

Shelburne woman becomes new vice-chair of Upper Grand District School Board

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Shelburne resident and Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) trustee Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson is stepping into a new role.

During a special board meeting hosted on July 30, O'Hara-Stephenson, who represents the Town of Orangeville through the UGDSB, was elected as the new vice-chair. She was elected to the position following the resignation of UGDSB trustee Katherine Hauser, who was appointed to Guelph City Council on July 23.

"I'm honoured and humbled to have been elected vice-chair by my fellow trustees. It's a privilege to serve in this capacity, and I'm committed to working collaboratively with [the] Chair and the entire Board to support student success, good governance, and transparent decision-making," wrote O'Hara-Stephenson in an email to the Free Press. "I recognize the responsibility that comes with this role and I'm excited to continue contributing to the work that positively impacts our students, families, and school communities."

O'Hara-Stephenson holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, a Master's of Business Administration (MBA) in Leadership and Innovation, and the Chartered Insurance Professional (CIP) designation. She has over 20 years of corporate experience in the financial sector and presented as a public speaker at conferences locally, nationally and internationally on topics related to leadership, equity and community engagement.

O'Hara-Stephenson has also volunteered with local youth in schools, sat on various committees in Dufferin County, and is the founder and president of the Dufferin County Canadian Black Association (DCCBA).

O'Hara-Stephenson was appointed to the UGDSB Board of Trustees in 2023, representing the Town of Orangeville.

"Alethia brings a wealth of experience from the corporate world, as a public speaker, a parent and from being an engaged member of the communities in Dufferin County," said Chair of the Board Ralf Mesenbrink.

In her new position as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees, O'Hara-Stephenson will support Board Chair Ralf Mesenbrink in leading the governance work of the Board and step up in his absence. She will also be responsible for facilitating board meetings, aligning with the Board's strategic priorities, and working with the Board Trustees, senior staff and Director of Education.

Speaking with the Free Press, O'Hara-Stephenson said she is particularly focused on maintaining a balanced budget and preparing for potential new legislation such as the re-introduction of School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools.

"Equally important to me is ensuring that equity, student well-being, and long-term success remain at the heart of every decision," said O'Hara-Stephenson. "Our students deserve more than short-term fixes; they deserve lasting solutions that support them academically, socially, and emotionally. That's where I will continue to focus my efforts."

O'Hara-Stephenson will sit as vice-chair for the remainder of the 2022-2026 term.