

DTS BIA Councillor Candidate Responses

These questions were emailed to all councillor and mayoral candidates. Not all candidates answered all the questions or replied by the deadline. The responses are presented in the order that they were received.

1. Parking is an ongoing concern in the downtown core, from not enough, to unauthorized parking in private lots, accessibility and employees and residents parking beyond the posted time limits. Do you support parking infrastructure developments within the downtown? What about other creative solutions to these concerns that are aligned with the City's active transportation and environmental goals?

Ken Wood

YES, Stratford has long needed a proper multi-level parking garage near the downtown core. I think the Grand Trunk/Cooper site is ideal, as it can be nestled into a land rise at the southern edge, and can be designed to look attractive with public art. When Market Square was being developed, I suggested a half height wall which could be used to promote local artists' work, based on a lottery selection system for dates. It still could be done and would also reduce the wind tunnel effect we have there. Regarding "active transportation and environmental goals", the bicycle repair stations are a great start. What I think we need now are rest benches at appropriate intervals to encourage walking, and also to help our mobility challenged and senior citizens. Perhaps at minimum a bench at every transit stop to encourage increased ridership?

Jason Davis

Parking, I fully support creating more parking near our core. I also believe that we need to implement a monthly parking pass that works in certain lots for local residents and employees to purchase at a flat rate. That way they can park without worry on coins, credit, apps, or time. Allowing locals to support our core businesses without the worry of meters and give the core employees and business owners a break

Bonne Henderson

I do support more parking or structures as the parking study recommends. I think a parking structure in the future would be a good idea in the Cooper Lot and possibly eventually in the Erie St Parking lot.

Harj Nijjar

We have a great downtown and want it to stay that way for years to come. We need to look at all options for parking. We should look into parking garages or underground parking when constructing new buildings. We should investigate partnering with private developers to build public parking. The benefits are numerous: adding parking supply bit by bit is quicker, this approach avoids debt for the city.

Robert Williamson

We have a great downtown and want it to stay that way for years to come. We need to look at all options for parking. We should look into parking garages or underground parking when constructing new buildings. We should investigate partnering with private developers to build public parking. The benefits are numerous: adding parking supply bit by bit is quicker, this approach avoids debt for the city.

Kevin Krunchkywich

I think with the Cooper Site comes the opportunity to build a sizeable parking structure (with enough sustainable elements, like a living roof and solar panels to offset the vehicle emissions) just at the edge of the core and invest in a city bike program for those that are able, and an electric shuttle for members of our community with mobility issues. It then becomes a process of education to encourage less cars in our core and more pedestrian traffic...which will ultimately lead to more foot traffic in our businesses. I am not a fan of more parking in our core, as it will increase the issues you mention below. If the core becomes a haven for pedestrians, it will better serve our businesses, our environment, and our community.

Mark Hunter

I support increased parking in the down town area. I'd like to see a vertical solution that increases the number of spaces without the need for extra land. I am an avid cyclist and would love to ride to more places downtown. One impediment for me is bike security. The City of London started a locker program <https://london.ca/newsroom/public-service-announcement/city-london-launches-new-bike-lockers-offer-secure-solution> which might be worth investigating.

Ian Morton

We need creative solutions for our downtown core to ensure that it is vibrant, accessible, and busy! In order to deal with parking issues, I feel that we must look at the root causes of the problems. Lots of people want to be downtown, which is great! We have limited space downtown to park, not good. We are highly dependent on vehicles, which has lead to so many of the parking problems.

I would love to see much more investment into active transportation infrastructure. We need to make it easy for people from all over the city, whether they are residents or visitors, to access the downtown, while having the choice to leave their vehicle behind. By creating an interconnected series of bike lanes, bike trails, and walking trails we can increase the foot and bicycle traffic to the downtown. This will alleviate some of the vehicular congestion that is experienced at times in our core.

We should also be looking at the possibility of creating pedestrian only zones in our downtown. We must be careful not to negatively impact our businesses. They can rotate on different days of the week, or become seasonal practices. This comes with a lot of benefits, but also some concerns. We still need people to access those areas, and so peripheral to the downtown, we need to increase the parking infrastructure. We need to ensure that it is easy to access pedestrian only zones, and have the right amount of parking close by.

That obviously leads to the need for increased parking infrastructure. I would really like to avoid eating up available lands for parking lots, so we may need to look at a parking complex of multiple levels in order to protect available lands for other development. However, there must be more access to parking downtown. We must be able to get residents and visitors to use the amazing downtown of Stratford.

Lastly, our public transit system needs to be part of the solution to reduce the need for more parking. We must increase ridership, and work to counter our car-culture. I am hopeful that council will revisit our transit system, and work hard to subsidize ridership so that people can more easily choose to leave their car at home or at their accommodation. Transit already funnels downtown, so let's use this system to further reduce our need for cars and parking.

By limiting additional land use, reducing the need for vehicular traffic in the downtown, and creating an active, healthy access network for the downtown, and increased public transit ridership, we can help to

mitigate our carbon footprint, reduce fossil fuel use, and help to future-proof the downtown for generations to come.

Ryan Doyle

Yes I support parking developments such as creating a parkade on Erie St. I would also like to see the parkade blend in with street level retail, restaurant and commercial spaces. During the pandemic, parking enforcement was relaxed so that we could encourage local residences to go downtown. Now that tourism is returning with the Canadian and US border restrictions relaxed, we need to step up enforcement and perhaps forecast and budget for another parking bylaw officer.

I do feel the downtown core is walkable and pedestrian friendly. However, I have heard of instances of speeding in the downtown core which is reckless for how small the city streets are and how many people are walking on them. I think we need more visibility from our police officers in the core to discourage such random acts from occurring. To encourage more active transportation than we have now, we could for the spring, summer and fall months look at a bike share program like they have in larger cities. My environmental goals are to invest in electric buses, and Electric charging stations, and convert city fleet gas and diesel vehicles to electric work trucks that are now available from Ford and GM.

Tim Forster

This has got to be a question raised every election. I 'd like to first look at what other proposals and ideas have been made and ask why nothing has come of them. I am not a fan of consultant reports that sit on the shelf. I am aware that Robert Ritz floated a proposal to build a multi- level parking garage at St Patrick and Erie with condos on top... Council did not jump on. I would be interested in learning what BIA members felt, if it was supported.

Lesley Biehn

Yes. I believe that a win win can be achieved if we work together.

Alan Kasperski

I do support better parking in the downtown. I would prefer that as parking is added to the GTR Shops site, that it be below grade and at least double of what is currently available on the surface. Very simply, the land is too valuable to park on when you could build on that property any number of facilities that are needed in the city. I would like to see a conversation between the BIA and the people that use the downtown – or would do if it was more welcoming. Should we consider a summer-time pedestrian mall around City Hall (Downie, Wellington, Market Place, etc.) – something like the Sparks Street Mall in Ottawa – to encourage more foot traffic in the downtown? I would like a discussion about a (sponsored?) residents free parking pass to encourage more activity downtown.

Rob Russell

We need to approach the parking challenges in a thoughtful and progressive way. I don't think turning our beautiful downtown into a parking lot is the answer, but we also have a need to park cars for those who come downtown from within Stratford as well as from out of town. With the likely development of the Grand Truck area soon (hopefully!), there will be quite a lot of currently free parking displaced as well.

I would suggest seriously considering underground parking facilities. The cost is high, but it keeps parking from going up or out, which are both less desirable aesthetically, and prone to more ongoing maintenance costs. I think a fairly robust underground parking system could be developed on the Cooper Site, and have a cost-recovery plan built-in by way of a reasonable payment system, both by the hour and longer-term permit parking for workers and residents.

2. Excessive noise, speed and congestion from vehicles on our downtown streets negatively impacts the enjoyment and safety of our BIA. What do you think can be done to change this?

Ken Wood

Firstly, enforcement by Police Services needs to be increased. Secondly, a review of the smart use of one way streets and possibly even closing some streets for weekends and events should be reviewed. Lastly, having a parking garage at GTR/Cooper site, COUPLED WITH a free shuttle service around the downtown core (horse drawn? electric shuttles?) could reduce pollution and congestion significantly.

Jason Davis

Noise, I would like to see actual crosswalks in our core instead of the kind of ones we have all over. I also support a speed reduction within the core.

Bonnie Henderson

The only thing that impact this is to encourage the provincial government to develop the truck route around our city from New Hamburg. If the trucks don't need to deliver in the city area they will use the new expanded truck route.

Harj Nijjar

I have a young family and I know firsthand that the safety of our loved ones comes first and foremost. I will ensure the city empowers its Community Safety committee, invests more in road safety, with focus on traffic calming measures such as speed bumps, rumble road strips and implement a Nurturing Neighborhoods program, this is needed for a Brighter Future.

Robert Williamson

First, we need to enforce the already there truck route to have our truckers going around the city and not through the downtown core. With the construction that has gone on this summer we have seen that the "NO TRUCKS" signs have helped to get them familiar with this route. I would like to see permanent NO TRUCKS signs at either end of Ontario street to continue this after the construction is complete.

I do support infrastructure development within downtown. I am also in support of better bike lanes and walkable streets so that tourists/citizens are encouraged to leave their vehicles and walk more in the downtown area.

Kevin Krunchkywich

As I mentioned above, shifting our downtown to one that serves pedestrians first will alleviate some of these issues. A large challenge is that our high street is also a provincial highway. Until we grow to a size where a ring road would be a viable option, we must tolerate a certain amount of commercial traffic along Ontario Street. I think rolling car-free days along York, Wellington, and Downie will increase foot traffic and dissuade excessive vehicle traffic.

Mark Hunter

Excessive noise is a personal pet peeve. I'd be very happy to have a workable solution. Ideally, the solution would be provincial, but a recent private member's bill aimed at curbing after-market mufflers, failed to gain support. For Stratford, the existing noise by-law prohibits noisy vehicles. In my opinion, the by-law could benefit from a review and a couple of minor amendments, but the issue is one of enforcement. I'd like to see if a program to ticket offenders could be successful.

Ian Morton

I feel that all over the city, speed on city streets is a concern. With this speed issue, comes more noise. I have heard it from people all over the city, from residents, to crossing guards to business owners. So that is an easy first step to address. We need some calming measures on some streets. Whether that is physical alterations to the infrastructure, or reduction of speed limits. Perhaps more signs can slow people down and help to reduce the noise issue as well.

In addition, all the ideas in the question above will speak to reducing traffic congestion in our downtown, and hopefully across the city.

Ryan Doyle

I think if we can find a way to expand the truck bypass (Lorne ave) into 3, 4 or even 5 lanes, we could make it worth truckers electing to drive on the bypass instead of through the city. Two lanes is not providing any relief and when the factories have a shift change, the congestion on Lorne Ave deters anyone from wanting to drive on that street unless they absolutely have to. Increase the lanes on Lorne Ave and truckers will rather drive the bypass instead driving on Ontario and Huron street. The noise from buses will over time reduce with investing in electric buses and as we build more charging stations, in turn reduce noise pollution by having the means for tourist and local residences to invest in electric vehicles.

Tim Forster

The current situation where trucks have been diverted due to the road reconstruction on Huron Street has helped the downtown noise situation. I see no reason not to make the diversion permanent.

Lesley Biehn

This is a question that I have never thought much about before. There has been a lot of talk amongst candidates about rerouting any transport traffic and not allowing them to enter the downtown at all. I honestly would need to have a discussion with businesses, truck drivers, city council, police etc to hear all sides to even have an opinion that was in the best interests of all involved.

Alan Kasperski

Congestion can be addressed by better street design and traffic flow measures. Noise and speed are enforcement issues, and I would work with the BIA to encourage better enforcement by the Police Service. If there was an active pedestrian precinct, that might alleviate some of those issues as well. Further, I would work with the trucking industry to move large transport vehicles off Ontario Street and Huron Street and onto the truck bypasses – again with the assistance of the Police Service to enforce that.

Rob Russell

This needs to finally be addressed properly by law enforcement, as it's only become worse over the past several years. I understand the decibel reading equipment that would hold up in court is quite costly, but either a partnership with other municipalities or looking into renting from a larger city like Toronto should be explored.

It could start with a “warning” sting operation, though, where police set up, pull over offenders and give warnings with info on potential fines. At the moment, nothing has been done, and it shows.

3. The DTS BIA is currently working with consultants on a comprehensive Downtown Stratford Public Art Plan. How can the city support and implement the recommendations and goals of this plan and foster public art opportunities in the BIA?

Ken Wood

City should provide some funding for local artists to do murals on many of the blank walls we have in the downtown core, especially since such art deters graffiti. An Artist Community Committee could be struck to do the difficult task of selecting the art/artist.

Jason Davis

I think the answer to this question is simple we support the plan and discuss any aid required from council or help share any public involvement that may be encouraged with the general populace.

Bonnie Henderson

Once the recommendations come to city council depending on what they are wherever we can we can support this development. Art is an important part of our city and its residents.

Harj Nijjar

I have always enjoyed public art anywhere I travel. Imagine walking through neighborhoods in Stratford and seeing works of art, as diverse as the inhabitants who live there. Whenever a new building is constructed, a small percentage can be budgeted for some work of art to make the site unique and interesting. Stratford could maintain a list of pre-qualified local artists who can showcase Stratford's unique culture through public art. We should also work with art schools to provide mentorship opportunities to elevate younger artists into the art scene by working on these projects. This also provides an opportunity for equity and inclusion, and to combat growing sentiments of discrimination in all its forms within our city.

Robert Williamson

I would love to see our downtown restaurants and local artists work together to support the arts in Stratford. One way would be for restaurants to have a wall in the business that would display local talent and might even let them sell their work on their walls. They could do a "local artist of the month" so that each eatery rotates work throughout downtown. Also, after viewing the mural that went up recently, I think that more of our outside exterior walls could be used by artists to showcase their talents!

Kevin Krunchkywich

As part of the Municipal Culture Plan that is being created as we speak, the city needs to clearly state its commitment to public art, and to partnering with those like the BIA who are doing the leg work to create a vision. That partnering would involve funding and land use.

Mark Hunter

I think the city could make space available, whether on sidewalks or in parks to support the display of public art.

Ian Morton

I think that increasing the artistic component of our downtown is a brilliant plan. We need to showcase our creative backbone, and this is evident throughout so many artistic disciplines. I love the addition of large murals to the downtown. I want to see more of this. We also should embrace the heritage of the downtown as much as possible, and work to accentuate any architecture that should stand out but currently doesn't. We have the space in market square to host many events, and art can be a huge focus of this. Whether it is celebrations of accomplishments, art installations, pop up galleries, or even workshops for the people of Stratford and visitors, our downtown can and should be a beacon of the arts.

Ryan Doyle

The City can listen and review the Art Plan, and help engage the public to gather and collect their feedback. When there is buy in from a majority of stakeholders, we can then develop and cost an implementation plan and determine how to fund the initiative through fundraising and/or municipal funds.

Tim Forster

Art is important... The City could look at a matching program to partner with the BIA.

Lesley Biehn

Stratford is an arts community. The beauty that art and culture bring to this city is what makes it a destination city. I see Stratford's draw similar to places like Quebec City. I believe that we must embrace the beauty that art brings to our downtown, because it will create an emotional connection with people that live here and with guests. If you are working on a Comprehensive plan I assume you will have very qualified people giving input on what to foster and what to limit. I'd be very supportive of council considering any of the ideas that are presented.

Alan Kasperski

There are many benefits to collaborating with all manner of groups that are actively looking to make Stratford a better community as those groups, like the BIA, have likely thought of some of the solutions to what ails the City or what could be made better. I would encourage a much closer working relationship with civic groups and include them directly in decision-making.

Cody Sebben

Having attended the recent engagement event at the Gallery that was hosted in part by the BIA, I believe there is a need for a coordinated approach regarding public art opportunities. I see much benefit to be gained with the development of an advisory committee that could work to streamline policy and proposals of public art both in the downtown and across the city. Once a Downtown Stratford Public Art Plan is developed, it will be important for there to be appropriate input and communication with city staff, and I see the creation of an advisory committee of sorts as one solution.

Rob Russell

Reducing red tape to implement projects would be a huge start. We need city staff to recognize the potential benefits of these projects for the entire community and adopt a "How do we get to YES" attitude.

4. In February 2020, the City of Stratford declared a Climate Emergency. Do you agree that we are in the midst of a Climate Emergency? If so, how do you plan to support green initiatives and environmental projects and how would your partner with the DTS BIA to implement them in the downtown core?

Ken Wood

YES we are well into a Climate Emergency, as evidenced by weather pattern changes and respected scientific reports. One of the best things we could do is change rules to permit installation of solar panels throughout the city. There is even great development in TRANSPARENT solar panels that could replace windows.

Jason Davis

Yes the entire planet is in a climate emergency, I would like to encourage public transportation by making it more reliable and consistent 7 days a week. I would also like to start a municipal bike program which

would allow more active transportation between locals and tourists. I also personally believe that lawns are ugly and creating more bio-diverse natural lawns is a great way to lower emissions and beautify the city.

Bonnie Henderson

I do believe we are in a climate crisis. I sit on the Energy & Environment committee and will continue to support the initiatives that we have been supporting. I will work with the manager of climate change. The police have purchased hybrid vehicles and the city has bought its first Hybrid truck with 2 more on back order. The 2nd stage Britannia St project for 27 more families is being built to zero emissions standards.

Harj Nijjar

Climate change is a huge issue at a global level. We can do our part to reduce our carbon footprint. I would encourage businesses and individuals to start with the basics such as the following.

- Reducing energy consumption.
- Look at renewable energy options.
- Reduce waste and plastics.
- Encourage public transit, carpooling, bike lanes and walking to limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- Choosing suppliers that are environmentally friendly.
- Implement more electric charging stations.
- When replacing city vehicles / buses replace them with electric vehicles/buses.
- Continue raising climate change awareness to all citizens (schools, workplaces, hospitals, etc.)

Robert Williamson

I feel that we need to be looking into electric vehicles for our buses, taxis, city vehicles and our police vehicles. This would be an important step forward to reducing our carbon footprint! I will research every and all green initiatives and projects brought before the council. As a former survival/wilderness guild the environment and the way we leave this planet for the next generation is very important to me.

Kevin Krunchkywich

We are absolutely in a climate emergency. I believe that the strongest action the city can take is to put a climate lens on every decision made at city hall. If there are new housing developments, are they net-zero builds? In our transportation discussions, are we looking to electric technologies? How are staff and staff infrastructure supporting this? Our Official Plan is up for review, this is the opportunity to bake in an entirely environmental approach to every aspect of decision making. Not just "how does this serve the city?" But also, "how does this serve the environment?"

As for actual infrastructure projects, I believe a Municipal Green Bond is a way to raise capital to fund both large and small projects that the city and BIA deem necessary to bring Stratford closer to net-zero. A way for citizens and businesses to invest in their own future.

Mark Hunter

Because climate is a global issue, I believe the best our city can do is to follow science-based strategies. One of the current plans is the switch from fossil fuels to electricity. Downtown could benefit from publicly available charging stations. It might be possible to replace existing parking meters with pay chargers. Cars not requiring electricity could pay existing parking rates and those paying for electricity could maybe get a deal on the parking.

Ian Morton

We are absolutely in a climate emergency, there is no doubt about that. We must create specific plans to future-proof our community so that it can effectively deal with the changes that are upon us, and that will continue to grow. This also very much includes the downtown, as it can become the centre of our climate efforts in so many ways.

I am very concerned about the climate crisis, and as such, much in my platform concerns steps we can take to mitigate carbon, as well as plan for issues that will evolve over time. First, we need to educate the citizens of Stratford on the specific effects we are seeing in Ontario, Perth County, and our city from the climate emergency. That education will also include ways to reduce the carbon footprint of individuals, businesses, industry, and city hall. Second, we need to work on mitigating carbon emissions in our city. So obviously, fossil fuel usage must be reduced. There are many ways to do this. City buses can be electrified. Renewable energy systems can be installed to operate city business and infrastructure. We need to create a public transit system that increases ridership significantly, in order to reduce automobile usage in the city. We can work to develop or bring in ride-share programs to reduce the need for families to own a vehicle or multiple vehicles. We need a massive active transportation network that will allow residents to get out of their vehicles and access all parts of the city on foot or by bicycle with ease. All of these measures will reduce the carbon footprint of our city. The third factor is investing in technology and industry that will thrust Stratford into a leading role for environmental innovation. We need to invest in electric vehicle infrastructure, public transit, active transportation, walkability, and carbon neutral energy generation. We can engage our citizens by investing in subsidies to increase renewables, and in measures to reduce the carbon footprint of individual households. Not only can we engage households, but we must engage our citizens in these measures, for only together can we find our way through this emergency.

Our downtown is a huge stakeholder in all of this, and the partnership between council and our DT BIA is of paramount importance. What I am saying is that the downtown must be part of the planning process. They see the problems and issues everyday, they have ideas for how to solve some of our environmental problems in the downtown. In addition, if we are going to add more active transportation infrastructure, or more bus routes, pedestrian only zones, the DT BIA must be a major voice for what that looks like in the heart of our city.

The Grand Trunk Block will provide a huge opportunity for the city, but it MUST be developed in the best way possible. Obviously that refers to specific uses of the space, but also with the environment in mind. There is the opportunity for so much leadership and innovation with the development of this site, and I sincerely hope that council finds themselves in a leading role among municipalities when filling out the Grand Trunk Block.

Ryan Doyle

I think our planet is in a climate crisis and Stratford must do whatever it can to contribute to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. I support investing in electric vehicles and to accelerate our investment by asking the Provincial government for additional funding. At a bare minimum, when city vehicles are due to be replaced, we buy electric where it's available (such as buses, Chevy Silverado's, etc). There are a lot of electric vehicles models coming to the market, and we need to jump on the opportunity.

Beyond municipal opportunities we can consult with the BIA on how many and where to install electric charging stations, as well as investing in solar panels and possibly windless turbines to feed the electric grid to offset our demand on the grid. Together we can come up with a plan and budget and together could possibly find a way to partner with Festival Hydro to build a solar panel infrastructure on roof tops. The program would have to be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders.

Tim Forster

Climate issues are clearly on the agenda. On initiatives that are BIA directed, I go back to suggesting a matching grant program. I am a believer in partnerships that are simple and do not incur overheads that negate the positive results everyone is seeking.

Lesley Biehn

Stratford has declared a climate emergency. Every policy will be seen through the lens of climate. I believe that as a human race we need to have a collective goal to reduce our harmful habits. We lean towards convenience and therefore change can be difficult, so we must keep some pressure on this topic or we won't see effective change. I applaud all of the small and big efforts our downtown businesses have made and are constantly making. I know from the business I work in that there is a lot of time, money, and energy being put towards making the business as green as can be. My idea would be as a city to highlight and promote all of these innovations, which in turn would promote the hard working businesses. Let's celebrate all of the little things because I believe if we do that more good will happen.

Geoff Krauter

Yes. I support the city's declaration of a Climate Emergency. Extreme weather has already wreaked havoc on our infrastructure and disrupted businesses in town. Council will have an opportunity to address climate change as the Official Plan comes up for review this term.

I would support the introduction of high-performance development standards to reduce building emissions. Additionally, the city could create a Community Improvement Plan for the downtown to facilitate environmentally necessary retrofits on the advice of the BIA and other community leaders. We should also work collaboratively to replace the dormant electrical vehicle charging stations.

As a member of the Energy and Environment Advisor Committee, I am proud to support the work of our ICI Waste Reduction working group that assists restaurants in sourcing and recycling alternatives to plastic containers.

Alan Kasperski

I imagine you are beginning to see the trend I referred to earlier. There are community groups in Stratford that are focused on climate resilience and the climate emergency. Those groups need to be heard and encouraged to work closely with the City to support and implement projects that make sense for us all. The City can, by working through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, look for "best practices" from other places and seek funding that may be available from the provincial and federal governments.

Cody Sebben

I do agree, and in fact voted to declare a Climate Emergency. While I believe there is much to be done regarding how Stratford can further address climate change and protect the environment - such as integrating smaller buses into our transit fleet, promoting preservation rather than demolition, for example- I will share my thoughts on the recently added Climate Change Coordinator position. In January, council voted in support of a Climate Change Coordinator position for Stratford. My vision for this newly created position is to allow this individual to provide recommendations to council completely independent of other departments, and strictly through a climate lens. This would allow for recommendations that would inform council on projects from an environmental perspective while also building an extra layer of accountability and record to actions and decisions as they relate to carbon footprint and environmental impact.

I believe Council should improve the way input is received from Advisory Committees, including the BIA, so that their input is valued and makes more of an impact on decision making.

Rob Russell

We are definitely in a climate emergency, and it should be taken very seriously. The city needs to look at all current and upcoming projects through a climate lens to ensure proper considerations are always given. The city should also partner with local organizations and groups to ensure information sharing is happening and to minimize duplication of efforts.

5. In light of recent events in our city and broader response to our growing awareness of the imperative to care for all in our community and beyond, we all need to reflect on the role we play, and the actions needed to be part of a city that is more inclusive in both action and words in relationship with Stratford's BIPOC and LGBTQ+2S community. How will you support our and our city's commitment to improving the relationship with Black, Indigenous, People of Colour and LGBTQ+2S community members?

Ken Wood

Firstly, the city should step up and fully fund the Pride crosswalk beside City Hall. This would set the example of inclusion we strive to see. As to "Black, Indigenous, People of Colour and LGBTQ+2S community members", we need to see more such people both on City Council and in the workplaces for city staff, as well as citizen committees that report to city council. I would like to see more of a partnership with the Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron and city hall.

Jason Davis

My mother worked with special needs and indigenous communities her entire adult life, I was raised in it. My sons first political activity was joining us in the BLM and truth and reconciliation marches at only a few months old. My wife and I identify as part of the LGBTQ2+ community. These are important relations to me and I believe that their needs and how best we can serve them should come from them. We have been provided requests from indigenous groups, we have the new Perth Pride organization, they know what they need and it is simply up to us to listen and support them in their requests.

Bonnie Henderson

I support every person who lives in our community that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. I also support the new position of the Manager of Diversity, Equity and Indigenous Initiatives and the Community Well Being Plan.

Harj Nijjar

Having a sense of belonging is critical to our personal and collective success. Who we are in terms of our cultural identity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliation, age, etc. helps to shape our life experiences. It is important that Stratford is a place where diversity is embraced and each one of us is valued and included. Creating a strong sense of belonging helps us harness individual differences in ways that drive leadership, co-operation, innovation, and service excellence.

We need to strengthen diversity and inclusion by focusing on:

1. Improve our understanding of diversity and deepen everyone's commitment to inclusion.
2. Strengthen diversity and inclusion within our community culture.
3. Engage everyone in diversity and inclusion efforts, and foster opportunities for leadership, advancement and development.
4. Identify and address barriers to inclusion in the delivery of our programs and services.

Robert Williamson

One of the things I love about Stratford is the diverse and unlimited culture of our community. I feel that the city is growing in the right direction to be inclusive to everyone and I am encouraged by the support I hear and see. It's wonderful to see how the city is moving to show our support be it the crosswalk, the bridge in the park or any of the other projects and steps we are taking. You have a guarantee from me that I will look carefully at all projects/ideas that the BIA or any other organization brings forward that will enhance this commitment.

Kevin Krunchkywich

The commitment needs to be real. The CEAT is a great group that is helping the police improve their practice in Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness....however, the commitment from the other side is lacking. The budget given to this group by Police Services to do their work? \$0. That needs to change. The city must get behind the groups doing the work and support them in a real way. Help grow Pride. Partner and present multi-cultural events. Strongly encourage the police to fund the CEAT. And put money into education and representation. All citizens deserve to feel safe and to have a sense of belonging.

Mark Hunter

I do not fit into any of the categories of people we are trying to address, so my ideas would be limited to generalities, such as treating all people with dignity and respect. To go beyond that, I would want to consult people who don't feel included or accepted to find out what we might be able to do to change that.

Ian Morton

I am a huge supporter of equity and diversity, and as a white male I recognize the privilege that I have, and the inequitable way our society has operated for long before my time. I am 100% supportive of not only improving our relationships with marginalized communities, but I also believe that we must step aside from leading and allow those voices to inform us of what must be done in Stratford to improve life for all. I obviously can not specifically speak to the struggles of our BIPOC, Indigenous, or LGBTQ+2S communities, as well as others, and I shouldn't. What I can do is listen to their struggles, and work with an open-mind and open-heart to use their perspectives on the issues facing them to better inform policy and plans for the future of Stratford. I can help to make the council much more accessible, hopefully completely, so that they can speak to the issues, as they know best what the needs are for their specific communities. Only together can we find a way forward. Only through their lived experiences can we inform the needs of our community.

Ryan Doyle

The City can start reading Stratford Indigenous land acknowledgement at the beginning of every meeting. City officials and leaders can be inclusive in the speech instead of articulating gender specific terms. The City is a diverse community and I feel our leadership can do better when we speak to the people of Stratford. We must denounce any hate speech or act towards any particular person or group and We need more programs that celebrate and educate our diversity in Stratford.

Tim Forster

My work with the Stratford Festival is with the out of town cast and crew, many who identify as the community members listed. I have built great relationships and my life has been enriched. It is true , Festival members have experienced incidents where people have felt uncomfortable. Recognising there is an issue is a first step, living a life of acceptance and inclusion, a second step... affirmative action is a third, but I have to admit, I don't know what that looks like

Lesley Biehn

I see Stratford as a very inclusive community intentionally. We have a unique culture. I see that our community wants to help to heal wounds and be a place where every person belongs.

Geoff Krauter

I believe Stratford needs to invest in more welcoming and safer spaces for BIPOC and LGBTQ+2S communities. These could take the form of youth centered resources where people can talk, plan, and create. The BIA and other agencies could also highlight the contributions of Stratford residents from equity-seeking groups.

Alan Kasperski

I have signed the pledge from Stratford Pride to support anything that will do away with bias and prejudice in any form. Period. We live in diverse and pluralistic community. Everyone should feel welcome and be welcome in Stratford and beyond. Often, what must be recognised is who is not represented, who is not in the room, not at the town hall meeting. I would reach out to every group in Stratford to seek their advice, points of view, and guidance on those issues that are important to them.

Rob Russell

Ongoing communication with groups in the community, and clear support for their initiatives at the municipal level. We lead by example, so showing the community that we care for all of its citizens and constantly demonstrating that through intentional actions and support is an important first step. Continuing to build awareness through educational opportunities and events, like the Downtown Stratford BIA and other organizations have already been doing.

6. BIAs are local Advisory Boards that provide expertise and experience to City Council that contribute to the development of policies, programs and initiatives that improve and impact businesses and property owners in downtown Stratford. How could relationships and partnerships between the BIA and the municipality be enhanced?

Ken Wood

Firstly, by the BIA helping to collect meaningful data on business needs and challenges and providing an annual report to City Council. I would liken this to the Daily Bread Food Bank of Toronto who provides a "Who's Hungry" report to all levels of government. Additionally, the city needs to partner in educating the public about the benefits of BIA's and why providing taxpayer money to them benefits the whole city.

Jason Davis

One way I believe we can enhance our relationship is to have at large elections and ward representation. Once an election is completed 2 councillors will be designated to each ward for representation and accountability just like we do with committees. After they have been designated one of the councillors designated to the core district should sit on the BIA, this allows that councillor to be responsible for their concerns and goals and leaves the rest of council to look to them for their needs.

Bonnie Henderson

I think we have a good relationship now with the reports to council and the emails we receive. If you have suggestions about more you would like to see I would appreciate hearing them.

Harj Nijjar

Relationships are the centerpiece of a Business and the City. I believe we must develop and maintain trust with each other, have open lines of consistent communication, show appreciation and respect for each other, speak well with all team members and build a positive environment.

Robert Williamson

It is wonderful that the BIA and businesses have the opportunity to work together with the city towards improvements for our downtown core. The heart of any city is their downtown and the city council needs to be as supportive as they can be. I will admit that as a new face to the running of a city council I am not familiar yet on all aspects of the relationships and partnerships but I am looking forward to getting to know more about the BIA and how the council can work together.

Kevin Krunchkywich

The more the city and the BIA partner, the stronger the ties become. The public art initiative is a great opportunity for cross-pollination. Members of council and members of the BIA working together for the sake of our city.

Mark Hunter

In a similar vein to my answer in number 5, I would need to consult with the BIA before developing policies that affect the BIA. For example, if we did look at switching parking meters for charging stations, it would require some amount of disruption downtown. It may require running new electric cabling which would entail digging up part of the road. Working with the BIA to inform the timing of such a project could help minimize any disruption to businesses.

Ian Morton

Great question. I admit, I do not understand the scope of the current relationship, but I do know that our downtown is the heart of this city. I mentioned before that the DT BIA must be at the centre of any planning and discussions around the downtown. As I mentioned with the previous question, those in the position, best know the issues and concerns. So for issues in the downtown, we must use the perspectives and knowledge of the BIA to inform council on ideas and planning that will undoubtedly happen. We are all partners in this city, regardless of our background or where in Stratford we live. We must hear the voices of the stakeholders for all matters, in order to best inform policy. I would hope that through these open and inclusive frameworks for council business, more partnerships can blossom. I do think that council can also work to foster relationships between different organizations and communities within our city, so that all can be more effective with what they do.

Ryan Doyle

We can organize round robin meetings at the appropriate sub committee level to discuss and plan development of policies, programs and initiatives that improve and impact businesses and property owners in downtown Stratford. As things progress, we can then organize joint public open house meetings to get public stakeholder feedback. We currently have a transparency issue in Stratford, so I promote public engagement and public education before we bring anything to council for a final vote. Public education and engagement does bring a benefit to the City and Business by advertising businesses and organizations in support of policies, programs and initiatives that improve and impact businesses and property owners in downtown Stratford.

Tim Forster

What you sadly suggest is that past relationships have not gone well. What I see is a downtown core that has been resilient and survived a pandemic relatively intact. It's one of the reasons my family chose Stratford to live. I would commit to attending BIA meetings to learn more about the challenges you face

and see where the city can assist you in grasping opportunities. On my visit to core businesses I did suggest I would be interested in being your council representative.

Lesley Biehn

Listening to the voices of those that are directly affected by the policies before changes are made. Working together as partners to achieve a goal of mutual success. I think we need to make sure there is enough time for those potentially affected by changes to become involved in the discussion. Proactively seeking their viewpoint.

Geoff Krauter

Obviously the BIA needs to play a pivotal role in maintaining and expanding the economic vitality of downtown Stratford. I will advocate for the City to take a Community Benefits based approach to all major projects and developments. In the context of these discussions, the BIA would be an outstanding resource.

Alan Kasperski

I would review the whole governance model and structure of City Council committees, agencies, boards, and commissions. The goal would be to make City Hall more open, accountable, and engaged. I would establish 5 community councils in the five historic wards to deal with matters of a local nature thereby allowing City Council to focus on city wide issues, concerns, and planning for the future. As part of a more participatory and engaged governance model, I would like to see community groups of all types, encouraged to participate in more than the minimum statutorily required meetings. I would hold more public, community meetings where these groups would be asked to do more than just provide feedback. I would want to see them directly involved in deciding what makes sense and what does not in Stratford.

Rob Russell

I feel the best path is through the Council representative. Leaning on them to be a strong voice for the BIA at Council meetings and in the public whenever possible. This flow of information can go both ways, as a strong Council rep should be looking at potential BIA initiatives through the Council lens and offering insights into possible challenges and opportunities.

We would like to thank all the candidates for taking the time to respond to these questions so we could share their responses with the Downtown Stratford BIA members!