

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 9

What steps would you take to support small businesses, encourage entrepreneurship and attract investment to Southamptton and Port Elgin BIAs?

Brian Putman (Not Putnam)

Mayor

I would encourage municipal economic development staff, BIA staff and local businesses to develop and utilize grant funds in exploring initiatives designed to attract investment to our communities.

Jeffrey J James

Mayor

I would work with the Town to ensure the BIA has a strong partner in promoting local shopping, reducing red tape, and actively using tools like the Community Improvement Plan and Business to Bruce to help small businesses grow, attract investment, and create a welcoming environment for entrepreneurs in both Southamptton and Port Elgin.

Luke Charbonneau

Mayor

The best way for Council to support small business is to do everything we can to ensure that we have a strong local economy. To that end, I will lead the municipality in our planned efforts to support the development of new nuclear generation in our region, support the expansion of local medical isotope production, invest in the features and amenities that make us an attractive place for people to visit and advance policies that support the success of local agricultural operations. As a member of Bruce County Council, I will support the continuation of programs like Spruce the Bruce and Summer Company to support businesses and young entrepreneurs. I will also support successful programs like Explore the Bruce that showcases our County and attracts residents and visitors to our community. And, both at the Town and the County, I will continue to champion the development of the housing that we need to accommodate workers for all businesses in our community. I will also support local procurement wherever it can be done in a fiscally responsible way.

Diane Huber

Deputy Mayor

Once upon a time the concept for an expansion/revitalization of the Southamptton Town Hall and Library included the addition of incubator and small spaces for use by entrepreneurs and others working outside traditional bricks and mortar buildings downtown. The concept also included meeting and performance spaces that could function for a variety of uses. Let's hope the revival of this project includes opportunities that enhance what's already in downtown Southamptton and add more. For both BIAs I would encourage the town economic development team to host (or continue) hosting annual or bi-annual downtown business gatherings (as part of, or in addition to, Chamber events) providing a forum for comments, criticisms, questions, conversation and shared learning. Joint marketing promotions would be great starting with the preparation of professional, branded photo, audio and visual materials that can be shared. At least once a year a member of the economic development team should endeavor to visit / stop in to each and every BIA member location to enable the distribution and collection of information the town wants to get out or that the town needs to hear. It would be good for Council members to receive training regarding the incentives and limitations within the municipal tax system so that where opportunities exist they can be acted upon during business planning/ budget sessions. Solid internet infrastructure in the cores is vital to success - if servicing is limited can the Town help?

Odette Bartnicki

Deputy Mayor

I would ask BIA members to share day-to-day priorities and challenges in doing business. I would look closely at annual budgets to identify where additional funds may be available to support, such as reduced development charges within the BIA area. Doing so could be investment-friendly and benefit local businesses. I think entrepreneurs should be given a reduced fee structure during their initial start-up year. Investors who see our BIA areas as healthy and supported are more likely to choose Port Elgin and Southampton. The Town should also improve communication by welcoming new businesses and fairly promoting local business districts. Healthy, attractive and well-supported downtowns will help existing businesses succeed and make Southampton and Port Elgin BIAs more appealing to future investors.

Don Matheson

Vice Deputy Mayor

I think we start by listening to the businesses that are already here.

They've invested in our community, created jobs and helped make Southampton and Port Elgin what they are today. We need to make sure we're supporting them while also welcoming new businesses and new ideas.

The Town can help by keeping our downtowns attractive, making it easier to work with the municipality and cutting unnecessary red tape where we can.

And we need to keep working with our BIAs to promote both downtowns and encourage people to invest here.

For me, it's pretty simple. Support the people who are already here and make Saugeen Shores a place where others want to come, invest and stay.

Jordan MacKinnon

Port Elgin

I think the biggest thing the municipality can do is make sure prospective entrepreneurs know they have a clear point of contact to go to for all answers to get their business off the ground. The municipality should also work with the BIAs to keep an inventory of available spaces for rent so there can be matching prospective business owners with the best available space.

As mentioned before, ensuring we have an attractive, well-maintained downtowns will help encourage investment in a place where business owners want to be.

Patricia Corrigan-Frank

Councillor Port Elgin Ward

The Town currently has a Business Retention and Expansion survey on the website. It will provide feedback to help the Town better understand the needs, challenges, opportunities, and priorities of local businesses to develop the 2027 Economic Development Plan. I would use the results of the survey as a basis for attracting and encouraging entrepreneurship and investment in our towns. There is also Email Marketing 101: A Beginner's Guide for Small Businesses on the website. That and other links provide a good beginning place for those wanted to start their own business.

Rachel Stack

Port Elgin Ward Councillor

Continue to highlight our local businesses in social media campaigns, support the successful shopping nights, and work with BIAs to develop events strategies that draw people downtown.

Tamara McDonald

Councillor- Port Elgin Ward

I can't pretend to know every technical municipal program on day one. What I do know is what it actually takes to run a local service business, build a loyal customer base and can imagine the difficulties when off-season hits and summer residents/tourists have left. I think supporting local business isn't necessarily about spending more tax dollars, but spending smart and getting out of the way.

My focus would be to cut the red tape. Make permits and approvals fast and straight forward. It costs tax payers nothing for the municipality to be easy to deal with, but it saves local business owners time and money. I would want to make sure we are fixing the basics. Keep our downtowns clean, safe and accessible. I think when core infrastructure works, private investment naturally follows. Another focus would be helping to build year round life by making our main streets welcoming for locals throughout the off season with things such as winter markets, local events, etc. I'm not sure encouraging entrepreneurship is so much about grand municipal promises so much as creating an environment where local people who take a risk to open a business feel backed by their town and supported through their community.

Eric Tolton

Saugeen Ward Councillor

The Town should create an environment where businesses can succeed through good infrastructure, efficient approvals, predictable costs and attractive commercial areas. We should also regularly ask businesses what municipal barriers make it unnecessarily difficult to operate or invest here.

Neil Sarginson

Saugeen Ward Councillor

We need to make it easier for businesses by assigning a staff member to act as a single point of contact, helping new entrepreneurs navigate licensing, planning approvals, sign bylaws, and health unit requirements. Working together Staff and the BIA could bring recommendations to the council for consideration and enablement.

Brenda Reeves

Southampton Ward councillor

I would start by listening directly to local businesses and entrepreneurs about the barriers they face. I would support clear and timely approvals, better access to grants and business supports, coordinated, marketing, and incentives to bring vacant properties back to life. By investing responsibly in a welcoming downtown and promoting each BIA's unique strengths, we can help existing businesses grow and attract investment that fit our communities.

Cathe McIntosh

Councillor, Southampton Ward

In reviewing the BIA websites, I see there is work already underway to create yearround activity to build economic success. Council needs to recognize what is working and support building on that work, including what barriers exist that the municipality could help mitigate. I would also advocate for responsive municipal services, clear and plain-language information for budding entrepreneurs, and identifying economic opportunities that could support small business. Based on my conversations with small business owners, I understand that a year-round economy is important more so than in prior years and I would look at which amenities and services support a year-round economy. In researching BIAs across Ontario and what supports assist them, I think a dedicated staff person at the Town who is the go-to contact for new entrepreneurs would be helpful (assuming it is not already in place). This person would help new businesses (and those existing businesses who need support) navigate through Town approvals, permits, etc. to reduce extra work by small businesses.

Cheryl Grace

Southampton ward councillor

In the past we've had economic development 1/2 day workshops. I don't remember any of these very recently, but I think this was a good way for municipal staff and Council to connect with business people and to share ideas. During COVID, we had an active outreach program to help businesses with grant applications, etc. Continuation of this type of program would be worthwhile. Explore what it would take to put together a recruitment day or weekend event with the Town providing some budgeted support and staff so the workload doesn't all fall onto the shoulders of BIA volunteers.

Harry Mazmanian

Southampton Ward

I have just become aware of Innovation Park, which appears to be a viable project to attract business and entrepreneurs. I participated in a program several years ago where there were 10 different locations in Bruce County you needed to travel to where there were tokens you collected. After you collected the 10 tokens, you could claim a prize if I remember correctly. Expanded business access to the sidewalks also enhances business activity to a more European feel without impeding pedestrian traffic. Spruce the Bruce program, which I believe was introduced this year, appears to be a comprehensive program which will enhance business activity. But, I say again, we need to define our architectural heritage policy/plan first. Correct me if I'm wrong here, but at one point in time, perpendicular signs were banned. Now I see that they are being revived. What is happening here? What is driving this?

John Divinski

Councillor, Southampton Ward

Continue to make the downtowns a destination point. If you don't come downtown, you might be missing something. If you aren't in the downtown area, you might be missing something. Show those unique businesses that they are missing a lot by not being part of the downtown area.

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