

2026 SAUGEEN SHORES MUNICIPAL CANDIDATE SURVEY

Section 3: Safe, Healthy & Welcoming Business Districts

QUESTION 13

Homelessness, addiction and mental health challenges increasingly affect communities and business areas across Ontario. What role should the municipality play in addressing these challenges while balancing compassion, access to services, public safety and the economic health of business areas?

Brian Putman (Not Putnam)

Mayor

The municipality should be actively involved, along with Bruce County Social Services to utilize existing funds and programs, explore new and innovative solutions to immediately house local residents that are un housed. Initial steps should be to focus on temporary housing in structurally sound but under-utilized buildings, before the winter season is upon us.

Jeffrey J James

Mayor

I have been thinking a lot about this question. I believe that drug addiction, some crime and unhoused people are mostly symptoms of the bigger issue of mental health. I believe the municipality needs to lead and form a larger alliance with the County, the YMCA, SON and the church groups in order to pool resources into a multi-faceted mental health facility that deals with the core issue and it's unfortunate symptoms including transitional housing on site. I would love to start the work on that.

Luke Charbonneau

Mayor

Homelessness is on the rise in all communities in Ontario. This rise is especially prevalent in rural communities like ours. Bruce County has primary responsibility for addressing these issues in our community. The province also has a major role to play - and we need them to do much more.

As a member of Bruce County Council, I have advocated for increased resources to address homelessness and encampments. The new Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST) is an example of what we have accomplished on that front. The team will provide care and support for residents experiencing homelessness, mental health and addiction issues. This is in addition to the programs we already have in partnership with the YMCA that provide thousands of nights of shelter each year.

The Town has a role in ensuring that we are supporting (and in some cases facilitating) the construction of affordable housing in our community. Saugeen Shores has plans to construct as many as 200 affordable homes in the next few years and to continue the Municipal Housing Allowance program which provides ongoing rental supports to 35 families. I will support making sure that we deliver on these plans.

We also have a by-law enforcement role. I will ensure that we work with our partners to do everything we can to protect the viability of our business districts as we address the rise of homelessness.

Diane Huber

Deputy Mayor

The Municipality needs to be at the table with the County, healthcare organizations, first responders and other service providers to ensure awareness between partners working to provide appropriate support is available to address individual and community challenges.

Odette Bartnicki

Deputy Mayor

The municipality must respond lawfully and compassionately while maintaining safe, welcoming public and business areas. This requires coordinated outreach, access to sanitation and waste services, wellness checks, mental health and addiction supports, and appropriate policing where safety is a risk.

The Town should work closely with Bruce County, CMHA, paramedics, food banks and housing providers to expand supportive and affordable housing and connect vulnerable people with services. Public education can also reduce fear and stigma while helping residents and businesses respond appropriately. Supports and facilities, such as washrooms, located in walkable areas outside of the core BIA areas may encourage unhoused persons to locate near these supports. Where encampments develop, the Town must implement additional waste management and maintenance protocols to ensure that these spaces do not reflect badly on local businesses.

Don Matheson

Vice Deputy Mayor

These are difficult issues, and I don't think there is one simple answer.

We need to treat people with respect and compassion and help connect them with the services they need. But we also have a responsibility to make sure our downtowns and public spaces are safe and welcoming for our residents, visitors and businesses.

The Town can't do this alone. We need to work with Bruce County, healthcare and social service providers, police and community organizations that have the experience and resources to help.

For me, it's about finding that balance—helping people who

Jordan MacKinnon

Port Elgin

This is a complicated discussion because it involves many different issues that fall under different jurisdictions. There is no magic solution to solve homelessness, mental health and addiction.

Our first priority should be looking out for people who need help and making sure they have access to it. Moving homeless people from one spot to another does not solve anything.

First and foremost, even though the municipality does not deliver the relevant services to this issue, it can help coordinate a response and help people experiencing these issues connect with the appropriate services.

At the same time, every person should have the expectation to feel safe and welcomed in any public space in their community. Business owners should not have to worry about encampments hurting the appeal of the downtown area.

Laws and bylaws should be enforced as they would anywhere else in the municipality, while recognizing enforcement of laws will not solve the underlying issues.

Patricia Corrigan-Frank

Councillor Port Elgin Ward

This is a very difficult question. Municipalities must show compassion. I know the Town coordinates with health, social services, police, and BIA members to try and provide accessible mental health services, addiction, and housing supports as needed. More provincial support is needed and investment required. There has to be clear protocols for encampments and downtown disruptions. The Town must engage the BIAs to find a balanced approach. No easy answers.

Rachel Stack

Port Elgin Ward Councillor

The municipality must identify issues and work directly with the upper tier municipality of the County of Bruce, as well as other service delivery organisations at the provincial and federal level to deliver support to people in need in our community. For example with the recent protest at the Police Parkette, the town worked tirelessly with the County of Bruce to ensure regular outreach was provided to those folks who were staying in the parkette and helped provide meaningful support to several households by providing consistent outreach at the parkette, all while treating people with care and compassion. Additionally, the town provided additional security to the area and worked with staff and police to ensure the area was maintained in reasonably good order.

Going forward, we must review our bylaws and other tools at our disposal to support timely response to these important challenges to ensure we protect our important downtown business areas while addressing the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Tamara McDonald

Councillor- Port Elgin Ward

I see this issue through two lenses. Deep human compassion for people struggling in our community, and the practical need to keep our downtown business areas safe, clean and welcoming for everyone. Our municipality can't solve it by acting alone or ignoring the impact on our main streets. Housing, mental health and addiction are primarily funded and managed at the provincial and county levels. I think the Town's role is to ensure our local staff, police, and outreach partners (Bruce County Social Services, YMCA) are coordinated so people get immediate help and connections to real housing solutions rather than being bounced around. Compassion doesn't mean turning a blind eye to public safety, open drug use or property damage in our commercial cores. We need firm, respectful and proactive policing alongside street level outreach to ensure our parks, sidewalks and storefronts remain accessible to all.

Eric Tolton

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Those complex issues require cooperation with Bruce County health and social services, police and community organizations. We need compassion and access to appropriate services while also maintaining safe and welcoming public spaces for businesses, residents and visitors. Vulnerable people deserve responses aimed at addressing underlying problems rather than simply moving them somewhere else.

Neil Sarginson

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Bruce County and Saugeen Shores already work collaboratively to address homelessness, addiction and mental health. I would see these programs continue to grow and integrate further with the BIA's.

Brenda Reeves

Southampton Ward councillor

The municipality cannot solve these challenges alone, but it must be an active and compassionate partner. I would support coordinated work with the county, province, police, health and social service agencies, BIAs and community organizations to connect people with housing, mental health and addiction supports. At the same time, public spaces must remain safe, clean and welcoming, with timely responses to unsafe behaviour. Compassion and public safety are not competing goals – we need both to protect vulnerable people and the health of our community and local businesses.

Cathe McIntosh

Councillor, Southampton Ward

The municipality must continue working with Bruce County, healthcare providers, police, outreach organizations and housing agencies to connect people with appropriate support. Businesses, employees and customers need safe public spaces; people in crisis need to be supported. The balance can be tricky and can take time to achieve results. The municipality's role is to work with partners, so people get help, issues are addressed early and businesses aren't left to manage these challenges on their own.

Cheryl Grace

Southampton ward councillor

Most of these specific responsibilities lie within the jurisdiction of the County and Province. Over the last few months, I've been peripherally involved in a group through one of Port Elgin's churches that gave me new insight into the roles of the County, Province, YMCA and Town in providing support for those who have challenges related to homelessness, addiction and mental health. These questions are complicated by Court decisions which limit actions that can be taken by municipal governments. In our case, most of this support is channeled through Bruce County, which receive funding for emergency shelter and homelessness support from the Province. The County works with the YMCA (and we now have a Y office in Port Elgin, which is great) to coordinate and offer on-the-ground supports and counselling for those in need. Somebody from County housing or the Y were on site of the encampment almost daily offering support. This summer's encampment in the Police Parkette was a protest encampment. Because of a Court ruling in May which ruled that municipalities may not move encampments unless adequate alternate shelter can be provided, the Town and many other municipalities were limited in terms of actions they could take, keeping in mind always that empathy and support had to be balanced with the needs of the community regarding public safety and business vitality. This was complicated by the fact that Bruce County doesn't have access to shelter that some folks with more complicated needs require. However, Town staff worked compassionately and diligently with the County to provide all of the original inhabitants of the encampment with satisfactory shelter. At this writing, one new resident is the only remaining inhabitant.

Harry Mazmanian

Southampton Ward

This has to be a collective, community approach. It takes a village right? Addressing homelessness, addiction and mental health issues will not only lay at the feet of council, but to businesses, volunteer groups and residents alike. Collectively, we need to devise a plan to house, treat, counsel, educate and train homeless people so that they have a modicum of a chance to re-integrate themselves into our community.

John Divinski

Councillor, Southampton Ward

As you know we have been dealing with exactly that in downtown Port Elgin. The municipality and Bruce County have played a large part in finding living spaces for those that created a camp site at the Police Parkette. These people need to be listened to and helped in any way we can. We have done just that and at last report with great success. Continue the work.

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