



Questions for 2022 Municipal Council Candidates



Miles Bowman 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?

Council's job comes down to being decision-makers and connectors. We respond to work put forward by staff (saying YES, or NO that won't work for Port Hope's people) and we help build relationships that make us all stronger. So, in two parts:

A) I want us to be the best Port Hope we can be, and to be our best, *our* plan must involve *your* input. It sounds dry, but I've learned most voters don't know key documents steer the town's day-to-day decisions (e.g., planning documents). These documents must be constructed at a high level and *involve public input*. For example, the Waterfront and Riverwalk Master Plan, tells town workers how: to respond to growth and development; to use greenspaces; and to plan business that works with other areas in town. This, and several others, like the Strategic Plan are decided in the next council's term. To that end, it's not "my plan", but rather guarding to make sure YOUR VOICE is reflected in the plans that go forward. My job is to include more of you in the documents that determine what we look like and how we act.

B) My work in culture has taught me that Port Hope can do a better job of keeping money in local pockets. Our cultural assets can be a major driver of our sustainable local economy, but we need better systems to bring consumers to our doors. In that regard, my plan is to connect more business owners and align their interests to activate our cultural economy. Doing so will improve the Port Hope way of life we all love and help Port Hope get paid. When we come together and build around the things we love we become a richer community with greater spending power.

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

COVID changed many connected ways of life. I see two issues as critically related and inseparable:

- A) The lack of affordable housing. Housing Prices are driving away our middle and lower class and preventing workers from staying or settling in Port Hope. Our solutions to the housing crisis must include options for all income levels and specifically support our working class who want to work *and* live in Port Hope. Without people to serve coffee, cut hair, and run our shops downtown what community do we have left? The town has proposed bylaws that allow ARUs (additional residential units) but those proposals must go further. We need approaches that help people access downtown business, increase rental options and promote reasonable development throughout Port Hope. This can all be done consistent with our historical perspective while adding livable spaces. Key changes that can help include: partnering with agencies with demonstrated track records consistent with our community values (like Habitat for Humanity) to select models that efficiently provide housing; and examining where excess lands can allow innovative housing options (like tiny home options in more spaces than laneways). To do this, we'll need creative thinking involving planning, and reprioritizing who we make space for in the community. Not everyone wants a large space to live, let's help them with that!
- B) Consumers shop differently and the online shopping trend will continue to grow. Brick and Mortar shops need to distinguish themselves and are best suited to stay around when they are supported by active "placemaking". This means that businesses thrive when there is active and engaging culture around them, and when they are integrated into that place. We need to leverage assets that draw consumers in, both natural ones (think Float your Fanny and Salmon Run, local farms) and cultural ones (Capitol Theatre, Lent Lane, Little Station) to help consumers spend at local related businesses. My track record in culture creation shows my experience in innovating these approaches and that keeps more money in Port Hope. Importantly, these two factors rely on each other. The downtown core cannot sustain if its employees cannot afford to live here. Sustaining our workforce and downtown require a workable solution to housing NOW.

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

Recently a smart woman I know asked people what community is to them. Each individual's response was so varied, but all came back to connections among people. Maintaining healthy relationships are ultimately what matters to people. Unsurprisingly, *healthy economies emerge where healthy communities thrive*. We must reject the simplification that economic development happens independent of community building. Money in your pocket comes from somewhere – most often your neighbour's pocket. In a healthy community that money is likely to return to that neighbour's pocket in the future. Economic Development, then, is helping to build strong, stable, and interrelated communities where it's easy and desirable to spend close to home. Quite literally, investing in local people and their success means fortifying and sustaining a healthy economy. We need to invest more in developing local successes. Examples abound in Port Hope. Investing in our people means money comes to and stays in Port Hope. Culture creators (think Float your Fanny, Fall Fair, the Capitol, all demonstrate that investing locally showcases our rural stories and perspectives and that economic benefits can “flow downriver”. It's part of what makes Port Hope so special and cherished and it's a model that I have worked with successfully. Applying it to other people in our town would also work. When we focus on our own people's success our economy succeeds as well.

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 think there are several steps that can be taken in the short term that will help local businesses and strengthen our economy.

First, I'd like to see us up the profile of Port Hope tourism. Using the province's model of ministry of sports, culture and heritage, we could better coordinate these community pursuits to influence economic stability.

Next, we need stronger coordination among groups that help Port Hope businesses. I want to see these groups liaise with the town through "think tank" sessions that are solution-focused. Getting groups together is a first step, but can often result in pitting one group's priorities against another's. A more effective approach comes from identifying common problems (including those faced in agri-business) and having the group table solutions together. Here is where we need to listen to the experts in our community.

Third, we need to better showcase businesses outside the downtown core, especially when they can coordinate with events held downtown. This could be assisting with pop-up vendors (at Float your Fanny), or tourism packages that help visitors spend when they come to town. For example, what if tickets to the Capitol came with guides on to where to shop, sleep and eat while visiting?

Fourth, we need to make way for the emerging draw of agri-tourism balance with traditional farming. With the recent announcement of the Loyalist College satellite campus in Port Hope, we need to critically analyze how we center rural businesses. We need planning regulations that help businesses remain viable (failure to do so has sunk many farming operations where I'm from). We need more agri-business featured on Port Hope materials. And we need to coordinate these businesses' efforts to remain in the area.

Finally, we live an hour outside the fourth largest city in North America! This is an untapped resource for the economic viability of this community and we need a much stronger digital strategy to make our offering visible in this market and to draw them to us. We are currently being outpaced by Prince Edward County, for example, as tourism dollars literally drive by our community! We must become the first place people stop and the first place people think of for local farmed goods!

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?

Short term? Stop naval gazing. It's the #1 reason I see companies fail. The town must stop referencing the hard work its done and instead focus on what its people and how to connect with their desires. This is initially hard, but it gets easier.

An example: In past consulting work a corporation framed problems to me around their effort into putting "the word out there" and "making tools available". They were frustrated that "no one used them". I discovered they were blaming the intended consumer when actually their efforts weren't where people were looking. And the tools? Not the ones being asked for. Focus groups revealed what was wanted, so we repackaged our resources and put them where they were naturally looking. This did not involve scrapping past work, but rather making it accessible. Unsurprisingly, we saw an uptick in consumers finding what they were looking for. This model helps us move to the mid and long term too. We need to listen to what people need (including our local experts) and give them offerings that *matter to them*. Regarding planning, advocates have indicated that changes are needed regarding housing. Proposed bylaw changes allowing tiny homes took four years to update and the adopted changes inadequately addressed the advice of community groups, and the Northumberland County Affordable Housing Report. If our affiliated groups (Province and County) point to solutions for key issues, we must move more quickly to implement them. You'll note that my examples focus on housing. This is because it is *the key issue* in growing and stabilizing our economy. Let me be clear: our economy depends – over the short, medium and long term – on our ability to provide affordable housing to the workers that keep our businesses going.

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?

Why focus on rural businesses? Because rural stories matter as much as any other. When we honour that, we attract new consumers and business models that center rural life. Done right, this can lead to attracting new audiences, but more importantly, it cultivates the pride in place that I think is essential in rural communities. It's what makes it worth living here. To acknowledge the importance of rural business models, we have to stop pretending we are a Toronto retirement community and instead focus on our agricultural past and its relevance to our present and future! How do we do it? I want more direct and visible connections between agriculture and downtown. With the Loyalist College expansion and the potential to radically embrace agricultural practice in our town, I also want to see systems that promote "farm-to-table" as a tourism venture but, more importantly, as a stabilizing factor to our locals (think direct giving to food banks, direct sales that reduce costs to locals, circular economies that keep money in local pockets). This means determining how to connect local producers with consumers and limiting the majority of profits being siphoned off by big corporate interests.

What makes that happen? We must demand our cultural impact is as important as any other. By looking to our neighbours and saying, "What you offer is the best of what I can get" we elevate local producers and business and we focus on supporting each other. All of this means a stronger and healthier community that builds itself.