

2026 SAUGEEN SHORES MUNICIPAL CANDIDATE SURVEY

Section 1: Vibrant Downtowns & Tourism Saugeen Shores BIA businesses serve residents year-round while also being an important tourism destination. BIAs help animate communities through marketing, events, beautification and placemaking

QUESTION 2

Vacant or underutilized properties can impact the vitality of a business area. How would you encourage property owners to improve, activate or redevelop these spaces?

Brian Putman (Not Putnam)

Mayor

The BIAs work to understand their respective catchment areas, businesses, current and potential business opportunities. They are also the best organization to anticipate business successes and those that may be struggling. Municipal staff will work with the BIAs and disadvantaged businesses to assist business owners with marketing and economic development information. The Municipality should work with the BIAs to explore innovative alternative uses for vacant businesses based on this information and that provided by an engaged public.

Jeffrey J James

Mayor

I would be happy to instruct staff and cohorts to help work with property owners to identify barriers, offer clear permitting pathways, and explore incentive programs that make redevelopment more attractive and achievable.

Luke Charbonneau

Mayor

The best way to ensure that that commercial properties do not remain vacant is to pursue policies that support a vibrant local economy. I will support and work to advance economic development initiatives that will increase local employment and ensure that there is a strong local market to support small businesses. I will also continue to support investments in downtown enhancement and beautification that encourage residents and visitors to spend time in our commercial districts. I believe that when businesses can find success (ie. customers) in our core commercial districts there will be demand to rent and occupy the store fronts in those districts.

Diane Huber

Deputy Mayor

Town awareness of available vacant or underutilized space enables information to be shared to those looking for space in our community. Specific actions to inform property owners re: the availability of grant programs or other development opportunities ,such as municipal or other jurisdiction tax incentives, might have an impact. If all else fails, the municipality can encourage (gently or more strongly) adherence to property standards requirements to ensure a space is safe and doesn't detract from the attractiveness of Main Street.

Odette Bartnicki

Deputy Mayor

Owners must maintain their properties to reasonable standards of safety and appearance. When this is not happening, the first step is to understand the obstacles preventing improvement or redevelopment. These may include financing, servicing, environmental concerns, approval timelines or difficulty finding suitable tenants.

Community Improvement Plan incentives could encourage façade restoration, accessibility improvements, conversion of upper floors into housing, environmental remediation and redevelopment if needed. Temporary uses, such as pop-up shops and public art, could also bring some vacant spaces back to life while permanent plans are developed.

The Town should review/revise measures within its authority when properties remain persistently vacant or neglected. New bylaws are needed to protect existing facades from redevelopment that would render them out of character in each BIA area.

The objective should be to encourage action, protect neighbouring businesses, and ensure that properties are safe, attractive and economically successful, not punitive.

Don Matheson

Vice Deputy Mayor

There is no single solution, and the municipality cannot force a private property owner to lease or redevelop a vacant building. It can, however, help create the right conditions for improvement.

I would support meeting with property owners to understand the barriers they face, simplifying municipal approval processes and considering appropriate incentives for renovations or redevelopment. Temporary uses, such as pop-up shops, public art and seasonal displays, could also help bring activity to vacant spaces.

Property standards must still be enforced fairly. The best approach is to combine cooperation, practical incentives and reasonable accountability to encourage owners to reinvest in their properties and strengthen our business areas.

Jordan MacKinnon

Port Elgin

I should point out that I am not supportive of any level of government dictating what private landowners should do with their land. Having said that, I understand the negative impact empty space or empty/abandoned/derelict buildings can have on the overall appeal of a downtown area.

What I would like to see happen is municipal/county staff reach out to these property owners and see what their future plans are for their properties, find out why and what can be done to help them achieve something better for their property investment. Instead of wondering why a store is empty, let's ask what we can do to improve the property.

Patricia Corrigan-Frank

Councillor Port Elgin Ward

I believe this is part of the Community Improvement Plan. Vacant storefronts are a definite eyesore and do not give a good impression of us. Some suggestions: 1- a CIP grant or loan for improvements made to facades or accessibility; 2- the CPPS could be used to streamline the beautification process AND protect the beauty of our downtowns, if implemented properly; 3-Should owners of run-down or vacant buildings pay more property tax? 4- a reduction in property tax for the winner of the seasonal "Shore Up Your Storefront" Ideas worth pursuing.

Rachel Stack

Port Elgin Ward Councillor

Work with the County of Bruce to continue to support and look to expand the Spruce the Bruce program and work with the BIAs to seek new and creative ways to enhance the appeal of our business areas, including reaching out to the public for ideas and suggestions on how to enhance our business areas.

Tamara McDonald

Councillor- Port Elgin Ward

I think we need to start by asking, "What is standing in the way?"

Before we put policies or penalties in place, I'd want to understand what's preventing property owners from improving or developing their property.

Sometimes the answer may be planning or approval issues, sometimes it may be financial, and sometimes it may be a matter of finding the right use. I believe the municipality should be part of finding those solutions. But we also have to recognize that a property sitting vacant or neglected for years affects the businesses and residents around it. My goal would be to work with owners to get these spaces back into productive use and contributing to the community.

Eric Tolton

Saugeen Ward Councillor

I favour encouragement and incentives over penalties. We should identify barriers to investment and consider tools such as Community Improvement Plans, streamlined approvals and incentives for appropriate redevelopment while respecting the character of our communities.

Neil Sarginson

Saugeen Ward Councillor

I suggest we could work with owners to allow local artists or community organizations to use the display windows for art installations or historical displays, maintaining visual appeal. Additionally the BIA could act as a broker between property owners and local entrepreneurs, artists, or local brands for temporary, low-risk leases. Ie Pop Up Stores

Brenda Reeves

Southampton Ward councillor

I would start by listening to property owners and our BIAs to understand what's holding each property back. The municipality can help through clear, timely approvals, practical incentives and partnerships, while ensuring vacant properties remain safe and well maintained. My goal is responsible redevelopment that strengthens our main streets while respecting the character of Port Elgin and Southampton.

Cathe McIntosh

Councillor, Southampton Ward

Thriving downtown cores need active properties. As a prior municipal Councillor, I know that vacant and underutilized properties can be a barrier to a healthy and vibrant downtown core. It is important to understand why a property is vacant or underutilized; financing, zoning, renovation costs or personal circumstances may be factors. I would also be open to exploring a vacancy fee and exploring alternate uses of these properties in the interim or until the vacant/underutilized issue is resolved.

Cheryl Grace

Southampton ward councillor

This is one of the most challenging questions in the maintenance of a healthy business area, especially in the downtowns. Our Economic Development team can assist businesses in sharing information about facade-improvement grants and supporting applications with letters of support, etc. Our goal should be to have every building in our downtowns occupied as thriving commercial or residential units. Because of the need for housing, development charges exemptions may be available for the development of certain types of affordable housing units. But how does the Town encourage vacant property owners to occupy their properties commercially? The Town should explore a vacant property registry - properties that are vacant for an extended period (six months, for example), must register their property with the Town. This registration would include a fee and regular inspections, with the goal of making it more attractive for the vacant property owner to revitalize their property - either by renting commercially or converting to housing units. Ultimately, it's the decision of the property owner to decide what they want to do with their property, but the municipality shouldn't make it comfortable for them to keep their property vacant year after year. See information on Hamilton's vacant building registry: <https://www.hamilton.ca/home-neighbourhood/home-property/property/vacant-buildings-registry>

Harry Mazmanian

Southampton Ward

Council needs to review the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to explore additional property tax or levy for commercial property owners whose business property is not regularly open for business or not at all. For entrepreneurs wishing to establish a business in these vacant or under utilized properties, possibly a lower property tax and permit fees should be continued in the CIP for a defined period of time.

John Divinski

Councillor, Southampton Ward

Ideally encourage the owners to create a unique business that would add to the downtown ambience. If not ready to open their properties, then urge the owners to improve their storefronts with colourful murals etc., rather than just paper-covered windows or boarded up storefronts. If that doesn't work, then some kind of directive to clean up the properties within a specified amount of time or be fined accordingly.

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