

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?

Kitchener City Council, Ward 1

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?

[Representation] While the participation of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in public life is much better than when I was a child in the 1970s and 1980s, I believe that we have a ways to go. Please have a read of my answer to the down-page question about my interest in City Hall School, as I think it could have a positive impact on representation in public life and the political system - locally, but also provincially and federally.

[Open Hate] I'm worried about the conflict that has been on display amongst the WRDSB trustees this year surrounding the erasure of certain identities (Woolwich Council also had an incident recently). There is a troubling trend of people saying the hateful part out loud, and we need more pushback. Whether it's a character in a book or a rainbow crosswalk, there are elements that are willing to openly question the value of acknowledging identity. I reject these points of view (including the so-called blueprint for Canada that some candidates have endorsed), and I will openly challenge them whenever and wherever I see them.

[Reconciliation] Finally, the people living at the intersection of 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous identities are deeply connected to issues of Reconciliation, including #LandBack. I know that some local activists have put together a proposal to make use of the space that was once the Charles St bus terminal, and even though that appears to me to be a Regional property I would support strong Indigenous participation in its redevelopment. At the same time, I think we must continue to amplify the discussion around removing celebratory symbols of colonialism from our public spaces. This includes the statue of Queen Victoria and the naming of certain public spaces. It's not going to be a quick public reflection, but I can imagine small steps. In Ottawa, where I grew up, some streets (Gladstone and Preston) have commemorative Italian names to reflect the local population. Let's start there and make it official that Victoria Park is also Willow River Park.

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

No, I don't believe that I have but would take every opportunity to develop this competency.

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've already typed a bit about pushing back on the disturbing trend of open and unapologetic hate that is directed at the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. I know that the City of Kitchener already has some programs designed to create safe spaces for this community such as the BE U swim program. I will work with the community and staff to refine programs such as these, adding new ones as we identify them. Listening to the voices of lived experience is important, as my own experience is not aligned even though my attitudes and intentions are.

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

While housing is often handed off to the regional government, I believe there is a lot that can be done at the city level, by the City of Kitchener and by a City Councillor. Through zoning and bylaw amendments, we can encourage and accelerate the development of a greater variety of housing styles. Some of these developments can and should be proximate to services and community spaces that are intended for groups such as the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In mixed-use developments, they could be in the same structure. The City can also make a concerted effort to support and defend the human rights of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, aligning with the work of activists and educators.

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

Yes, without hesitation or qualification.

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 would work to create "City Hall School" for Kitchener, like the one described in Dave Meslina's book "Teardown: Rebuilding Democracy from the Ground Up" (it's in chapter 2). He describes it as "...a full-size permanent classroom where students spend an entire week learning about democracy through a customised hands-on participatory curriculum." Intended as something that secondary students could take advantage of, I would like to extend this to include groups from under-represented (in the political system) communities such as the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Other communities that I would reach out to include newcomers, Indigenous people, and activist groups. I wouldn't stop at the creation of the program but would support it with my own time and experience. I believe that this intensive and inclusive approach would have a positive impact in our communities and for our communities, whether as part of local government or as activists or as community builders. I would hope to work on this in collaboration with educators and community leaders.

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?

Specifically to the question of books and lessons, Yes! The controversy that has distracted the local public school board is embarrassing to many of us that support a strong public education system. I can draw on my own experience raising my two children, now in grades 8 & 11. I've always believed that no topic or conversation is off-limits, but that the vocabulary is selected to suit that level of the student. Conversations around gender identity and sexual orientation have often been guided by specific experiences, interactions, and stories. I'm convinced that my kids are much further along in understanding the people around them than I was at their age.

I've touched on some of the areas that we could focus on in my other answers, and won't repeat myself here. These include targeted programs and activities for identifiable groups, and "City Hall School".