

## **Claire Halloway-Wadhwani**

### **Ward 1 Candidate**

#### **1. Vision for Port Hope at the end of the next term**

Four years from now, I would like to see our Official Plan and modernized zoning by-law in place and working for us, new employment lands opened up and serviced, and a more diverse range of housing being built in our community.

Underneath that is a clearer sense of what makes Port Hope distinctive and what we have to offer. We have a remarkable combination of assets, the kind that many communities can only dream of: a heritage downtown, working farmland, natural and built heritage that people travel to experience, proximity to the GTA, and a community where people can put down roots, raise a family and grow older without having to leave. I think there is an opportunity to tell that story more consistently and build on what we already have.

Housing is a big part of making that vision possible. If the people who work here cannot afford to live here, we are limiting our own potential. We need more options beyond the traditional single-family home, with housing that accommodates different incomes, household sizes and stages of life. That is not just a housing issue. It is an economic development issue.

And I would like to see us making more progress on the opportunities in front of us now. Planning for the future at Wesleyville is important, but we shouldn't put the needs and potential of the residents and businesses already here on hold while we wait to see what happens there. There is plenty we can and should be doing now.

#### **2. Greatest opportunities and challenges**

I think we have some tremendous advantages that we perhaps don't always recognize as economic assets. A downtown people genuinely want to visit, working agricultural land, a remarkable heritage landscape, and proximity to the largest market in the country. These are things other communities invest considerable resources trying to create or attract. We already have them.

The challenges are real, but there is a lot within our control.

Housing is a big one. If the people working in our shops, restaurants, clinics and plants cannot afford to live here, we are limiting our local workforce and making it harder for employers to attract and retain people.

Employment land is another. We need to make sure we have serviced land available for businesses looking to establish or expand here. We cannot attract investment if we don't have somewhere for it to go.

Process matters too. Our approvals and permitting processes need to be more predictable and timely. Uncertainty and delays come at a cost, particularly for smaller businesses and applicants who don't have the resources to navigate a complicated process.

And there is one other challenge I would identify. I think we have sometimes allowed our thinking about economic development to become too closely tied to what may or may not happen at Wesleyville. Planning for that opportunity is absolutely important. But there are opportunities here today, for the businesses and residents who are already part of this community, and we need to be equally focused on those.

### **3. The Municipality's role with existing businesses and attracting new investment**

I think the municipality's most important contributions are often the fundamentals rather than grant programs. Land availability, servicing, approvals, infrastructure and creating the conditions for people to live and work here. These are things that make a real difference to businesses considering investing or expanding.

So I would focus on getting those fundamentals right. Making serviced employment land available, improving the predictability of approvals, and supporting a greater range of housing so employers can attract the workforce they need.

I also think we need strong working relationships between our economic development team, the Chamber and the HBIA. There is an opportunity to work more collaboratively around a shared vision for Port Hope, making the most of the resources and expertise each organization brings. For a municipality our size, coordination and avoiding duplication really matter.

On incentives, our Community Improvement Plan is a flexible tool that I think we could make better use of. It can support improvements to building facades, upper-storey conversions, accessibility upgrades and bringing vacant spaces back into productive use.

I also think the recent decision to defer development charges until occupancy is a good move. It recognizes that development comes with significant upfront costs and helps avoid adding to the financial pressure on a project before it is even ready to generate revenue. It's a practical way the municipality can help support development and investment.

I will be honest that economic development is not the area where I have spent the most time at the council table. What I bring to the conversation is a strong understanding of the planning and housing side of things, and I think those are fundamental to creating the conditions for economic development.

### **4. Accommodating growth while preserving what makes Port Hope distinctive**

I think this comes down to being thoughtful about where and how we grow, and being clear about the things we want to protect. People are drawn to Port Hope because of what makes this place special. We need to make sure that growth doesn't come at the expense of those very things.

For me, that means protecting Lakeshore West, looking north and east for appropriate opportunities, and working with our neighbouring municipalities to think about growth across the region rather than each municipality planning in isolation.

It also means completing our Official Plan and zoning by-law. These are important tools for establishing clear expectations about where growth should happen and what it should look like. Too much is currently worked out application by application, often under tight timelines. That can be frustrating for applicants and doesn't always give the community the clarity it deserves. Good planning, done in advance and with meaningful community input, is better for everyone.

I would also say that heritage and development are not opposing forces. In fact, adaptive reuse is one of the most practical and sustainable forms of development available to us. We have buildings that already exist, often with servicing and infrastructure in place, and opportunities to bring them back into productive use. That's good for our heritage, good for the environment and good for our downtown and neighbourhoods.

## **5. Services, infrastructure and policies most important to a healthy business environment**

Serviced land is a big one. Water and wastewater capacity in the right places determines what can be built and where. These are investments that take years to plan and deliver, so the decisions we make now will have a real bearing on the opportunities available to us over the next decade.

Predictable approvals are equally important. Businesses can plan around a known timeline. What is much harder to plan around is uncertainty. Clear rules, consistent processes and confidence in our staff's ability to make decisions within those rules can go a long way toward improving the experience for applicants.

Roads and infrastructure renewal matter too. We have a significant gap between what we have set aside and what it will cost to maintain and renew the infrastructure we already own. Deferred maintenance doesn't make those costs disappear. Eventually it means more disruption, closures, detours and emergency repairs. Investing in the infrastructure we have is not always the most visible work, but it is essential to a healthy community and local economy.

Housing comes up again, because it is so closely connected to the ability of local employers to recruit and retain workers.

And I would include transit. Getting people to work is an important part of a functioning local economy. For employers who are struggling to find staff, access to reliable transportation can make a real difference. We should be thinking about transit as part of our economic development infrastructure, not just as a municipal service.

## **6. Making sure businesses across the whole municipality are considered**

We do a good job of celebrating and supporting our downtown, as we should. But we also need to make sure that businesses elsewhere in the municipality are part of the conversation. That includes rural businesses and those along the Toronto Road, Peter Street and Croft Street corridors.

These areas are home to a significant amount of our employment and everyday commerce, and I am not sure they always receive the same attention. The recent closure of Giant Tiger was a reminder of how important it is to pay attention to the businesses that provide the everyday goods and services our residents rely on, as well as those that contribute to our sense of place and our tax base.

Rural businesses have some different needs, and many of the solutions are related to planning. We need a more modern approach to rural land severances and permissions for on-farm diversification and agri-tourism that reflect the ways farms are operating and generating income today.

We should also look at whether our zoning appropriately accommodates home-based businesses. People should be able to operate small businesses from their homes without having to navigate an unnecessary application process where the use is compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood.

The Rural and Agricultural Advisory Committee(s), which Councillor Darrell Toms and I brought forward through a motion that has now passed, will be implemented in some form in the next term. The committee(s) will give rural residents and the agricultural community a more consistent voice in municipal decision-making, with an opportunity to help shape the conversation rather than being brought in after proposals have already been developed.

This builds on work I've been involved in through the Northumberland Intermunicipal Taskforce on Housing Solutions and in empowering the Environmental Advisory Committee to play a greater role in advising Council and staff and advancing municipal work in sustainability. I would like to see us carry that kind of collaborative approach into other areas too. The people who are living and working in our community often have a very good understanding of what would help and they are willing to roll up their sleeves to move things forward.

## **7. Making planning, building and development more efficient and predictable**

This is probably the question I have spent the most time thinking about, and I am optimistic because we have already done a lot of the groundwork.

I helped establish the Northumberland Intermunicipal Taskforce on Housing Solutions and have co-chaired it for two years. We brought together people from across the housing and development sectors, including planners, building officials, realtors, housing providers, developers and lenders. The taskforce produced a report with a series of practical recommendations aimed at addressing barriers to housing and improving how we plan for and accommodate development. I was the lead author.

Those recommendations include greater flexibility in our zoning, allowing more housing options as of right rather than requiring a rezoning, including triplexes and fourplexes, more mixed-use zoning, modernizing our approach to rural land severances, and giving our planning staff greater discretion. I would like to see us move from recommendations to implementation.

The recommendations also include giving planning staff the discretion to fast-track designs and development plans that have already been reviewed and built elsewhere in our community. If a local builder is proposing the same building they have successfully built on another lot, it shouldn't necessarily mean starting the review process from scratch. There may be opportunities to save considerable time and expense while maintaining appropriate planning and building standards.

Ultimately, I think we have a real opportunity to make meaningful improvements without necessarily requiring significant new resources. Much of the groundwork has already been done, including by the people who work in and understand our local development sector. What we need now is to act on it.