

# 2026 Deputy Mayor Candidate Questionnaire

**Town of The Blue Mountains · Election Monday, October 26, 2026**

**To:** Candidates for Deputy Mayor, Town of The Blue Mountains — Rachel Gilliland

**From:** Ron Shulman, The Shulman Report

**Please return by:** Tuesday, 14 October 2026

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## Why you have received this

Turnout in this region runs near 30 per cent. In The Blue Mountains in 2022, roughly 4,000 people voted and the mayor's race turned on 480 ballots — a handful of votes steering close to \$30,000 per household in obligations. Most residents who do vote cannot name what the candidates on their ballot actually stand for. That is not the voters' failure. It is a failure of transmission, and this questionnaire exists to correct it.

## What will happen to your answers

1. Every completed response will be published in full and unedited on The Shulman Report. Nothing will be summarised, trimmed or characterised.
2. Responses will be set side by side against the same criteria, so readers can compare candidates directly.
3. Where a candidate does not respond, that will be reported — plainly, without adjective.

These five questions are drawn verbatim from the questionnaire already put to the candidates for mayor, and they keep that questionnaire's numbering so your answers can be read beside theirs.

## How to complete it

- Type directly into the shaded boxes. They expand as you type.
- Word guidelines are guidelines. Concision will be noticed favourably; evasion will be noticed too.
- If a question rests on a factual premise you dispute, say so in your answer and give your source. Corrections will be published.
- Answer in your own words. Responses that read as though produced by a communications firm or by generative AI will be noted as such.

**Two ground rules.** No question here is a trap. Every one asks what you would do and why. “It depends on the staff report” is an acceptable answer only if you also say what would make you decide one way or the other.

## Disclosure

The author of this questionnaire has publicly proposed that Collingwood and The Blue Mountains consider amalgamation, and was reported doing so by CollingwoodToday on 11 March 2026. He has also published in favour of moving water and wastewater into a municipal services corporation. These questions are put to every candidate in identical terms, and every answer will be published in full — including answers that reject those positions outright.

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## Candidate details

**Name:** Rachel Gilliland

**Office sought:** Deputy Mayor, Town of The Blue Mountains

**Current or most recent occupation:** Canadian Beverage Sales and Town Councillor/ Rotating Deputy Mayor. Additional: Finance in small business lending and publishing

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## 1. Priorities

**Rank your top three priorities for the 2026–2030 term, 1 to 3.**

### Financial Sustainability & Accountability

We need to get our financial house in order. It’s no secret that we have some significant financial pressures ahead, and I believe we need to take a closer look at our operating costs, the capital commitments we currently have in the cue, future projects and infrastructure needs, and where our reserves are heading.

I’ve had the benefit of working with some very strong financial practices throughout my eight years in municipal government. The treasurer I worked with comes with experience from the Region of York, who adopted best practices most small to mid-sized municipalities have not introduced, such as; 10yr capital planning, in term 2-3 asset management planning, fiscal strategies, and investment strategies to grow and

protect our reserves. These are tools I've seen work, and I'd like to bring that experience to the table.

Going into the 2027 budget and beyond, I'd want to examine all aspects of the budget such as; our current operating costs, opportunities for efficiencies, identify capital spending priorities, explore granting and/or partnership opportunities, possible MSC, and adjust our plans where needed.

We can't solve every financial challenge overnight, but we can start making better-informed decisions right away. That means making some difficult decisions, setting realistic goals and remaining consistent on how we manage our financial path.

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### **Strong Leadership at Town Hall & Governance Efficiency**

This is a big one for me, and I don't think it gets nearly enough attention.

We've seen the departure of three senior leadership members. Regardless of the circumstances, that kind of turnover creates challenges for any workplace, especially one facing significant financial and infrastructure pressures.

I believe we need to restore stability, strengthen the working relationship between Council and staff and make sure employees have the leadership, support and direction they need. As such, I'll be proposing a workshop with all Council members, the CAO and senior ELT team that will outline the role of Council, Staff, expectations, media and communication, Roberts Rules, integrity commissioner and strategy sessions to set the tone in a positive direction out of the gate.

I've worked in municipal government long enough to know that when things aren't functioning well internally, it eventually affects the services residents receive.

I'd also like to modernize how the Council operates.

Currently, Council committee of the whole takes two days of meetings to get through an agenda. That is a lot of staff time around the table. Our agendas could be more streamlined, tightened up and more focused, and I'd like to explore moving Council meetings to the evenings. That way the public can participate after working hours and give staff time to do the good work we are asking them to do during the day. In my experience, one committee of the whole meeting can be achieved in one meeting day to

get through an average agenda in 2-3hrs. That is reasonable, not including closed sessions, if needed.

I also would like to meet with my council colleagues one on one quarterly to ensure we are working as a team and helping each other achieve our successes. There are two types of leaders. Those who lead for themselves...and those who lead through the success of others. I believe in the latter and am committed to collaborating.

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### **Planning and Supporting the Community we are Becoming**

We know we need mixed housing and as our community grows, we need to think about what families and residents will need in the years ahead, from parks and recreation, community spaces, to transportation, while protecting the character and charm that makes us so special.

I helped champion stable neighbourhood policies and have firsthand experience in supporting partnerships with private organizations and local sports groups to expand recreational opportunities without relying entirely on municipal facilities or taxpayer funding. I'd like to explore similar opportunities here.

Along with these initiatives, we need to ensure we continue supporting our local business. Economic vitality for all sectors is vital to our town. That means removing barriers on small business, protecting what makes us so special such as our natural capital assets, and investing in our town responsibly. I have prepared several motions I'd like to bring forward, such as; strengthening downtown storefront protections, promoting more pedestrian friendly access, install parking signage and wayfinding, streamline permitting, and make it easier for local farmers to diversify their income opportunities.

For me, it's about building a community where families can thrive, local businesses can succeed and the character of our neighbourhoods is protected as we grow.

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**For each of the three, outline what you would actually do, and by when. If they compete for the same dollar in the 2027 budget, say which one gives way.**

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## 4. Capital cost control, and who is accountable when it fails

*Across this region, major projects have run far past budget: three bundled sewage projects in The Blue Mountains went from \$34.79M to \$53.56M, and Collingwood's water treatment plant went from roughly \$60M to \$120M to \$270M.*

**The reporting threshold at which a cost variance must come to council should be:**

**X** Any variance over \$100,000 — if a major capital project between \$1 to \$5 million

☐ Over \$500,000 — if a major capital project over \$5 million

☐ Over 10% of budget

☐ Set by staff

**Outline what you would change in procurement, estimating, contingency and staff-to-council reporting so that a nine-figure programme cannot drift by half before council hears about it. Be specific about mechanisms, not intentions.**

Having reviewed the Town's Budget and Procurement Policies, I recognize that financial thresholds and reporting requirements have been updated as of late, including a \$100,000 cap on certain capital budget adjustments before Council approval is required.

That's a good starting point.

My experience with multimillion-dollar municipal projects has taught me the importance of strong financial oversight. Some best practices I'd like to ensure are taken into consideration are:

- Better estimates: Ensure cost reviews and risk assessments are considered, before major projects move forward.
- Contingency oversight and capital project updates: Regular reporting on how contingencies are being used and what's remaining, spending actuals and timelines.
- Change-order accountability: Proper approvals and explanations for significant changes in project costs or scope. Super important. This one can help us save when sufficient research is done to better determine whether the scope has

actually changed, and/or negotiate an adjustment. In my experience, we have saved money with this scrutiny.

- Identify “who” is managing the project, with clear check in expectations
- Post-project reviews: Learning what worked, what didn’t and how we can improve future projects.

I’d also like to explore establishing a Finance Advisory Committee, something we formed in my previous municipality. Having a committee that can take a closer look at forecasting, financial pressures and identifying any red flags early would provide another layer to ask questions, identify concerns, and would be proactive accountability.

We also need to recognize the difference between class estimates and what they mean. Preliminary estimates and construction-ready budgets are not the same thing, and that needs to be clearly communicated.

As for accountability, I believe it goes both ways. Staff are responsible for managing projects and keeping Council informed, while Council is responsible for setting budgets, providing oversight and asking the right questions.

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## 9. Council, staff and professional governance

*The Blue Mountains budgeted 191.74 permanent full-time equivalent positions in 2026, up from 185.61, for roughly 9,000 households. Fully-loaded compensation rose about 10 per cent in a year with no new hires, with the cost-of-living adjustment set at 5 per cent.*

**Over the term, the permanent staff complement should:**

☐ Grow ☒ Hold flat ☐ Shrink

**Reliance on outside consultants should:**

☐ Increase ☐ Stay the same ☒ Decrease

**I will support publishing closed-session subject matter and voting records to the fullest extent the Municipal Act permits:**

☒ Yes ☐ No

**Outline your platform on how this town is run: the mayor–CAO relationship, where council’s role ends and staff’s begins, what you would change in the first hundred days, and how residents will be able to see what the town spends, owes and owns in a form a non-accountant can read.**

In respect to FTE Staff. For now I’d hold flat, but I’d certainly be open to reducing positions or restructuring where it makes sense such as, not filling a vacancy without compromising services.

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I believe a municipality works best when Council and staff have a respectful, productive working relationship and everyone understands their role. Council sets the direction, priorities and budgets, while the CAO manages staff and day-to-day operations. While the mayor provides leadership, decisions are made democratically by Council.

Given the recent changes in senior leadership, I’d like to see greater stability, clear expectations and a healthy working environment at Town Hall. Hence, why I believe a workshop on this topic would be very beneficial. Culture and teamwork matters.

Early in the term, I’d want to review the organizational changes already underway, look for efficiencies and streamline Council agendas and meetings, including moving meetings to the evening.

I’d also like to see simpler financial reporting so residents can easily understand them. That will be a request I am committed to ensuring our new treasurer will provide, as well as, our communications department.

I’ve already drafted a motion on closed-session transparency that would establish an annual review of closed-session documents. With the Town Solicitor’s input, the intent would mean no longer requiring a Council resolution to release the documents, where legally permitted.

Ultimately, it’s about good leadership, accountability and making sure town hall is working effectively.

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### 13. Contracting out municipal services

*Municipalities deliver some services with their own staff and buy others from contractors. This question asks where you would draw that line.*

**Would you support contracting out services currently delivered in-house?**

☐ Yes

☒ Yes, where a business case supports it

☐ No

☐ Undecided

**Which would you be prepared to contract out? Check all that apply.**

☐ Snow ploughing and winter control

☐ Landscaping and parks maintenance

☐ Transit and buses

☐ Tree pruning and forestry

☐ Facility cleaning and custodial

☐ Fleet maintenance

☐ Building inspection

☒ Waste collection - Already contracted out

☐ By-law enforcement

☐ Information technology

**Others you would contract out:**

I'd focus on occasional services that would require expertise or specialized equipment.

**Services you would never contract out:**

Core municipal governance, policy decisions and statutory oversight responsibilities, such as by-law. Information technology and FIPA would influence my decision to keep

in-house. The Towns budget identifies savings by keeping custodial duties in-house. Public accountability must always remain with the municipality.

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**Outline your platform. Say what test you would apply before contracting a service out, what you would do about the staff currently delivering it, and how service quality would be held to account once it sits with a contractor.**

In my municipal experience, I've worked with a model where we've aimed to have a balance of in-house and a 60/40 blended approach, which gives the municipality greater control over costs, quality and response times, while still allowing us to bring in outside expertise when needed.

I'm not opposed to contracting out. Some services require specialized equipment or expertise that simply wouldn't make financial sense. But contracting out doesn't automatically mean saving money, sometimes it is more cost effective to remain in-house.

It's important to note, that even when a service is fully contracted, you still need municipal staff to manage the contract, deal with resident concerns and make sure the work is being done properly. Those costs are sometimes overlooked.

Before making any changes, I'd want to see a proper business case comparing the full costs, service levels and long-term implications. And I'd expect that each department would include this in their annual budget review.

For me, it's not about whether a service is public or private. It's about finding the right balance, keeping costs under control and making sure residents are getting good service for their tax dollars.

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## **19. Grey Road 19, and long-term care capacity**

*Two separate projects sit on Grey Road 19. The first is a 192-bed peopleCare long-term care home on roughly 3.2 acres of municipal land the Town is selling, beside the new Craighleith fire hall. The second is a private proposal of approximately 612 rental units on a 9.95-hectare site at 796060 Grey Road 19, up to six storeys, being sought by Minister's Zoning Order rather than by Official Plan and Zoning amendment. Separately,*

*Errinrung is currently the only licensed long-term care home in Thornbury, with 60 beds. Please answer on each project separately.*

**On the 192-bed long-term care home:**

**X** Support ☐ Oppose ☐ Undecided

**On the 612-unit rental proposal:**

- ☐ Support the units and the MZO route
- ☐ Support the units but oppose the MZO route
- ☐ Oppose the proposal

**X** Undecided

**If Errinrung closes or enters redevelopment before replacement capacity opens, the Town should:**

- ☐ Secure interim local capacity at municipal cost

**X** Accelerate the Craigleith home and ~~accept a gap~~

- ☐ Reopen a Thornbury site

**X** Treat it as a provincial responsibility

**Outline your platform on long-term care and seniors' housing, and explain your view of using a Minister's Zoning Order to deliver housing in this town.**

The 612 Proposal, I support the Council resolution to allow the next steps of staff completing a wholesome review to better understand the impacts, to help Council make an informed decision. So at this point, I am undecided until the work has been presented to Council.

It's my understanding that Errinrung has received an extension to its service agreement well into 2027, but we still need to understand what that means long term.

As such, I would take a blended approach by proactively working with the Province and the developer to accelerate the Craigleith project, I would not simply accept a gap. While long-term care is a provincial responsibility, the Town should be actively advocating for continuity of care to find solutions.

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Long-term care and seniors' housing are definitely critical priorities. We have a growing seniors population, and people want the option to stay in their community and close to family.

As for MZO's, I'm not opposed to them in every circumstance. I've experienced this before in my previous municipality, where the Province issued an MZO without giving Council an opportunity for any consultation.. That was a major concern for us, which is why we pushed back.

The TBM just submitted a new Official Plan for final sign off, and that work needs to mean something. An MZO should not be a way to get around our Official Plan or replace the normal planning process. Respecting consultation with the Town, public input, and conducting proper studies, checks and balances should be done. Ultimately, it should only be considered where there's a clear reason and a clear benefit to the community. And because LTC is definitely a top priority, we should be open to exploring.