

Caleb Carisse Ward 1 Councillor

Questionnaire:

1. What is your vision for Port Hope at the end of the next four-year Council term?

At the end of the next four-year term, I want Port Hope to be a municipality that has grown on its own terms. That means new, diversified revenue from the services and assets we already own, support for seniors aging in place, new investment and industry coming into town, responsible housing growth, and a tourism-driven boost to local business, all working toward closing the infrastructure funding gap without leaning on repeated tax levy increases.

By then, I want Port Hope to have signed provisions in place protecting our interests as the Wesleyville nuclear project moves forward, and line-of-sight to closing out the Port Hope Area Initiative. I want public trust rebuilt through transparent, open discussion, with residents having access and input into council's strategic decisions. I want a staff culture that's genuinely incentivized to find savings, new ideas, and new revenue, backed by strong public committees and the skills already sitting in our own community. And I want local businesses to have a real voice whenever infrastructure work disrupts tourism, traffic, or day-to-day operations.

2. What do you believe are the greatest opportunities and challenges facing Port Hope's economy?

Port Hope's greatest opportunities start with our heritage downtown, one of the best-preserved main streets in Ontario, which continues to drive real growth in filming and tourism. The Wesleyville nuclear project will bring new jobs and new business for local suppliers, create room to expand municipal services, and help attract other industries that diversify our tax base. And our people, both staff and residents, give us real depth of skill we can draw on to support economic growth.

On the challenge side, our aging infrastructure and the funding gap behind it remain a major concern. The 2026 budget funds only 36.8 percent of what we actually need for roads, water, sewer, and facilities, and every year that gap persists raises the risk of disruptive, unplanned construction that hurts businesses and residents alike, on top of the basic problem of finding the money to close it. Affordability is a real and growing concern too: taxes rose 6.9 percent in 2024 before dropping to 2.7 percent this year, and residents deserve a predictable trajectory rather than one that swings with the political calendar. We need to look hard at how we spend and where we can grow revenue so we're not leaning on the levy by default. Third, we need a better relationship with the public around trust, transparency, and decision-making. Critical decisions will be made over the next four years and getting them right means making sure public opinion isn't lost in the process, with clear, plain-language communication whenever a key decision is being made. That also means a stronger voice for Port Hope in how we negotiate and prepare for federal and provincial projects like Wesleyville, so we're directing outcomes rather than just reacting to them.

3. What role should the Municipality play in supporting existing businesses and attracting new investment?

The municipality needs to play a strong support role for existing businesses. First is listening to the day-to-day challenges and establishing a better working relationship. Concretely, that means a formal construction mitigation policy, property tax relief during active construction, marketing and streetscape grants, reduced permit fees, and real advance notice, along with an independent review of what recent and upcoming infrastructure work has actually cost local businesses so we are using our past learnings for future projects. Port Hope should understand the overall business demand and market of Port Hope so we can ensure existing business priorities and future issues are addressed. Businesses should be encouraged to stay, grow, and build in Port Hope and at a minimum, the environment should be attractive and easy to work in. On attracting new investment, I want Port Hope being proactively building a strong tourism business by marketing the many assets that our town boast. New ideas around cooperative funding grants, ownership agreements, land acquisition, and outside funding growth are all ways that the town can support new business growth.

4. How should Port Hope accommodate growth while preserving the qualities that make the community distinctive?

Growth should be additive, not imitative: new development should conform to the character our heritage areas have already established. I want the Heritage Advisory Committee to continue to hold changes to a high standard with real teeth on key developments in heritage areas. On housing specifically, I support gentle density done simply: easier rules for additional residential units on existing lots, without turning it into a heavy new approval process, so Port Hope can grow without changing the character of its existing neighbourhoods block by block. And with Wesleyville-driven growth on the horizon, I want firm protections in place before decisions progress, not after: actual limits on how much farmland gets converted, and a genuine commitment to greenspace and public trails on land that would otherwise just sit as an industrial buffer. Distinctive doesn't mean frozen in place. It means growth that must fit our identity, instead of an identity that has to make room for growth.

5. What municipal services, infrastructure or policies are most important to a healthy business environment?

Reliable core infrastructure, roads, water, and sewer, still matters most, and that's not just a downtown issue. Our budget funds only about 36.8 percent of what we need there, and every year that gap persists raises the risk of disruptive, unplanned construction, whether that's a downtown street or a rural road a home-based business depends on.

Just as important is the relationship between the municipality and the people running local business, downtown, rural, and home-based alike. I want a real, ongoing table with the HBIA and the Chamber, brought in early on construction timing and permit changes, not consulted after the decision's made, and I want rural and home-based business owners at that table too, not an afterthought because they're less visible.

Concretely, that means façade and streetscape grants for businesses hit by construction, active promotion for local businesses, and a genuine construction mitigation policy: property tax relief, reduced permit fees, and real advance notice.

Rural and home-based businesses also need reliable cell and internet coverage. Council has already heard that parts of our rural area have real gaps here, and that's a genuine barrier to doing business, not a minor inconvenience.

Beyond that: plain, timely communication on what's coming, closures, fees, policy changes, so businesses can plan rather than get surprised. A predictable tax trajectory, tied to a clear cost-of-living benchmark, matters more than any single program. And downtown parking remains one of the simplest levers we control for whether people actually show up to shop.

6. How would you ensure that the needs of businesses across the entire municipality, including the downtown, rural area and home-based businesses, are considered in Council decisions?

Downtown gets most of the public attention because it's the most visible, but Port Hope's business community is bigger than Walton Street, and the Chamber of Commerce is exactly the body built to represent that full picture, downtown, rural, and home-based alike. I want to lean into that, not work around it: a formal seat for the Chamber at the table early on council decisions that affect business, so your membership's expertise actually shapes what gets built and how, not just how it gets taxed.

The same rules need to apply to rural business owners too, rather than treating downtown as the default and rural as the exception. For home-based businesses, I support keeping the rules genuinely simple: straightforward criteria for things like additional residential units and small-scale home occupation permits, rather than an approval process built for a much larger commercial project. And on anything tied directly to Walton Street, the HBIA remains the right partner alongside the Chamber.

Practically, that means bringing the Chamber in before a decision is made, not after, treating your input as a standing part of how council does business, not something squeezed into a single meeting once a year.

7. What changes, if any, would you support to make Port Hope's planning, building and development processes more efficient and predictable?

Port Hope's planning, building, and development process needs to modernize, and I'll bring ideas to help that change. I've heard directly from residents and business owners that timelines are a real frustration, and the process itself confirms why: without a modern intake system or a public benchmark, there's no way for anyone to know what to expect or hold the municipality accountable to it.

What I do support in principle: published service standard timelines for common approvals, so applicants know what to expect and can hold the municipality to it; a genuine single point of contact for a project moving through multiple departments; and pre-application consultation as the default, so problems get caught before an application is formally submitted rather than after. Ontario's own More Homes Built Faster framework already pushes municipalities toward faster processing on residential applications, and I want Port Hope pushing those standards.

As councillor, one of my first actions will be to direct planning staff to map exactly where applications are getting stuck and building a modernization plan around those issues, with the Chamber and the businesses who depend on this process at the table from the start.