



KEVIN GONCI
for
WARD 8 COUNCILLOR
“Community First”

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Election Platform #2 – FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Our family, along with many others in this city, has become increasingly concerned with the prevailing "tax and spend" mentality and a municipal system that seems to be growing more unsustainable. I would respectfully recommend that municipal leaders thoroughly examine internal cost-saving options before seeking additional debt relief from Hamilton taxpayers.

Municipal Taxes

The current term of the City Council runs from 2022 to 2026. During this period, there has been a total tax increase of 17.1% over the past three years, with an additional 8.7% increase projected for 2026. Furthermore, water and wastewater fees have risen by a cumulative total of 31.43% over the last four years, and it is also expected that the introduction of a new Stormwater Tax will impose an additional annual cost of \$208 on taxpayers.

Municipal Office Budgets

In 2023, the average budget allocated for Municipal Councillors' offices ranged from \$284,657 to \$314,040, and a recent motion has been introduced to secure an additional \$1.62 million in funding to hire a full-time staff member in each of the 15 Ward Offices, with an estimated salary between \$66,431 and \$89,039 annually. Additionally, there is a request for another \$55,657 to cover discretionary expenses, including mail-outs, town hall meetings, and maintaining web pages.



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Municipal Hiring Freeze

As the election year nears, debate continues among council members about a proposed hiring freeze on full-time staff for the upcoming year. Currently, an estimated 425 to 595 staff positions are vacant within the City of Hamilton. Most of the council supports this proposal, although it was introduced without a formal staff report that could have assessed potential impacts on service levels and key projects related to safe streets, housing, and transportation.

With over 27 years of experience in the manufacturing sector and having completed McMaster University’s Labour Studies Program, I understand that hiring freezes and staff reductions are often seen as effective ways to cut costs. However, these strategies are rarely used without a careful impact assessment. Such an assessment would likely show that these actions can lead to task redistribution and increased workloads for some employees. This situation may cause higher stress-related health problems, absenteeism, workplace injuries, and increased staff turnover. Additionally, some municipal employees have recently voiced concerns about unsafe working conditions, which may have contributed to the recent closure of two municipal recreation centres.

Hybrid Work Schedules

I have serious concerns about the current hybrid work model in Hamilton, where around 1,700 municipal employees work from home 50% of the time. Given the substantial taxes residents pay, we deserve high-quality service in return, and many residents have expressed their frustrations with declining customer service, delays in obtaining building permits, and slow responses to routine inquiries.



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\$30 Million Ward Councillor Slush Fund

According to a report by Joey Coleman of The Republic Record, in 2021, the City of Hamilton received a significant one-time funding boost of \$32.7 million from the Province of Ontario to address urgent infrastructure issues. This allocation was divided among 15 municipal wards, with each ward receiving \$2 million in discretionary funds.

There now seems to be a hurried approach to spending these funds, especially with the municipal election just over a year away. However, this prompts an important question: What criteria are being used to decide if this work is truly necessary? From my perspective, sidewalks, driveways, and roads that look to be in good condition are being replaced at taxpayers' expense, while the City of Hamilton has been recognised as having the “worst road” in Ontario for four consecutive years. So, where and how exactly are these funds being spent?

Vacant Unit Tax

The City of Hamilton is implementing a Vacant Unit Tax (VUT) to boost the housing supply and raise additional funds for future housing projects. This program will apply a one percent tax on the assessed value of any residential unit that is vacant or on owners who do not complete the required self-declaration. The tax could be as high as \$3,810 annually and will increase each year for those who fail to submit their self-declaration on time.

Staff estimates suggest that between 880 and 1,135 homes may be impacted, which likely includes seniors and others who might not fully understand their reporting obligations. Therefore, I plan to oppose the VUT and seek support from other Council members to do the same.



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Tiny Homes Project

Hamilton's initiative to provide tiny homes aimed at addressing homelessness involves offering up to 40 transitional housing units in small, heated cabins with shared facilities. While the project's intentions were commendable, it encountered significant challenges, including an order from the Ministry of Labour to halt construction due to compliance issues. There were also concerns about the tendering process and the fact that the buildings had been imported from China. Typically, initiatives like this are expected to follow a structured public tendering process that meets technical building standards and specific code requirements. Additionally, the project should have included established site plan assessments and soil analyses as further safeguards. A key question that remains unanswered is how the original estimated cost of \$2.8 million escalated to a staggering total of \$7.9 million.

Summary

The current tax-and-spend approach used by the City of Hamilton is unsustainable and is significantly hurting Hamilton taxpayers. Proactive efforts to explore suitable alternatives should be considered. I suggest that the first step is to review internal spending patterns, assess departmental inefficiencies, and ensure strict compliance with established budgetary limits, which should be considered before proposing an 8.7% tax increase for 2026.