will be families that cannot afford to have their kids participate. Recreational programming for adults also has to have reasonable costs. When we know there are times that the ice or the turf is not being used, we can offer the space for drop-in activities. I believe these things are already being done and I support their continuation.

I advocated for the program coordinator position, and I was happy to hear that it was created during the current term of Council. Increased local programming helps our community stay united and within our current climate can save families hundreds of dollars in transportation costs, as well as, saving them travel time. I know that in the past the staff have put time and effort into looking for grants that will allow us to keep our parks and recreation facilities up to date and I will encourage that practice to continue as a way to provide improvements at a reduced cost.

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

I do not believe it is responsible to say that I want the tax rate to increase no more than a specific percentage. I do believe that it is my responsibility to look at every line of the municipal budget and be comfortable in asking questions if there is something that is not clear to me. Our municipal taxes, like our household budgets, cover a variety of items that we have no control over. This includes wages, legislative changes that affect necessary training for staff or safety needs, rising fuel costs, and increased material costs for maintenance. Only a small portion of the municipal budget falls under discretionary spending. As always, when I am considering the budget, I ask myself a few practical questions. Is this something that the municipality has no control over, for example legislative changes? Is this something that will have bigger costs if delayed, like maintenance costs? Is this something that if not dealt with could result in a public safety or liability issue? Is this something that can be put on hold until some type of grant or partnering can be arranged?

I also strongly believe that in the short-term, limiting a tax increase is not practical if it causes significant increases in the long term. Specifically, municipalities have a responsibility to be sure they are proactively planning ahead for infrastructure replacement, at minimum based on current repair or replacement costs and ideally with at least some cost increases built in. At the same time as we review the budget, I like to review our current land assets and our service fees to see if they are meeting our current needs. Bottom line is I do not take the responsibility of reviewing the budget lightly.

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

I follow the same process as above when reviewing the OPP budget with one additional step. I would first review our contract because it will identify increases that I have no control over. Next, I will look at each line item and ask myself the practical questions. I will not suggest cutting a cost that will negatively impact our current level of safety or result in an item being put off that would have a much greater cost a year or two down the line. I will be diligent in my review of this budget too.

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

I believe that any initiative that improves health, safety, the environment, or communication improves quality of life. I will advocate for positive change and do my best to get Council to consider my ideas and work with me to move them forward. I have shown my ability to do this in the past. For example, I first brought forward the idea of having our Council meetings recorded so that individuals could access them at a time that worked with their schedule. I also worked with the Environment and Climate Change committee to bring forward including the potential positive and negative environmental impacts of purchases or initiatives within the reports coming before Council for consideration. Appropriate to election years, I brought forward the idea that election signs should only go on private property. When driving through neighbouring municipalities keep an eye out for the visual pollution and distraction caused by street corners covered in competing signs.

If elected this term I will advocate for further investigation into how other rural communities are managing to increase affordable housing and commercial growth. Their solutions may also work for us. I would also like to have a review of our emergency preparedness plans with an eye to the impacts of extreme weather and encourage public education regarding these events including, limiting driving to emergencies only, and explaining the importance of safe use of generators.

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

This question is unusually easy this time around, I am uniquely qualified for three reasons:

1. As the only woman running, I can offer an alternate perspective on any topic.
2. With the steadily increasing understanding of the importance of health and well-being, I have both educational and employment background in mental health.
3. I have had long-term involvement in local politics, having first been elected in 1997 and since then I have consistently either been elected or served on township committees. I have historic knowledge of how things have come to be, which when shared can encourage conversations about whether the original need still exists. The only Council member who has more institutional experience than me is Mayor Jibb.

Finally, my guilty pleasure is giving myself a 'thinking free' afternoon or evening, which includes a decadent sweet treat and binge watching old TV series like Bones or The Mentalist.

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