



Questions for 2022 Municipal Council Candidates



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Councillor Ward 1

The Port Hope and District Chamber of Commerce is the recognized voice of business in the Municipality of Port Hope. We support all businesses, not just our close to 200 members, and play a key role in advocating on their behalf regarding decisions made by levels of government that may impact them.

These questions are being asked as background research to form individual question(s) for our meet the candidate events and to keep the business community informed of your outlooks with regard to the future of the Municipality of Port Hope. Please be advised that your responses will be shared in full or in part with the community through our membership, community publications and Social Media networks.

1. What is your plan for the Municipality over the next 4 years?

If elected, I would champion more open, community-based, decision-making. It is integral that Council and municipal departments engage with residents and businesses so that we can understand our needs and interests and build a common vision for our future.

I believe we need to make services FOR residents and businesses more easily accessible and easier to navigate – which I propose can be accomplished by ensuring that the staff empowered to work alongside constituents to get things done, rather than simply processing applications for support (see below).

I believe we need to move beyond just service delivery to working WITH constituents, including local businesses, to advance our community priorities. Our community is full of talent, experience, and energy, which can be harnessed to get things done, especially when there is a common interest and benefit to be had.

Finally, I would like to explore how Council and the municipality can facilitate and support efforts BY constituents. There are so many wonderful events and opportunities being created by residents and businesses. Too often I hear that those working on creative initiatives and creating opportunities run into difficulty seeking permission, let alone receiving support from the Municipality.

If we can open ourselves up to what's possible when we consult with each other and collaborate, I know we can build a future where we can all live, work, and thrive, together.

2. What do you believe is the biggest issue facing the business sector in the Municipality and how do you plan to address it?

If I were to consolidate all of what I have heard when speaking with business owners and residents employed by local businesses, I believe there is a common thread related to access and how businesses are treated as stakeholders by the Municipality.

My view is that the business community are core stakeholders in our local economy and in our community. They should be treated as partners to the Municipality who are working to advance our community priorities – including providing employment, creating opportunities, making our town a vibrant and enjoyable place to live, ensuring that essential services are available to residents, etc. As such, they should be facilitated in establishing and growing their businesses within our Municipality. As above, I am very concerned to hear about difficulties faced in navigating permits, accessing information, etc. We must ensure that the Municipality works closely with the HBIA, Chamber of Commerce and with businesses directly to ensure that Port Hope is a place where it's easy to conduct business and be successful. Importantly, I believe that engagement needs to be a combination of formal and informal approaches. I believe that as a Councilor I should lead by example, frequenting and supporting local businesses (also providing a great opportunity to speak to business owners and their clientele to learn more about their experience!)

I would also add that I am very aware of the challenge coming for those businesses located in our downtown core posed by the Walton St. construction. I was appalled to learn that there have not been any formal meetings between the municipality and affected businesses to address concerns and to develop a plan to mitigate impacts for local businesses. This must also be addressed in the immediate term before the construction moves further down Walton St.

3. Explain your understanding of economic development and describe the significance to our community.

A vibrant community needs local businesses that offer the services we depend on and that create employment. We need a plan to sustain our downtown and ensure that Port Hope is a place welcoming to entrepreneurs and industry, attracting investment to our local economy.

I believe that our business community are important stakeholders that should be part of consultation and discussion about our economic and community development more broadly. Our local economy, and the success of our local business community, is connected to other issues, including education, affordable housing, demographics, etc., and vice versa. Without the businesses – including retailers, restaurants, service providers, manufacturing and industrial – that provide employment, our community cannot thrive. Without affordable housing, schools, entertainment, and opportunities, our businesses will not attract a stable local workforce, and cannot thrive. I have heard concerning reports from local business owners of challenges in retaining staff due to the lack of affordable housing. Similarly, I have spoken with a commercial property owner who failed to secure an ideal tenant as the business owner themselves would not have been able to reside here. It is thus crucial that we invest directly in economic improvement to ensure Port Hope is a viable place to do business, while also investing appropriately in encouraging young people to stay, ensuring that people who work here can afford live here, and to make Port Hope a place where people want to raise their families.

Recognizing that our local businesses play an important role in our overall goals as a community, they must be recognized as being more than constituents serviced through municipal departments. Instead, we should see businesses as partners in our economic and community development with whom we can collaborate in pursuit of common goals.

4. The downtown core is an integral part of the business community, however there are businesses throughout the municipality including, but not limited to, home based and agri-businesses. What do you believe the municipality can do to support the businesses throughout the entire community and not just in the downtown core?

I believe we need to do a better job of paving the way for new business development. We should make it as easy as possible for people to start and expand small businesses. The “Start or Expand Your Business” portal on the Municipality’s website and the incentives under the Community Improvement Plan are a great start. But, I know our business community have lots of ideas about what’s most useful to them that we can learn from and build on.

I would advocate for expansion of some of the incentives and supports offered through our Community Improvement Plan to businesses outside of the designated heritage district.

I would advocate for and support expansion of community events and opportunities that attract residents and visitors to other locations within both town and rural areas where local businesses operate – e.g., the Wednesday farmer’s market up at the plaza on Toronto Rd., the 2021 Cultivate Food tour which directed people to check out establishments across our community, including in Hope Township. Through this approach, I believe it is important for organizers to consider how to attract visitors to engage with the retailers while they’re here, ensuring the events add to rather than taking away from existing businesses.

Recognizing the changes on the horizon regarding sustainability and climate resiliency, I would champion expansion of our Community Improvement Plan to support local businesses to lead the way in emerging sectors such as sustainable energy, building, and transportation, and to support agricultural businesses to adapt and remain competitive and viable in both local and larger food systems.

Finally, I would advocate for our economic development team to actively identify and disseminate opportunities and supports through other levels of government that could be accessed by our local business community. Where possible, this function could extend to convening business partners for consortium initiatives or projects led by the municipality with benefits for local businesses. This facilitation role is a crucial one that recognizes that our success as a local economy is not solely driven at the municipal level.

5. The municipality has been restructuring and reconsidering their approach to economic development, building and planning. What do you think the best thing the municipality can do in the short, mid and long term to better support growth and development in a fair, timely and financially sound way?

I understand the logic behind the internal restructuring that combined economic and community development with building and planning under a common Director. As above, I do believe these pieces are intrinsically linked. However, from my discussions with businesses and residents, I am not sure this restructuring has been successful so far in improving service delivery and meeting the needs of constituents. I often hear expressions of frustration regarding the experience of businesses and residents alike, in navigating the planning department, for example.

From what I hear and observe, problems of inefficiency and timeliness seem to stem from an unwavering commitment to processes that are not always working well. I believe the best thing we can do as a Municipality in the short term is to ensure that all departments working to manage and facilitate growth and development are focused on outcomes first and empowered to change processes and approach as needed. For example, if staff working in economic development have a target of supporting X new businesses in the year, they will be more likely to identify inefficiencies that are slowing progress and innovate to improve the speed and quality of their services to achieve that goal. If the planning department has a target of supporting X property owners in developing new accessory units on their properties, they will likely be more proactive about public engagement and making the process as easy as smooth as possible, altering processes, and developing new strategies as they go. While I recognize that this is ultimately the responsibility of our CAO and Directors, as a Councilor I would champion this results-based approach and monitoring of outcomes so that we can learn from what's working (and what's not) and do even better!

In the medium and long term, I believe, as above, that we need to recognize the interconnectedness between economic and community development and get serious about convening diverse stakeholders, including our business community, in the development of a comprehensive growth and development strategy. I am intrigued by the potential of emerging models – including Community Development Corporations – but believe strongly that any strategy needs to be properly informed by the specific needs, interests, and vision of our Port Hope community. We need to ensure that our vision is integrated across all policies –our Official Plan, our Community Improvement

Plan, our Strategic Plan, our by-laws, and even staff job descriptions – as a consistent thread to ensure we are moving together in the same direction. A small, but crucial element of this, would be to amend the template for staff reports/recommendations to Council to ensure inclusion of analysis about how proposed motions/approaches align with these policies to inform sound decision-making consistent with our overall vision.

6. Agriculture and rural businesses are a key piece of the economic viability of this community. What do you think the Municipality should be doing to better support this sector?

I believe our agricultural community is an integral part of our economy and our culture as a community. I believe that we need to protect agricultural land and work with agricultural and rural businesses to adapt to changing contexts and remain viable and sustainable. Our Official Plan and our Community Improvement Plan should reflect their needs and priorities so that they are supported, alongside their urban counterparts. I believe it is important to acknowledge that the support and facilitation needed for agricultural and rural businesses are unique and as such their voices should be explicitly included in consultations and discussions related to community and economic development planning. I readily admit this is not an area where I feel I am fully informed. But I am ready and eager to learn more about their work and needs – once elected, I would see myself as a representative for all of Port Hope, including rural neighbours and constituents.