



29 August 2026

QUESTIONS FOR OWEN SOUND MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

1. Municipal leadership and management

Owen Sound's population has stagnated for more than two decades, while the size and cost of the municipal management structure have increased significantly. What changes would you make to ensure that the City's senior management structure is lean, accountable and focused on results rather than simply administering the status quo?

Answer:

My understanding is that the city currently has a little over 150 FTEs. It's important for each employee to have a clear job description, reporting accountability and clear KPIs tied to advancing the work that they have been hired to do under the direction of their supervisor and ultimately back to council direction. Remuneration increases should not be a given but should be tied to the achievement of KPIs.

Focusing on results is also tied to the speed and efficiency with which results get achieved. In talking with business owners and individual citizens seeking simple permits, it would seem that there is often too much process and bureaucracy with permits and approvals rather than focusing on the customer – the business or citizen. So reviewing procedures and processes for routine applications etc. should be undertaken with a view of minimizing the time to process such applications.

Would you support recruiting a City Manager with a demonstrated record of organizational transformation, cost reduction and successful change management?

Answer:

Yes. Given that one of the complaints I have heard consistently in my discussion with citizens is that “nothing ever changes” with city hall. Those may be anecdotal perceptions but perceptions are people's reality. Owen Sound should be a magnet for industry and tourism given its geographic positioning but has been unable to move the needle very much on either front. The city can ill-afford to keep doing the same thing and expect different results.

Would you also support establishing fixed-term, renewable contracts for senior management positions, with a significant portion of compensation tied to measurable performance objectives established by Council?

Answer:

Yes. See the answer to the first question for greater clarity.

2. Controlling property tax increases

Owen Sound taxpayers have experienced property-tax increases that, in our view, have exceeded what can reasonably be justified by inflation and population growth.

Would you support a policy limiting annual property-tax increases to the rate of inflation unless the City Manager can demonstrate a compelling reason to exceed it?

If you would support exceeding inflation, what circumstances would justify doing so?

Answer:

Yes. That said I would support exceeding inflation if the City Manager was able to persuade council via cost benefit analysis that it would be less expensive to spend money on key pieces of infrastructure or other preventative maintenance now (thus potentially pushing property taxes higher than inflation) than waiting when the cost of having to repair or renew infrastructure would be significantly higher.

3. Reducing the cost of government

Owen Sound's population today is smaller than it was in 2011, yet municipal spending and staffing have continued to grow.

Would you support requiring every municipal department to identify 5–10% in potential savings, including staff cuts, as part of the budget process?

Answer:

Yes. This exercise should be a part of every budget process. I do believe there is a way to undertake this exercise in a way that could also spur innovation and efficiency if there was a small remuneration and/or recognition for employees coming up with creative, innovative ideas to reduce costs and improve efficiencies that could be transferable to other departments.

Would you support using the City's 2011 budget, adjusted for inflation, as a benchmark for determining whether today's spending levels are justified?

Answer:

I think the 2011 city budget is being used as a baseline for analysis given Mr. Hutton previously published work looking at the CPI increase vs. city expenses increases. I am all for controlling expenses however I think there are also things that appear to be outside of the city's control that we have to live with ... like the arbitrated settlement for the fire fighters. Moreover, while Owen Sounders feel and look at CPI the city has to contend with inflation as it relates to non residential commercial construction and roadworks – where increases have been well over CPI for a number of years as I understand it. So it is a bit of like comparing apples and oranges. Additionally, it goes without saying that tariffs and retaliatory tariffs have been exogenous factors in increasing costs. My point would be, let's focus on the areas/items where we can potentially control costs/mitigate increases and ensure that we are comparing apples to apples when looking at spending levels.

If not, what alternative approach would you use to identify and eliminate unnecessary spending?

Answer:

I think the city needs to take a good hard look at its initiatives and expenses – much like any household. Initiatives and budget line items should be reviewed and labeled as either essential or discretionary expenses. Discretionary expenses should be given a thorough review with the goal of eliminating them if such expenses are not in line with the mission, vision and values of the city.

4. Council accountability and relationship with taxpayers

Many residents believe there is an increasing disconnect between City Hall and the taxpayers it serves.

What would you do to make City Council more transparent, accessible and accountable to residents?

Answer:

I share the belief that there is a disconnect between City Hall and the taxpayers it serves. That said I

also believe that the disconnect is not entirely the city's fault. Citizens are becoming increasingly disengaged and disenchanted with governments and politicians to the extent of not utilizing their democratic right to vote and not appreciating that municipal government is the level of government that in many cases has the most effect on their lives. However, I believe all citizens should be given the option of opting into receiving a summary of all committee and council meeting minutes via email or through the creation of a city WhatsApp group. Agendas for committee and council meetings should be established and publicized at least a week in advance of a meeting and the agendas should be true agendas of the business to be transacted – not just placeholders with the real agenda to be added later. All meetings of committees should have written minutes with votes noted and how councilors/committee members voted.

Councilors have their own views and perspectives that may or may not be informed by discussions with or complaints from their constituents. Therefore there is merit in retaining public participation in committee work to ensure that the views and perspectives of at least some of the public are being reflected as opposed to the views of 7 Councilors

I also appreciate the efforts of helpOS.ca and other private efforts that have been established to help those interested in municipal politics and city happenings stay abreast of current events and key council decisions that may affect citizens.

A primary plank of my platform is to increase transparency and accountability of council to the citizens of Owen Sound and I will push in every case for greater transparency and broader public participation.

Would you support greater public disclosure of the rationale behind major spending decisions, staffing increases, consultant contracts and significant policy decisions?

Answer:

Absolutely.

More importantly, what would you do to ensure that residents are treated as stakeholders in municipal government rather than as an obstacle to it?

Answer:

See answer two questions above.

Concerned Owen Sound Taxpayers (COST)

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5. Homelessness, addiction and the downtown

Owen Sound's downtown is facing increasingly visible homelessness, addiction and public disorder.

What specific actions would you take to address these problems?

Answer:

While not without compassion and empathy for the homeless and the addicted, this is a real problem that is not unique to Owen Sound. Therefore part of the solution would be for the city to research other cities in Ontario that have been successful in reducing both the percentage of homeless and how the addicted were handled to see if there are transferrable concepts that can be deployed without reinventing the wheel.

Public disorder and violation of the law would seem to me to be the responsibility of the newer downtown River District foot patrols. This is an issue that really does need to be addressed because it is these folks that leave some residents fearful of coming downtown and leave tourists –

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when or if they come with a decidedly negative view of the city. While some may be upset with Owen Sound securing the Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre, the statistics suggest that the centre's efforts have been largely successful in terms of reducing opioid deaths and in reducing traffic volume to the hospital.

While it may have already been attempted, trying to deal with the homeless and addicted as human beings as opposed to a blight on the downtown may make a difference and individual case attention has been successful in reducing homelessness in other Ontario cities.

I also believe that social agencies receiving funding from the city should be required to have their own kpis and service guarantees as part of receiving city funding.

Would you support a coordinated approach with the County that combines:

- increased access to addiction treatment and mental-health services;
- meaningful pathways into appropriate housing;
- stronger enforcement of existing laws and bylaws when public safety is affected; and
- clear expectations for individuals receiving publicly funded support?

Answer:

Yes. I would support each of those initiatives and yes I believe we should be giving a hand up, not a hand out.

What would you do differently from the current approach, and how would you measure whether your strategy is working?

Answer:

I think you need to have objectively measurable metrics established from a baseline with respect to each of the four points above. The old Peter Drucker quote applies "What gets measured gets managed", and that needs to be applied in these instances

6. Development charges and economic growth

Owen Sound needs more residential and commercial development if it is going to reverse decades of population stagnation.

Would you support reviewing the City's development-charge structure with the objective of making Owen Sound more attractive to developers and encouraging new housing construction?

Answer:

Yes. I would also recommend that the city manager reach out to cities like Alliston, St. Thomas and Cambridge that have been highly successful in attracting global companies to their cities resulting in significant employment and secondary and tertiary economic spinoffs. We need to know what our competition is offering commercial developers and be more than competitive.

With respect to housing construction, while I certainly support initiatives that would expedite new housing construction and make doing so more attractive to developers, we should also address the fact that there are a number of vacant buildings in Owen Sound and, like other candidates and other jurisdictions I would support the notion of introducing a vacancy tax to encourage owners to sell or rent their vacant properties

Would you support targeted incentives or a temporary reduction or moratorium on development charges where appropriate, particularly where developers commit to including affordable or geared-to-income housing?

Answer:

Yes I would.

More broadly, what specific steps would you take to make Owen Sound a more attractive place to invest, build businesses and raise a family?

Answer:

Owen Sound has so much to offer but even though I have only lived here for a year it seems to me that very little is done to promote the virtues of Owen Sound being a relatively affordable COMMUNITY, which was highly attractive to me. Further, people still say "hi" to one another here and the coffee shop owner knows your name etc. These values should be promoted. Likewise its harbour, regional hospital, college, natural beauty and great musical and cultural attributes need to be made better known and promoted. I believe Owen Sound needs a much stronger Economic Development and Tourism presence but attracting business, tourists, and new citizens to Owen Sound will continue to be a problem if the issue of homelessness, addiction and lawless disorderly behaviour are not dealt with in the downtown core. A safe and attractive downtown core is one of the keys to filling up the many empty storefronts with new businesses that will make the downtown a tourist destination as opposed to a place to be avoided.

Finally, downtown landlords and tenants need to collectively meet with city council to assess the challenges for business owners staying in business in the downtown core and the barriers to those considering opening new businesses.

7. The true cost of municipal services

We believe taxpayers should be able to see the full cost of every municipal service, including the costs of administration, HR, payroll, facilities, information technology and other shared services.

Would you support fully allocating these costs to each municipal department, agency or shared-service arrangement so Council and taxpayers can see the true cost of each service?

Answer:

I believe that citizens have a right to clear, fully allocated costs of municipal departments, agencies and other shared service arrangements. Knowing the full-costing of all services is the only way to make responsible decisions about those services

Would you also support using this information when negotiating cost-sharing arrangements with organizations such as the Library and other agencies?

Answer:

See answer above.

8. Water and wastewater costs

Water and wastewater charges have increased significantly, yet these costs are sometimes treated separately from the City's broader budget decisions.

Would you support requiring the Water Department to present Council with a complete explanation and justification for proposed rate increases as part of the annual budget process?

Answer:

Yes this makes inherent sense to me

Would you also support requiring the Water Department to participate in the same cost-reduction and efficiency reviews expected of other municipal departments?

Answer:

Same as above.

Ultimately, do you believe Council—not municipal staff—should be fully accountable to taxpayers for increases in water and wastewater charges?

Answer:

Yes, however realistically if council has no control over or ability to influence or change water and wastewater charges then it is perhaps unrealistic to hold council accountable for that which they cannot control. If we can control it or influence it then we should be responsible for it as council members

Deadline for Submission is: Saturday, September 12, 2026