

2026 SAUGEEN SHORES MUNICIPAL CANDIDATE SURVEY

Section 3: Business Growth & Economic Development

Healthy local business areas contribute to employment, municipal assessment, tourism, investment, community identity and overall quality of life. As Saugeen Shores grows and evolves, municipal decisions can play an important role in creating an environment where independent businesses can continue to invest, adapt and compete.

QUESTION 12

Saugeen Shores will continue to grow and evolve. What role should Council play in encouraging appropriate mixed-use development, investment and the activation of second-floor or upper-level commercial and residential spaces, while maintaining the character that makes Southampton & Port Elgin distinctive and supporting the long-term viability of existing businesses?

Brian Putman (Not Putnam)

Mayor

Council's role should be one of listening to all rights holders, exploring best practices and undertaking environmental scanning of similar municipalities. There are many interesting and effective programs being used by municipalities across Ontario, across Canada and around the world that we could implement, if deemed appropriate.

Jeffrey J James

Mayor

I would support mixed-use development by actively promoting and expanding the existing Community Improvement Plan incentive programs. I would strengthen the wording around protecting the distinct character of Southampton and Port Elgin and support the long-term viability of existing businesses

Luke Charbonneau

Mayor

Council should support and encourage appropriate development in our core commercial areas through the policies that we set in the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-Law. We should further refine those policies by establishing district design guidelines to direct the scale and form of development in sensitive areas. We should also use community improvement plans to support incentives that conserve and enhance the character and economic viability of our downtowns. I have worked on developing these tools and policies for our community in the past and I am prepared to lead the Town's efforts to continue to update them for the future.

Diane Huber

Deputy Mayor

First we need to somehow have the 'character' conversations here via meaningful engagement throughout the community so that there's an accepted consensus and understanding of how we define character here and what matters in terms of protecting it. That's going to be a lively, passionate, difficult and frustrating conversation that may never lead to success but the engagement is needed. Provincial legislation has adjusted the Town's ability to inspire and control development activity in some ways. The opportunities we still have within our Zoning by-law, incentive programs, site plan control and design guidelines can be regularly reviewed and used to their advantage.

Odette Bartnicki

Deputy Mayor

Council should encourage well-designed mixed-use and live-work development within existing serviced areas, including the activation of upper floors for commercial or residential use. I do not support continued urban sprawl at the current rate. Growth should strengthen existing businesses and preserve the distinctive character of Southampton and Port Elgin rather than reproducing generic strip-development models found elsewhere.

Don Matheson

Vice Deputy Mayor

I support mixed-use development in our downtowns, particularly making better use of second and upper floors for housing, offices and other appropriate uses.

That can bring more people downtown, provide more housing choices and help support the businesses that are already there.

But new development has to fit. I don't believe we should sacrifice the character of Southampton or Port Elgin simply to get more development.

I want good design, appropriate height and density, adequate parking and infrastructure, and development that respects the buildings and neighbourhoods around it.

I also want our BIAs and existing businesses involved early, because changes downtown can directly affect them.

Growth is coming. My position is to welcome good investment, make better use of what we already have, and manage that growth without losing the character that makes our communities special.

Jordan MacKinnon

Port Elgin

Growth is inevitable. We're lucky to live in a community where people want to live, work, and play. We're lucky to have Bruce C beckoning on our doorstep.

What we are tasked with is how do we ensure the growth does not overwhelm us, and does not rob us of the character of our downtowns? We need to encourage mixed-use developments, encourage full utilization of our downtown buildings and encourage development that complements what we already have.

What that means is taking time to consider and encourage developers to design proposals that capture the unique characteristics of our respective communities, so those distinct identities are not lost to growth and development.

Patricia Corrigan-Frank

Councillor Port Elgin Ward

Council should act cautiously in this area. While growth is good, there must be clear guardrails to ensure appropriate mixed-use projects. There should be strict controls on height, massing, setbacks, parking, etc. to protect the small-town character of our towns. Any incentives in this area must be tied to retaining heritage facades and long term affordable and attainable rental spaces. Prioritizing the viability of existing businesses and community character should be front and center. Short-term development at any cost is not the goal.

Rachel Stack

Port Elgin Ward Councillor

There is no question that we need to support a commercial core that services the needs of the community and continues to enhance the character and charm of our community. By providing helpful design guidelines and working with developers to encourage thoughtful development, we can continue to meet the needs of our growing community while maintaining our charm.

Tamara McDonald

Councilor- Port Elgin Ward

Growth is happening. I think our job on Council is to encourage sensible growth by staying out of the way of local entrepreneurs while protecting our coastal, small town feel.

My approach:

Active upper floors - use CIP grants to help building owners turn empty second floors into housing or office space. It brings consistent, year round customers right to our main shops without taking up new land or ruining streetscapes. Protect local character - enforce smart height and architectural guidelines so new infill fits seamlessly into High Street and downtown Port Elgin.

Cut the red tape - make permits for mixed use conversions simple and fast. If a local property owner wants to invest their own money to improve a building, the Town should help them get it done.

Eric Tolton

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Council should create the conditions for appropriate investment through clear planning policies, efficient approvals and tools such as Community Improvement Plans. Growth should be encouraged where it strengthens our commercial areas. Council must also protect the scale, heritage and character of our communities and ensure existing businesses are considered in the process.

Neil Sarginson

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Council plays a critical role in steering Saugeen Shores' growth, increasing density and strengthening the local economy without eroding the charm of Southampton and Port Elgin. Council should balance growth and character through targeted Community Improvement Plans, easier parking and protecting and supporting existing businesses.

Brenda Reeves

Southampton Ward councillor

Council should set clear, predictable rules that welcome investment while respecting scale, heritage, and the identity of each downtown. I support thoughtfully designed mixed use development and active upper floors for housing, offices or services. The BIAs, residents, heritage groups and existing businesses should be involved early with attention to parking, accessibility, infrastructure, and construction impacts. Done well, growth can bring more customers and year-round vitality without displacing the businesses already there.

Cathe McIntosh

Councillor, Southampton Ward

My principle is that growth should fit our communities, including our business sector, not the other way around. With focused attention on community character and charm, downtown cores are attractive and inviting to visitors, tourists and local shoppers. This is do-able, but it needs to be a core focus as Saugeen Shores grows by using appropriate planning tools and extensive community engagement which MUST include the BIAs.

Cheryl Grace

Southampton ward councillor

As mentioned in the previous answer, our CIP provides financial supports through the CIP to encourage mixed-use development, etc. Our Municipal Heritage Committee has recommended that staff assess a property tax rebate program to offer financial support to owners of provincially designated heritage properties who invest in restoration, similar to the ones offered in Collingwood (<https://www.collingwood.ca/town-services/documents/heritage-grant-program-guidelines-and-application>) This could provide another incentive for improvement of heritage properties while preserving the character of our towns. Besides that, I believe that the Town should be integrating heritage-focused elements into any future CPPS, particularly within our downtown areas. Encouraging mixed-use development will provide another stream of income for commercial business owners.

Harry Mazmanian

Southampton Ward

Council is elected to play the leading role in all aspects of our community. As I continue to reiterate, a definitive plan for architectural heritage needs to be defined before we move on to any other projects that affect the appearance of our downtown cores.

John Divinski

Councillor, Southampton Ward

See #3

Candidate responses are reproduced as submitted and have not been edited for content, spelling or grammar.