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Future-Proofing Guelph: Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Dakota Cherry

Ward: 5

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Priority One: Build More Homes, Faster:

- 1. Will housing be your first priority for the 2026–2030 term? If so, name one current city priority you would subordinate to it when they conflict. If not, what ranks ahead of it and why?**

Yes, housing affordability will be my first priority for the 2026–2030 term. Where spending priorities conflict, I would prioritize these basic needs over elements of the downtown revitalization project that go beyond necessary pipe replacements. By housing, I mean more than increasing approvals for developers: I support diverse approaches rooted in evidence-based practice. Increasing supply alone is not enough to ensure affordability. We need community land trusts as well as an elimination of development charge for social housing developments, more resources and support for homeowners introducing additional dwelling units, and priority for developments that commit to a minimum percentage of affordable homes. We must also ensure local infrastructure, including our groundwater supply, can sustainably support this growth.

- 2. Guelph has unlocked over 22,000 potential units but issued permits for a fraction of that. What do you believe explains the gap, and which parts of your explanation are within Council's power to change?**

From working in the federal public service in Ottawa, I have seen how detrimental excessive red tape can be to progress, but planning capacity for over 22,000 potential units does not mean every project is immediately shovel-ready. Council can improve approval processes, plan and secure funding for infrastructure upgrades, and use zoning policies to support housing that reflects community needs. However, we cannot move full speed ahead without assessing and planning for diverse community needs, which in Ward 5 include student housing, family homes and suitable options for seniors who want to downsize, alongside municipal infrastructure that supports their day-to-day lives. Our roads are increasingly congested by growing car traffic, while packed buses along Gordon are known to pass waiting riders, reinforcing car dependence and making adequate transit and roads essential elements of development alongside new construction. My focus would be on working with City planners and

residents to identify barriers and opportunities for getting housing built, while ensuring we can support and accommodate that development over the long term.

3. Would you support publishing binding end-to-end approval timelines by application class, reported quarterly against actuals? What consequences should follow when the city misses them?

Yes. Guelph already publishes timelines for parts of the development application process (see: [Notice of Complete Application and Public Meeting](#)). I would support publishing more in-depth approval timelines by application class, reported quarterly against actuals. When timelines are missed, the City should publicly explain the delay and provide a corrective action plan. Where avoidable City-caused delays result in demonstrated financial losses for homeowners or small businesses, I would support a fair compensation policy.

4. Getting approved housing built depends on strong working relationships with the people who build it — both for-profit developers and non-profit housing providers. What would you do to build genuine working relationships with both, and what's one concrete step you'd take in your first year to strengthen them?

I would build strong working relationships with both for-profit developers and non-profit housing providers in the same way I've built community relationships over the past 15 years: through regular engagement, active listening, shared learning and consistent follow-through that builds trust. In my first year, I would bring these providers and City staff together to identify barriers to construction and improve information-sharing about available supports. Based on conversations at the door with homeowners interested in converting basements or adding backyard units, I would also help residents navigate these processes. The City offers grants of up to \$60,000 to help eligible homeowners develop additional units, but many residents are unaware of this support. I would help residents access these funds and understand approval requirements and potential property tax implications. My priority is to ensure housing supports are accessible to non-profits and small local providers as well as larger developers, so more of the benefits remain in our community.

5. What three housing metrics should residents use to judge the next Council — and you — at the end of the term? State the values you would consider success.

- a. Affordability: Success would mean a lower percentage of Guelph households spending more than 30% of their before-tax income on housing compared with the start of the term. Achieving this requires greater emphasis on non-profit and social housing, alongside protecting existing affordable homes. A comprehensive report by the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance notes that non-profit housing fell from approximately 14% of new homes built across Canada in the 1970s and 1980s to less than 1% throughout the 2000s and most of the 2010s, highlighting the need to rebuild this essential part of our housing system (see: [The Municipal Role in Housing](#)).
- b. Infrastructure capacity: Success would mean 100% of approved growth is supported by demonstrated water and wastewater capacity, or funded upgrades scheduled to be operational when needed, without compromising groundwater capacities and reaching a state of crisis.
- c. Housing completed: Success would mean Guelph is on track by the end of the term to meet the provincial target of 18,000 new homes by 2031, measured by homes completed and occupied,

alongside approvals. We are on track to do so with 2,257 housing units approved so far in 2026, compared with 1,752 in 2025 and 1,623 in 2024 ([as described here](#)).

Priority Two: Make Guelph More Competitive

- 6. Guelph is one of Ontario's most tariff-exposed communities because of its manufacturing and agri-food base. What's one specific thing you'd do as a councillor to help those employers weather this period, and how would you work with the Province and Ottawa to bring supports to bear and ensure Guelph's business voice is at the table?**

One specific action I would take to support Guelph's manufacturing and agri-food base is to bring local manufacturers, agri-food employers and buyers together to identify opportunities for local purchasing and distribution as access to the U.S. market becomes more difficult. There is only so much municipalities can do to offset tariffs, but we can help build stronger domestic networks and keep more of the supply chain within our community. In terms of working with the Province and Ottawa, I already have established relationships with MPP Mike Schreiner and MP Dominique O'Rourke and would work hand in hand with them to connect employers with provincial and federal supports. I would also advocate for bringing affected employers directly into those discussions so Guelph's business voice helps shape the solutions.

- 7. Guelph businesses and residents consistently raise the cost of property taxes as a concern. How would you approach property tax increases while ensuring the City can continue to deliver the services residents expect?**

Property taxes are a huge concern, and my approach would be to aim to keep increases in line with inflation while protecting essential services. We cannot continue shifting rising costs onto Guelph residents without ensuring provincial institutions contribute their fair share toward the municipal services they rely on. For example, [Guelph's report](#) identifies a provincially set "heads and beds" levy of just \$75 per student - a rate unchanged since 1987 despite substantial increases in service costs. I would advocate for the Province to update this levy and index it to inflation, while working with the University and other parties to discuss fairer contributions that would help improve services for everyone. Events like Homecoming highlight the additional demands placed on emergency services and waste management, and residents should not be left carrying a disproportionate share of those costs. Fairer contributions would help ensure students and long-term residents can thrive together, without asking Guelph households to shoulder an unfair share of the cost.

- 8. What would you do to make major municipal spending decisions more transparent and ensure residents and businesses can clearly understand the value they are receiving for the taxes and fees they pay?**

Accountability is one of my three key campaign commitments. As Ward 5's councillor, I'll create more opportunities for meaningful engagement, keep residents informed about City Hall, and invite residents and businesses to help shape City policies on major issues before decisions are made. Guelph already has a tool that breaks down annual property tax costs by service (see below). However, I want to work with City staff to make this information clearer and more detailed. For example, how much of our solid waste spending goes toward composting versus garbage collection and disposal? This distinction should be easy to find and understand. For major spending decisions, I would advocate for plain-language

explanations of the costs, alternatives, expected benefits and actual results. Residents and businesses deserve complete, accessible information to understand the value they receive and hold elected officials to account.

Vacant Home Tax
We're developing a 4% vacant home tax to encourage owners to live in, rent, or sell unoccupied homes. Learn more at guelph.ca/vacanthometax.

Property tax cost by service for 2026

Police	\$1,062
Capital funding	\$734
Social services	\$603
Fire services	\$482
Corporate and governance services	\$429
Transit	\$427
Roads and sidewalks	\$295
Library	\$206
Solid waste resources	\$202
Parks	\$197
Paramedics	\$165
Corporate fleet, facilities and security	\$129
Recreation	\$113
Engineering and transportation services	\$111
Planning and building services	\$90
Culture	\$79
Public health	\$68
Economic development and tourism	\$52
Long-term care	\$43
Mayor and Council	\$21
Hospital Levy	\$5
Total	\$5,513

For every dollar the City collects in property taxes, 15 cents goes to the province to fund education. The remaining 85 cents helps fund City services and programs. This year, you will see the hospital levy shown separately on the final tax bill. The City has committed to an annual \$375,000 tax levy for 2026 and 2027 to help fund Guelph General Hospital renovations.

In Guelph for 2026, a residential property with a median value of \$411,000 is levied \$5,513 to fund these City services and programs.

You see the impact of your property taxes every day, they contribute to things like:

- Maintaining roads and bridges
- Helping you get to work
- Emergency services

Priority Three: An Effective Strategy to Advocate for a Fair Deal

- 9. Guelph's pending development-charge reduction trades short-term relief for long-term financial risk if the offsetting funding falls short. Name one non-negotiable condition you'd require before supporting a deal like this, and one safeguard you'd put in place to protect taxpayers if it doesn't pan out.**

I would not support a blanket reduction in development charges, but I would support targeted incentives for non-profit and affordable housing. An example from the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance gives an example from Vancouver where waiving development charges for a 100-unit affordable rental project saves almost \$2 million, with other permit fee waivers saving another \$275,000. Its report also describes Victoria and Langford offering 100% property tax exemptions for non-profit affordable housing for 10 years - these are meaningful responses to the housing crisis we face. My non-negotiable condition would be a binding commitment to deliver a meaningful percentage of genuinely affordable homes and maintain that affordability for a defined minimum period. To protect taxpayers, I would require repayment if affordability commitments are broken and suspension of further reductions if replacement funding falls short.

- 10. When infrastructure capacity is the reason a housing application stalls, the City's real power may lie in advocacy for provincial and federal funding rather than in saying no. What specific ask would you bring to Queen's Park or Ottawa to unlock that funding, and what would you do to build the kind of relationship that gets a yes?**

My specific ask to Queen's Park and Ottawa would be predictable, multi-year infrastructure funding tied to the capacity upgrades needed to meet Guelph's provincially set target of 18,000 new homes by 2031. Guelph recently secured more than \$33.4 million in federal funding for wastewater upgrades, announced by MP Dominique O'Rourke, demonstrating what collaboration can achieve. However, this is only a starting point, and infrastructure funding must be accompanied by greater provincial and federal investment in affordable and social housing as well. As Dr. Suttor noted in his paper: *Social Housing: Strong City Roles Need Regional and Federal-Provincial Partnerships*, municipalities funded an average of 77% of Ontario's social housing expenditures, compared with 14% provincially and 9% federally, a funding imbalance I would advocate to address. Working toward shared goals creates a foundation for healthy, collaborative relationships, as Guelph is already doing with the Province on housing. I would build on this foundation by working with residents and leading experts at the City and the University to ensure every conversation is firmly rooted in the needs of our community.

11. Describe, in your own words, the division of responsibility among the City, Wellington County as service system manager, and the Province on homelessness, mental health, and addictions. What is the city's job, specifically?

All levels of government have a role to play in addressing homelessness, mental health, and addictions. Wellington County, as service system manager for Guelph and Wellington, leads the planning and coordination of housing and homelessness services for the region, including social housing, homelessness prevention and shelter supports. While the Province sets the legislative and funding framework and is responsible for the health system, including mental health and addictions treatment. The City's job is to use its own powers and resources to support this work: enable housing through zoning and approvals, make suitable municipal land available for non-profit development, contribute funding to County-led services, and support local organizations delivering outreach and other essential assistance. It must also bring partners together, listen to people with lived experience, and advocate for adequate provincial and federal investment. We cannot simply "pass the buck" - the City must act where it has authority and work collaboratively where responsibilities overlap.

12. Would you support supportive and transitional housing, with expedited approvals for qualifying projects? Would you accept such a project in every ward, including your own?

Yes. Absolutely.

13. Do you endorse the municipal sector's case for rebalancing provincial-municipal finances (cost uploads, predictable infrastructure funding, growth-linked revenue tools)? What should Guelph offer in return?

Yes. Ontario should take on more of the costs municipalities currently carry. In return, we would be better able to meet provincial development targets while reducing public costs associated with homelessness and inadequate housing. For example, research from Calgary, Alberta, shows that a Housing First approach can reduce the use of publicly funded health and justice services, particularly among people with mental health conditions (see: *Cost Savings of Housing First in a Non-Experimental Setting* by Jadidzadeh, Falvo and Dutton). In Guelph, helping people access stable housing and appropriate supports could also contribute to a safer, more accessible downtown for everyone, including businesses affected by public drug use and unmet support needs.