

SHEBURNE VOTES: 2026 MUNICIPAL ELECTION COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE PROFILES - PART 1

With the upcoming municipal election on Oct. 26, we invited each candidate to respond to the same three questions about their reason for running, priorities and vision for the municipality and qualifications. Their responses are published below as submitted, subject only to length and standard copy editing for style, grammar and clarity. Candidates were asked to keep their responses focused on their own qualifications, priorities and vision for the municipality. Note ? Candidates are listed alphabetically within each position they are running for.

Jim Bates ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

I'm running because I care about Shelburne and want to play a role in shaping its future.

I've lived here, worked here and seen firsthand what makes this community such a great place to call home. I want to listen to residents, bring a practical and common-sense approach to council, and help make decisions that benefit Shelburne today while preparing us for tomorrow.

2. What do you see as the biggest issue facing the municipality?

One of Shelburne's biggest challenges is managing growth responsibly.

Our community is growing, and that brings opportunities, but it also puts pressure on roads, infrastructure, services and taxpayers.

We need to make sure growth is planned properly and that our services keep pace.

At the same time, we have to be responsible with residents' tax dollars and make sure we're getting good value for every dollar spent. Growth should strengthen Shelburne, not change what makes it special.

3. What makes you best suited for the role?

I bring practical leadership experience, sound judgment and a willingness to listen.

I'm not someone who pretends to have all the answers, but I am someone who will ask the right questions, do the work and make decisions based on what's best for Shelburne.

I believe in being approachable, accountable and willing to hear different perspectives.

Most importantly, I'll put the community first and work hard to help move Shelburne forward in a thoughtful and responsible way.

Lynda Buffett ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

Prior to moving to Shelburne, my previous experience was as a local municipal council member in the Town of Whitby, a community experiencing rapid growth with 10 times the population of Shelburne.

This experience provided me with a very comprehensive understanding of the workings of municipal government and included significantly more experience in land use planning issues. Since Shelburne's growth will continue, I believe my experience can help to guide us in future planning and developments.

2) What do you see as the biggest issues facing the municipality?

Land use. As the town continues to grow, how we deal with future land planning should be a major priority, as we need to focus on making more land available for industrial development to help offset residential tax increases.

This can be successfully achieved by annexing portions of other rural municipalities surrounding us into our ?built boundary? so that we have a balanced community that can support more local jobs for residents while helping the town to be financially stronger by diversifying and expanding our industrial tax base.

3) What makes you best suited for the role?

I feel that, as a former municipal politician both in Shelburne and previously in the Town of Whitby, this experience will be a benefit going forward.

I spent several years attending council meetings regularly for two years before I ran, and I believe that anyone today running for office needs to have done this to fully understand and grasp the responsibilities entailed.

Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

Shelburne is home. It is where I have raised my family, built relationships, served our community and seen firsthand both the opportunities before us and the challenges that come with a growing town.

I am running for council because I believe the decisions we make today will shape the Shelburne we become tomorrow.

Our community is at an important point in its growth. I want that growth to strengthen Shelburne, not simply make it bigger. That means thinking carefully about how housing, infrastructure, affordability, roads, recreation and municipal services fit together ? and, most importantly, how those decisions affect people.

My professional career, public service and community leadership have taught me to look beyond the immediate issue, ask thoughtful questions, listen to different perspectives and consider the long-term consequences of decisions.

I want to bring that approach to council: see the whole picture, think beyond today and keep people at the centre.

I care deeply about this community and believe I can make a meaningful contribution to its next chapter. That is why I am asking Shelburne residents for the opportunity to serve.

2. What do you see as the biggest issues facing the municipality?

I believe Shelburne's biggest challenge is managing growth in a way that is responsible, affordable and sustainable.

Housing and growth are important, but we cannot look at them in isolation. New housing affects water and wastewater capacity, roads and traffic, recreation, municipal services and the tax base. Infrastructure investments have both immediate costs and long-term operating costs. As our population grows, residents rightly expect services and amenities to keep pace.

Affordability must also remain part of that conversation. Council has a responsibility to carefully consider how today's spending and infrastructure decisions affect taxpayers now and in the future.

Another important issue is ensuring residents feel informed, heard and able to participate in decisions affecting their community.

For me, these are not six separate problems. Everything is connected.

That is the foundation of my One Shelburne approach: understand the relationships between housing and growth, infrastructure and utilities, finances and affordability, services and recreation, roads and mobility, and people and participation.

Good municipal leadership means seeing those connections before decisions are made ? not after the consequences arrive.

3. What makes you best suited for the role?

I bring a combination of professional leadership, public governance and community experience that I believe is well suited to the work ahead for Shelburne.

I have more than 20 years of experience in financial services, with leadership responsibilities in business continuity and third-party disaster readiness. My work requires me to understand risk, budgets and dependencies, ask what happens when one part of a system changes, and plan beyond the immediate issue.

I also serve as an Upper Grand District School Board trustee and have been selected by my fellow trustees to serve as vice-chair. That experience has strengthened my understanding of public governance, policy, budgets, accountability and working collaboratively around a decision-making table.

Locally, I founded the Dufferin County Canadian Black Association and chaired Shelburne's Anti-Black Racism, Racism and Discrimination Task Force, which delivered 34 recommendations to council. I have also been a member of several committees, including the Fiddle Parade Committee before it was discontinued, Dufferin's Joint Accessibility Committee, Hills of Headwaters Collaborative, and Dufferin County's Climate Action Committee, among others.

I don't believe effective leadership means having all the answers. It means listening, asking the right questions, understanding the evidence, bringing people together and having the courage to make thoughtful decisions.

That is the experience and leadership I would bring to Shelburne council.

Sohayla Smith ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

I am not a politician. First and foremost, I am a resident who has lived and worked in Shelburne for 17 years and considers it my forever home.

For years, people have encouraged me to consider running for council. This year, I decided to seriously explore how I could serve the community in a new way. Much of my life here has already been rooted in service ? from working with local children, adults and families to running Soup Haus, serving on the Heritage Committee, singing at Remembrance Day ceremonies and providing harp therapy in long-term-care homes.

These experiences have allowed me to hear the concerns of residents from many different walks of life. I am running because I want to bring that resident-focused perspective to the council table.

I care deeply about Shelburne's future and want to help ensure that decisions are practical, thoughtful and grounded in how they will affect the people who live here.

2. What do you see as the biggest issue facing the municipality?

Safety is my greatest concern. Shelburne no longer has its own municipal police department; policing transitioned to the OPP in 2021. Residents have raised concerns about crime, police visibility and whether our community is receiving the local presence and responsiveness it needs.

Council cannot direct individual police operations, but it should be a strong advocate for residents. It must work through the OPP Detachment Board and directly with the OPP to communicate local priorities, examine crime and response data, ask difficult questions and pursue practical ways to improve visibility, prevention and public confidence.

Growth and infrastructure are inseparable from safety. As Shelburne's population grows, policing needs, roads, traffic management, pedestrian protections and municipal services must keep pace. As Shelburne grows, planning for the effects on safety, infrastructure and municipal services must remain a priority.

Clear, ongoing communication can help residents understand safety trends and the actions available to council. My priority would be to listen to residents, understand the evidence and advocate persistently for a safer Shelburne.

3) What makes you best suited for the role?

My strength is the breadth and depth of my connection to this community. During my 17 years in Shelburne, I have worked with children, families, seniors, business owners, volunteers and residents from many different circumstances.

For nine years, I have run Soup Haus, providing complimentary weekly suppers to anyone in the community. I have also served on the Heritage Committee and contributed through education, music, community programming, Remembrance Day ceremonies and harp therapy in long-term-care homes.

As an educator, coach, musician, local business owner and TEDx speaker, I know how to listen, communicate clearly, ask difficult questions and turn concerns into practical, creative solutions. I also understand that good leadership is not about pretending to have every answer.

I would bring an independent, resident-focused voice to council. I am prepared to do my homework, understand the scope and responsibilities of municipal government, consider different perspectives and build support for practical solutions.

Lindsay Wegener ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

I initially ran for council in my first term because Fiddle Park was on the agenda to possibly be sold to developers. I couldn't let that happen.

I attended that council meeting, stood up and spoke for the community, asking the council of the day to imagine if Brampton sold the land Chinguacousy Park is on. What a shame that would have been, as it's the community hub offering so much.

I had a vision then of what that space could be. Fast forward to my second term and final year, and we have that very park for the community!

2. What do you see as the biggest issues facing the municipality?

The biggest issue facing Shelburne today is growth versus infrastructure. As we have seen such rapid growth in the town, we are working to keep up with infrastructure.

This isn't just roads, sidewalks, and underground pipes. It's also services like recreation and healthcare. We need to continue to move towards better programming at our CDRC, library, and town events, and we need to advocate for better diagnostic services like extended hours at Life Labs with discussions of expansion.

3. What makes you best suited for the role?

With my over a decade and a half of community engagement through volunteering and event planning, I have had the hard

conversations with my fellow Shelburnites. I know their wants and needs. I have worked to bring their voice to council, asking questions and requesting action.

I reply to everyone who connects with me to ensure they know they matter. I may not always have the answer they want, but I will always answer with truth and transparency.

Donald Williams ? Running for councillor 1. What made you want to run for municipal office?

I have called Shelburne home since 2013, and over the years I have built my life around service, as a paralegal helping residents navigate the Landlord and Tenant Board and Small Claims Court, and as a taekwondo instructor mentoring young people at my Dojang.

Running for council is a natural extension of that. Early in my career, I represented Air Traffic Controllers to government as president of the Jamaican Air Traffic Controllers Association, achieving a threefold improvement in recognition and compensation for the people I represented.

More recently, due to my advocacy for my community, a system was implemented in our school board to help ensure fairness in how students are treated. Both experiences taught me that real change comes from listening carefully, staying persistent, and following through, not from empty promises.

I decided to run because I believe Shelburne deserves a councillor who brings that same discipline: someone who will listen to residents, be honest even when it's difficult, and work hard to get results. I'm not a career politician. I'm a neighbour who wants to put that same track record of advocacy to work for this town.

2. What do you see as the biggest issues facing the municipality?

First, community safety. Like many towns our size, Shelburne has seen a recent rise in car break-ins and petty theft, and residents deserve to feel secure in their own neighbourhoods.

I would support stronger coordination between council and local policing, along with practical steps like improved lighting in vulnerable areas.

Second, safer streets more broadly, including basic accessibility gaps like missing curb cuts and ramps that make it difficult for residents using wheelchairs or scooters to get around town safely.

Third, youth and recreation programming. Right now, options for young people outside of hockey and skating are limited, especially through the winter months, and I would like to see us make better use of resources we already have, like school gyms, for indoor drop-in programming.

Fourth, transparency between council and residents, so people understand what's being decided and why, and have a real voice before decisions are finalized. Shelburne is growing, and growth should never come at the cost of residents feeling heard, safe, or included.

3. What makes you best suited for the role?

Council work isn't about a title. It's about judgment, fairness, and follow-through, and that's what I bring. As a licensed paralegal focused on Landlord and Tenant Board matters and Small Claims Court, I work daily within rules, procedure, and disputes that require patience and impartiality.

As a retired Air Canada manager, I bring operational and budget experience at scale. As a 2nd-degree black belt and taekwondo

instructor at my Dojang, I have spent years mentoring young people and building discipline and accountability in others. And through leading advocacy efforts, from representing Air Traffic Controllers to government early in my career, to advocacy that led to a fairness system being implemented in our school board.

I have shown I can turn concerns into concrete outcomes, not just talking points.

What ties this together is a consistent approach: listen carefully, be truthful even when it's uncomfortable, solve problems fairly, and treat people with respect regardless of where they stand.

I haven't sat on this council before, but I have spent my career doing the work council members are asked to do. I'm asking Shelburne residents for the chance to bring that same commitment to the council table.