

Martin RITSMAN FOR MAYOR

Thanks so much for connecting with me personally. Let me begin with my areas of focus, now, and leading into the 'next' term.

1. My number one goal this term and continuing into the next four years is building relationships. This starts with local residents, agencies and businesses with no issue being too small. My communication and relationships and work with Councillors, CAO, and city staff has been so important to ensure that these issues get addressed in a timely fashion. My work with the Province and MPP Rae has been so important for their financial support with ongoing needs of our residents and for the support of our repair and development of infrastructure; including roads and passenger rail service, and the return of GO Metrolinx. My relationship with the Federal government has assisted in promoting their support for affordable housing, including homelessness housing and includes my work on supporting and protecting the manufacturing and tourism sectors as well as advancing big projects like the Grand Trunk Rail (GTR) redevelopment with housing and recreational and library facilities. This has been my greatest public engagement process this term. As Mayor, I believe that we get so much more done for so many more if we collaborate in all that we need to do.

2. The discussion around housing was the number one question at the door during my first campaign for Mayor. And it continues to be! I can say that we have had great success in this area. The growth in much needed housing comes from the important creation of a new Department. Coming into the office I believed that for housing, that we needed a Building and Planning Department to oversee, support and advance the housing required in Stratford. To that end, the Building and Planning was removed from the Infrastructure Department. This has produced an increase in housing from single detached (the lowest number) town houses and rental. The number of units built went from an average of approximately 150 units per year to 250 plus, in 2025; and we are currently looking at 350 plus units in 2026. In 2025, 70% of housing units were townhouse style, that are more affordable and higher density which protects our valuable farmland. The greatest increase in housing types during this year is in the rental housing sector. In 2023 our vacancy rate was at a very low 2%. This has led to rent that is higher than municipalities around us. This year

we have had several key developments move this vacancy rate more close to 3% and we have seen a decrease in rental costs. This year we have had a 166 unit and an 81 unit, open; along with several smaller developments. With another 81 unit, and two 90 plus unit apartments opening in 2027. This type of housing is so key for individuals hoping to down size, for first time housing and for employment and student housing. Another big area of need is for our senior's population. In the 2022 campaign, many seniors (and senior's children) shared that they needed a place to retire with the supports to assist them with their daily medical challenges. This much needed seniors housing was addressed early in this mandate with the build of the People Care retirement home on Vivian Line. This took us from previously, 60 units (that closed because of the flooding) on Mornington Street, to 288 units that will open in January, 2027. On the land in front of the new retirement home, seniors will be able rent individual units and buy health services from People Care, as part of a planned continuum of housing and care on site. I can say that Stratford is leading the Province in the building of housing types that we need.

3. The investment in Capital Infrastructure has been so needed in our City. This is required infrastructure for both transportation and housing and industrial growth. In 2025 the City invested \$52M to improve roads, both below and above ground infrastructure; and in some cases replacing sewers, water and sanitary pipes that were 90 years old. This year we will invest \$36M in infrastructure. This work is possible with the reserves that we have built, through municipal tax levy and through Provincial and Federal grants. These grants make up the 'lion's share' of the cost; reinforcing the importance of having a strong relationship particularly with the Provincial government. We have taken amazing steps in our asset management work. This gives us the data to better understand the health of our infrastructure and to identify when and where capital infrastructure dollars needs to be invested.

4. We need to continue to support and protect our manufacturing sector. Perhaps this is where I have spent the most time beyond our municipal boundaries. This sector makes up over 60% of our economic base in Stratford, providing quality jobs and tax revenue. So much of what we do would not get done in Stratford without our manufacturing sector. The sector boasts aerospace, tool

and dye, metal fabrication, defense and auto parts production. The current challenges of the trade tariff war are a huge threat to this sector, particularly the auto parts manufacturing. The Canada United States Mexico (CUSA/USMCA) free trade agreement has been a big part of my work both in Washington and across Ontario. So much to say about this complicated work and all of the nuances. The work involves connecting with Canadians and across the United States with Mayors, Senators, and Governors. So much work has been done but still lots more to do.

I need to add that I continue to work with and advocate for the Stratford Festival, especially as we are still coming out of the impact of the COVID pandemic. Tourism is a key economic driver, making up over 22% of our economic base with over \$300M in spin off impact annually. It is one of our largest employers and the money spent in our community by our visitors; and has a major impact of what we offer to our residents, especially in the downtown core. Art and culture strengthens our community and gives us light and hope during challenging times in our personal lives and our community.

5. Addressing homelessness is my most emotional work. So much I would love to share here, however, it may require us to have a coffee and a chat. As an individual with lived experience and having been in education for 37 years and seeing former students trapped in this terrible state, keeps me up at night. Being on the youth Shelterlink Board for 23 years, as a President and Volunteer CEO for a year, and opening and running Stratford Community Kitchen in 1993 until 2015 (turning it over to the St.Vincent De Paul) I have a deep care and concern for our most vulnerable.

Homelessness is a municipal, provincial, national and international challenge. A challenge that I want to address to a greater level but realize our budget limitation. The goal has to be permanent, supportive housing that provides 24/7 care for our residents with the high acuity needs. The goal is getting these individuals back to independent living and to rejoin the community as workers and volunteers. The current Council has committed to a \$5M build of a 12 unit permanent, supportive location. We are currently advocating with the Province for a \$1.2M grant for operating costs.

Homelessness cannot be addressed without addressing mental health and drug addiction which is part of the wrap around supports. The build begins in the spring of 2027.

I have worked closely with the Council of Churches to play a part personally to address this very challenging issue. On December 17, 2025; my project called "Not One More Night" saw us open the Warming Centre for overnight care and support for our under-sheltered residents. A place to shower, do laundry, have a home cooked meal and to socialize. The Warming Centre will open again November 1, 2026 and will stay open until April 30, 2027. It will build on the day time hours of the Connection Centre and will be open from 7 pm to 9 am daily. I know that this program addresses the 'gaps' in services but it does not protect our most vulnerable as we are on our journey of permanent housing and supportive housing. This Warming Centre meets the needs of our Stratford residents and is a made in Stratford approach.

Thank you again for reaching out. I would like to finish by saying that I believe that all of this work must always keep in mind our ratepayers. In the end we need to have a City where our residents can afford to live and that is inclusive. I can say that I did not use any Strong Mayor Powers given to me in 2024 by Premier Ford except in my 2026 Strong Mayors Budget. With my Mayor's Budget, direction was given to our Department Heads and Outside Boards stating that the tax levy increase could not exceed 3.5%, with no increase to hires to City staff. To that end the tax levy came in at 3.19%. Affordability also includes City Transit and my work on bringing back permanent GO Metrolinx passenger rail to Stratford. Residents need to have reliable public transit within and beyond our City boundaries. I am proud to have FlixBus become part of this service as well as VIA and PC Connect.

A highschool friend and teammate recently reminded me of two things when he was visiting from Brampton. One, I love and miss Stratford and I wish to return home. And two, Martin, you grew up in 'dirt poor'. These two comments drive me every day to do my very best, daily, for all residents of Stratford so they can continue to live here and thrive here.

Please continue to follow me.

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