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## **Future-Proofing Guelph: Council Candidate Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name:** Michele Richardson

**Ward:** 3

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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?**

Housing will be one of my highest priorities, but community safety remains my first priority. There is not way for a community to thrive if residents do not feel safe, and housing and community safety are closely connected. I will strongly support increasing housing supply, protecting existing affordable housing and expanding non-market options while ensuring growth is supported by the infrastructure and services our community needs.

- 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?**

The gap between approved housing and actual permits reflects several factors. Approval does not necessarily mean construction will proceed. Interest rates, construction costs, labour availability financing and market demand all influence a developer's decision to build.

Council cannot control these market conditions. But what we can control is how efficiently the City processes applications. I support reducing unnecessary delays, improving coordination between departments, ensuring requirements are consistent and communicated and reviewing approval timelines. We also need to ensure adequate water, wastewater and other infrastructure capacity. Our goal should be to make Guelph a place where housing that has been approved can move to construction quickly and responsibly.

- 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, I support publishing clear, end to end approval timelines by application type and reporting quarterly on actual performance. This would provide transparency, identify bottlenecks and give applicants greater certainty. When targets are missed, the City should publicly explain why, identify where the delay occurred and provide a corrective action plan. The goal should be accountability and continuous improvement- not simply penalizing staff for delays that may involve factors outside the City's control.

**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 believe strong housing outcomes depend on respectful, transparent working relationships with both private developers and non-profit housing providers. Council needs to listen to what is preventing approved housing from actually being built while maintaining clear expectations and protecting public interest. I would support regular housing roundtable meetings bringing together City staff, developers, and our non-profit partners to identify barriers, improve processes and work collaboratively on practical solutions. The goal should be simple. Move good housing projects from approval to construction as efficiently as possible.

**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.**

Residents should judge us on results not simple the number of policies we adopt. I would suggest 3 measures:

1. Housing actually built - Make measurable progress towards Guelph commitments of 18,000 new homes by 2031, with a pace approaching 2,000 new homes per year.
2. From approval to construction - Significantly reduce the number of approved units sitting in the pipeline and streamline City-controlled approval and permitting timelines. Success would mean a significant reduction in the current backlog of approved units awaiting permits, recognizing market conditions also affect whether projects proceed.
3. Housing people can afford - Ensure that increased supply includes a meaningful share of affordable and non-market housing, while preserving existing affordable units. I would consider success to be year over year growth in affordable units with no loss of existing affordable housing wherever municipal tools can prevent it.

Ultimately, success is not how many units Council approves on paper - it is how many homes get built, how quickly good projects move forward and whether Guelph residents can actually afford to live in them.

**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?**

I would prioritize direct engagement with Guelph's manufacturing and agri-food employers to understand the significant impacts tariffs are having on their operations, supply chains and jobs. As a councillor, I would work with our economic development team, the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to bring a strong, unified Guelph voice to Queen's Park. I would advocate for targeted supports for affected employers while also promoting diversification, local procurement and new market opportunities. Municipal government cannot solve the international trade challenges, but we can ensure our businesses are heard and that Guelph receives its fair share of available provincial and federal support.

**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?**

I recognize that property tax increases are a significant concern for both residents and businesses, particularly when everything is becoming more expensive. My approach would be to focus first on delivering core municipal services efficiently and responsibly. Before considering new spending. We need to get back to basics and review existing programs, identify efficiencies and determine what can be deferred or delivered differently. At the same time, we need to protect essential services such as public safety, infrastructure, transit and other services residents rely on everyday. I will continue to advocate for responsible budgets that balance affordability with maintaining the services and infrastructure that make Guelph a strong community.

**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?**

I would make transparency a priority by ensuring major spending decisions clearly, explain what is being spent, why it is needed, what alternatives are considered and what measurable benefits residents will receive. Council reports and budgets should be written in plain language and make the long term operating and tax impacts clear. I also support regular reporting on major projects so residents can see whether they are on budget, on schedule and delivering the promised results. Taxpayers deserve accountability for how their money is spent and a clear understanding of the value they receive for their taxes and fees.

**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.**

As a non-negotiable condition I would require a clear, reliable funding commitment from senior levels of government that fully accounts for the revenue lost through reduced development charges. Growth should pay for growth, and taxpayers should not be left covering an unexpected shortfall. As a safeguard I would require regular financial reporting and defined trigger points so Council can reassess the program if the projected funding or development does not materialize. Any agreement should include

an exit or adjustment mechanism that protects the City's long-term capital plan and prevents the financial risk from simply being transferred to property tax payers.

**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?**

I would go to Queen's Park and Ottawa with a clear, evidence-based ask: Partner with Guelph to fund the water, wastewater and other growth-related infrastructure needed to unlock approved and planned housing. I would need to identify the specific projects, their costs, number of homes they would enable and the City's contribution.

Building those relationships requires more than asking for money when we need it. I would work consistently with our MP, MPP, provincial and federal ministers, municipal partners and organizations such as FCM and AMO. Guelph needs to demonstrate that we are doing our part, planning responsibly, approving housing and investing locally while making the case that infrastructure benefiting growth requires all 3 levels of government at the table.

**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?**

The responsibilities are interconnected but distinct. Wellington County is the provincially designated service system manager for housing and homelessness in Guelph-Wellington. Their responsibilities span the first half of the housing continuum, including homelessness prevention, emergency shelter, transitional and supportive housing, community housing and rent supports.

The Province is primarily responsible for funding and delivering the health care system including mental-health and addictions treatment while also setting the legislative and funding framework for housing and homelessness services.

The City of Guelph is not the service system manager but we have an important role. Through land use planning, zoning, development approvals, infrastructure and our housing policies, we can help create conditions for more housing across the continuum. We also have a responsibility for municipal services, public spaces and community safety.

Most importantly, jurisdiction cannot become an excuse for inaction. Decisions made by the County or the Province have direct impacts on Guelph residents, neighbourhoods, businesses and City services. When gaps in shelter, supportive housing, mental health or addiction services create consequences in our community the City has a responsibility to respond to these consequences, work collaboratively with the County and Province to ensure the impacts on Guelph residents are understood and addressed. We may not control every part of the system but we are responsible for responding to how the system affects our city.

**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. I support supportive and transitional housing and would support expedited approvals for projects that meet appropriate planning, safety and operational requirements. These forms of housing are an important part of the housing continuum and can help people move from homelessness or instability toward permanent housing.

I would also be prepared to support an appropriate project in my own ward. At the same time, I don't believe the goal should simply be to place one project in every ward. Decisions should be based on need, suitable locations, access to transit and services, good planning, and the ability of the operator to properly support residents.

Where projects are proposed, meaningful neighbourhood engagement and clear accountability are important. Supportive housing works best when the housing is accompanied by the services and supports residents need and when impacts on the surrounding community are anticipated and responsibly managed.

**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. Municipalities are increasingly being asked to deliver services and infrastructure without access to revenue tools that keep pace with those responsibilities. I support a more substantial provincial-municipal funding model, including predictable infrastructure funding and ensuring that when responsibilities are downloaded to municipalities, appropriate funding follows.

In return, Guelph must demonstrate strong fiscal discipline and accountability. That means setting measurable outcomes, reporting transparently on how new funding is spent, finding efficiencies before adding costs, and ensuring growth-related revenues are directed toward the infrastructure required to support that growth.

A new fiscal arrangement should not simply provide municipalities with more money to spend. It should create a clearer division of responsibilities, predictable funding, and accountability for results while reducing the pressure on property tax.