

## 2SLGBTQIA+ Questionnaire for Waterloo Region Municipal Candidates

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**Do you identify as a member of a 2SLGBTQIA+ community?**

No

**What role are you running for?**

Ward 3 Councillor

**What do you believe are the most critical issues for the local 2SLGBTQIA+ community? If elected, how would you work with the local community to address these issues?**

The most critical issues for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community relates to safety. By "safety", I am talking about physical safety from intentional harm and also psychological and social safety for the freedom to feel comfortable to simply be ourselves without the risk of being targeted or "othered". We need to make it safer for members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to feel safe, welcomed and free to be themselves. With safer places, there will be more mentors for the young and fewer stereotypes. I remember a conversation several decades ago with a male office worker who felt an obligation to go to Gay Pride events so that the public would understand that there were gay men who are "boring and ordinary" as compared to the parade stereotype of that time, which was colourful and flamboyant. Until it is safe enough to "come out" everywhere to everyone, our community is not safe enough! The lack of safety impacts the quality of social interaction and the development of youth. Education, training and self-awareness about unconscious bias are remedies or antidotes for the attitudes which undermine social and physical safety for vulnerable people.

**Have you ever participated in 2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?**

Yes. I teach social service workers in college courses about social justice and have invested a considerable effort in training, research, workshops to be a better ally and to continue to explore my own areas for growth to increase self-awareness about unconscious bias and privilege. This is a journey and I am committed to continued self-development. I have participated in cultural competency training in the past and will continue to do so.

**Systemic homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are still prevalent in our community, resulting in significant socioeconomic disparities within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. If elected, how will you combat homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia?**

I had the privilege of participating in the citizen advisory committee for the Stronger Together initiative in November, 2018 which explored ways to help the City to be more welcoming and accessible, especially for residents from vulnerable or minority groups. Part of that initiative included Unconscious Bias Awareness training and this type of training needs to be offered regularly and periodically across the city and especially to new Councillors, Trustees and employees. The recent apology and comments by the Woolwich Councillor about rainbow crosswalks is an example about why education is necessary. As Councillor, I would continue my advocacy and ensure open communication with citizens, advocacy groups and their allies, staff and other Councillors to ensure the City policies and training programs are

regularly reviewed and updated to match current research for effective strategies to educate and facilitate a welcoming environment. There are also opportunities for education through City web-sites and communication to consistently send a message of kindness, respect and radical hospitality.

Hate, harassment, discrimination, disrespect are symptoms of deeply troubling problems and what is required is transformation in our culture – in schools, the city and the wider culture. The challenge is complex: this is not a simple problem easily “fixed” by a recipe; nor a complicated project like building a rocket ship with a team of experts. The relatively new field of social innovation provides insight into complex social problems (such as this one), which are like raising a child, which requires the whole village.

I currently teach college courses about social justice and change and I have over fifteen years of experience in mental health (including front line, supervisory and management roles). There is considerable research in this area: culture changes slowly over generations, beginning with clear and accountable civil rights laws and policies, modelling and mentoring by leaders, teachers, coaches and other significant adults and often by intergenerational discussions in homes where children and youth bring new perspectives from school and the community to start to soften old habits, assumptions and biases of parents and grandparents.

**If elected, how would you address the ongoing issues of homelessness and mental health, especially as they disproportionately affect members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?**

Much of my professional training and work experience is in the field of mental health services. In addition to teaching Social Service Worker courses as a college professor I have over 15 years' experience at the front-line and management in the mental health field. There is an unfortunate legacy of misguided treatment in the field of mental health and the impact needs to be recognized. Until relatively recently, gender identity and orientation were pathologized as a mental health disorder; finally conversion therapy has been discredited by legislation. We need to recognize the trauma arising out of this treatment history and the legacy with respect to social isolation, fear, social identity and internalized negative self-image. I was at an event before the pandemic at City Hall when researchers from one of the local universities shared data that seniors who are 2SLGBTQIA+ are often living as neighbours in seniors' residences with those who abused or bullied them earlier in life. The City has an important role in hosting and being an ally for sharing of research and for facilitating a change in culture.

There is extensive research connecting mental and physical health and the urgency of developing a health care system which supports preventative health measures in a treatment model to support resilience. Our current services fail as a system because it is disconnected with many gaps and mostly focuses on crisis response. Decreased funding at federal and provincial levels over decades has eroded the system.

Although mental health is mostly outside of the jurisdiction of the city, there is a role that municipalities can play, both with respect to advocacy to other levels of government and with respect to prevention and the facilitation of citizen wellness and resilience. There is research that truly inclusive community programs for recreational and sports activities and green spaces like city parks and tree-lined streets can create conditions to help people connect, mitigate social isolation and reduce stress.

**Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"**

Yes. I agree that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such". I also recognize that this protection was not formalized until 2017 when Bill C-16 specifically amended the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to include gender identity and expression. Municipalities and allies need to be very diligent in these early times to safeguard these rights which are not yet fully integrated into our culture.

**What is one motion would you bring to council that you think will improve the lives of specifically queer people, racialized individuals and/or marginalized residents and why?**

I have referenced a 2019 publication, by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, called LGBTQ2+ Inclusiveness Toolkit for Inclusive Communities in Canada and Beyond. The Stronger Together committee in which I participated as a citizen ally, helped facilitate the City of Cambridge Inclusion Action Plan, 2018. At the time, I was disappointed that the action plan did not fully integrate some important recommendations by our advisory committee.

Status updates have been published in 2019, 2020 and 2021 on the City Web-site. I would support a motion to re-visit the issue of inclusiveness to ensure that the City of Cambridge is fully participating to do everything a municipality can to be an inclusive community. Specifically I want to improve upon: workplace culture, hiring practices, resident protection & safety, inclusive infrastructure, community events & programs and especially resident consultation & engagement ( Toolkit, above, p7). The earlier action plan is a good start and hopefully creates conditions to deepen the consultation with marginalized communities so that we can fortify City commitment to inclusiveness and become a truly inclusive community.

**When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?**

It is crucial for young children to see themselves and their families in books and lessons. There was quite a bit of controversy at the provincial level with respect to inclusive curriculum about gender identity, expression and inclusiveness. I believe that there are significant areas for curriculum independence at the school boards and that, while this is primarily an issue for School Trustees, that Municipal Council can provide support. As mentioned above, changes in culture happen slowly and the City has a role in facilitating a kinder and more inclusive culture.