

HOUSING AS A MUNICIPAL ELECTION ISSUE

*Town of Wolfville
Candidate Responses*



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Town of Wolfville: Candidate Responses

The Homeless No More Initiative invited candidates to respond to questions about housing. Candidates were provided the opportunity to respond to our questions via email or complete an online questionnaire. Candidates who completed the questionnaire had the opportunity to provide responses to additional questions. This report includes publicly shareable responses.

Question 1: If elected, what action(s) will you take to address housing in your community?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor

During the current council term, particularly in the last year I have been extremely involved in the issues related to housing. From convening and facilitating a workshop of organizations who had approached me with housing needs or that had approached me because they could potentially support additional housing (The intent was to connect people in our community who might not know of each other and start a productive dialogue). I would continue to play this role if it was helpful and productive.

As well, since January I, along with one other member of council ,have been meeting bi-weekly with interested residents and service providers to try to, if not address entirely, then advocate for and provide items like socks, mitts, blankets, tents, food to those who are unhoused in Wolfville. I will continue to do what I can to provide this kind of support.

Most importantly however, I have been advocating on Council ,for council, to engage Minister Lohr to provide additional support to either the Town or to organizations in our region who are charged with providing supportive housing. While Open Arms and the Portal and Chrysalis House to name a few are providing amazing and much needed services they need more resources and more staff to effectively deal with this growing issue. Housing, particularly supportive housing and wrap around supports, needs to be supported financially by the Province. There are many willing not-for-profits but their resources are spread too thin. We need financial support from the Province.

We also need an open dialogue with our residents and businesses. I have received some truly odious emails from people regarding the current small unhoused



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Question 1: If elected, what action(s) will you take to address housing in your community?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor (continued)

population in Town. I don't believe this reflects the majority of our residents but lack of information is in part fueling this fear and lack of sensitivity to a grievous issue.

Finally, I am well aware that in addition to those who are actually living outside we have many people in Wolfville who are a week or a month away from being homeless. I am aware of students and others living in unsafe and unsanctioned accommodation. While they call me to tell me that, they will not give me their address and so our hands are tied to send in our bylaw officers to check for compliance. I know families who have been evicted due to sale of their accommodation and people who have lost their accommodation due to the Fixed Term Lease situation. I believe this is a significant cause of current homeless insecurity (stats suggest that almost 25% of those who are homeless or housing insecure in NS have been effected by this legislation). I also understand that landlords costs may be higher than 5% and maintaining that cap may also be unfair to landlords. In this council term a motion to write the Premier about the unfairness of both these implications was initially passed by our council and then rescinded by council. This was, to my mind unfortunate, as these are issues that need an open dialogue not to be brushed away under pressure or due to lack of clear understanding of intent.

If reelected I will continue to advocate for this issue. I believe in HOUSING FIRST. People find themselves in life situations that are beyond their control - whether physical or mental health issues or other life circumstances. These can't be dealt with unless you can do so from the safety and privacy of secure housing.

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council

Housing is a core need. As an elected Councillor for the Town of Wolfville, I look forward to taking action on housing by reducing barriers to affordable housing that make housing more expensive within the Town of Wolfville, increasing opportunities for people to earn wages that match the cost of living within their community, and working with the province and the federal government to enable more diverse



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Question 1: If elected, what action(s) will you take to address housing in your community?

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council (continued)

housing options, including non-market housing. As a town, Wolfville directly controls the rules and regulations that make houses more or less expensive to build - such as the fees associated with building, the maximum number of units permitted on a property, and the parking fees for those people who prefer to build houses for people and not cars. These factors and more combine to make houses in Wolfville expensive, limited in number, and financially punishing as those without cars pay more.

Mike Butler, Candidate for Council

I have served on council for the last four years and we have seen significant issues arise with housing and the unhoused. We have already begun some initiatives to build mixed housing, we were awarded the Housing Accelerator Fund to navigate better housing options, we have been working hard (outside of our jurisdiction) to assist the few unhoused in our community and we listen closely to the needs of our community. If re-elected, I want our council to concentrate on securing our infrastructure so this future growth is sustainable. And I want to work more closely with the University to see what they have to offer.



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Question 2: In your opinion, what are the housing needs of people living in your district or municipal unit?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor

Much of this is answered above. We need housing for students, for working individuals and families with lower incomes, for seniors with limited pensions/income; for seniors who want to downsize, for people without incomes.

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council

Everyone needs affordable, safe, stable housing in their community. Within Wolfville, young people and aging people face barriers to finding affordable small places to live. A person with multiple barriers to accessing standard housing is likely to have even fewer options. These people need a diversity of options for housing so we can keep the people who live here, housed here, whether it's the beginning of their adulthood, career, or grandparenthood. Everyone deserves a place to live.

Mike Butler, Candidate for Council

Wolfville has all demographics: seniors, students, young families, those with learning and accessibility needs, etc. so we need to create a community that meets all their needs both in housing and in community buildings and businesses. The last few years have seen a better standard in building to meet these needs which is wonderful. I believe we need more adequate student housing outside of turning century old homes into student housing. Wolfville also needs to review it's zoning bylaws.



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Question 3: What role do you think municipal government can play in addressing those needs?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor

That's a difficult one because housing is a provincial responsibility. But it is municipal staff and elected officials (as well as the not-for-profit sector, and the faith and health professionals in our Town) who deal on a day-to-day basis with those who have difficulty finding and retaining housing. I personally would like to see the Province provide much better funding and integration with housing advocacy and support groups. It is unrealistic to think groups like Open Arms can raise the funding as a non-profit to handle the increasing needs in our region. I would like the Province to take an all-party look at both fixed term leases and short term leases and come up with something fair and reasonable not something partisan. If we are all committed to housing first then we will treat it differently than we have for all of my lifetime (which was that housing is generally the responsibility of the private sector and the market and other supports made this work fairly well for most of us). The housing situation is different now. Too much immigration - without pre-planning, The emergence of short term rentals in residential areas where residential rather than commercial taxes are charged is wrong and we need the province to be a partner in this issue.

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council

The Town of Wolfville, the first town in Nova Scotia to have an accessibility plan and one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Canada, has an obligation to current and prospective residents to provide a diversity of housing options. This can be done slowly with government and stakeholder involvement, or quickly by encouraging Nova Scotians to build more homes for people in their backyards. We need to say "yes" to homes for people.

Mike Butler, Candidate for Council

Municipal and Provincial need to be more closely connected, instead of completely disjointed. Provincial needs to stop ignoring the issues and throwing them on the backs of the Municipal Government, and ignoring emails and meeting requests. Wolfville is not the same as Halifax, each town needs to be looked at through it's own lens. As council we need to make sure our infrastructure is sound and all the pieces are ready before we approve an abundance of housing. We are not elected to do the Provinces job.



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Question 4: If elected, what are you willing to do to ensure that your council addresses the issue of housing in your community?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor

As you will know I have made this a priority in the last year of the current term. It has not been without very significant headwinds directed against me personally. My position in fact is not a popular political one and while I do feel I am right I know it is not a vote getter. That said I believe that housing first is a must and that it will take all of us to address it. I am a strong believer that municipal government is closest to the people, that municipalities have the table around which all parts of the community can meet, and that as the Mayor I have a moral responsibility to bring people to that table to respond to this pressing issue.

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council

My voice on Council will ask "who's in the room?" and consider those who should be yet aren't. Those people who live with more barriers to a safe, affordable, stable, place to live in Wolfville also deserve to have their needs considered by the Town of Wolfville - even if they aren't in the room when decisions are made. Every resident of Wolfville matters, whether or not they own property or have a permanent address. Every voice counts.

Mike Butler, Candidate for Council

I have lived in Wolfville for 22 Years, I have been involved in many groups and being a councilor is an amazing opportunity to move the needle on things, but first and foremost, I LISTEN!!!! Listening to the community, our stakeholders, and the communities around us is key to helping where we can. Council is not just ONE person. We are a collected voice of the community. It's a very tough job but as long as we listen to the needs, I have faith we can move things forward to something better.



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Question 5: Which of the opportunities for municipalities to address housing needs in your community would you be committed to supporting as a member of Council?

Vacant Property Registration

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks

Vacant Property Taxes

Jeremy Banks

Incentives for Renting Out

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks

Registration of Tourist Accommodations

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Elimination of Non-Owner-Occupied Tourist Accommodations

Jeremy Banks

Landlord Licensing/Registration

Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Developing a housing plan/strategy

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Initiatives to support energy efficiency for homeowners and renters

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler



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Question 6: Which actions will you commit to doing, as a member of Council, with respect to supporting community housing needs?

Adopting a Municipal affordable housing plan that increases the supply of safe, affordable housing that meets peoples' needs

Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Championing the role of Municipal Government in addressing issues related to housing

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Ensuring local policies reflect the vision of Federal and Provincial housing policies

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks

Engaging with local agencies, NGO's and stakeholders in creating a community driven action plan

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks

Ensuring local agencies are heard by funders and Government stakeholders

Wendy Donovan
Jeremy Banks

Ensuring local businesses are supported in the effort to make a living wage the baseline for all employee compensation

Jeremy Banks
Mike Butler

Question 7: If you have identified other opportunities for action on housing, please share them with us here.

No responses provided for this question.



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Question 8: What are your questions or comments about housing?

Wendy Donovan, Candidate for Mayor

I don't have any questions or other comments other than the way the last two questions were worded doesn't reflect the reality of municipal decision making. While I am very supportive of all the items in the preceding two questions being discussed they are so multi-faceted that I can't in good conscience, and without further assessment and discussion of these issues, as well as fulsome consultation with stakeholders commit to them. That does not mean I do not think they are worthy of discussion.

Jeremy Banks, Candidate for Council

I have many questions, yet as someone who isn't homeless, I don't even know where to begin expanding my knowledge. This is where I believe in the value of organizations and advocates working to address homelessness, such as Homeless No More, who work to reveal the lived experiences of those people without a permanent address. How can any councilor or town know where to start without including those perspectives?

Mike Butler, Candidate for Council

None at this time, Thank You!!!