



GREEN ORILLIA 2026 ALL-CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was created by a group of local community organizers with [Green Orillia](#), with questions contributed by 12 local community organizations. We also crowdsourced question ideas through multiple call-outs to the broader community. It is intended to bring together a broad range of local perspectives and give Orillia residents a clearer picture of where candidates stand on issues that will shape the community over the next four years and beyond.

This is the second municipal election questionnaire produced by Green Orillia. During the 2022 Municipal Election, Green Orillia crowdsourced 32 questions with contributions from approximately a dozen local organizations and put them to all 30 registered candidates. All candidates were given one month to respond, and the completed responses were published publicly, giving residents a month to review candidates' answers before Election Day. 15 of the 30 candidates completed the questionnaire, including seven of the nine candidates who were ultimately elected ([see here](#)).

Candidates will have one month, from August 26 to September 26, 2026, to review and respond to this questionnaire. All submitted responses will then be published unedited and in their entirety on the Green Orillia website, social media platforms and email newsletter, which reaches nearly 1,000 engaged local subscribers. The community organizations that contributed questions will also be encouraged to share the completed questionnaire with their networks, which we estimate could collectively reach more than 5,000 community members. This will give residents approximately one month to review candidates' responses before Election Day on October 26, 2026.

This questionnaire covers a range of topics, many of which are ongoing Council items, and all are likely to arise during the next term of Council. In the interest of transparency and accountability, constituents must know where their candidates and future mayor and councillors stand on the given issues before they are elected. Despite there being 32 questions in this questionnaire, there are still many issues left unaddressed and questions we did not include for brevity. At the end, candidates have an opportunity to add additional thoughts.

Green Orillia will not edit, grade, judge or offer commentary on individual candidate responses. Candidates' responses—or lack thereof—will speak for themselves.

QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and why you believe you are qualified to serve on council:

My name is Mason Ainsworth, and I am approachable, accountable, and hard-working. My family has been in Orillia for more than five generations, and I have lived here for over 30 years, more than 20 of them in what is now Ward 2. I grew up at 252 Barrie Road and later on McKenzie Street. My wife and I have two boys, Seth and Lincoln.

I served two terms on Orillia City Council from 2014 to 2022. I understand how local government works, how to get results, and I can hit the ground running. I represented Orillia on the Association of Municipalities of Ontario Board of Directors and the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities Executive Committee.

Since then, I have worked in economic development with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. I hold a Master's in Economic Development and Innovation from the University of Waterloo and host the Hyper Local: Economic Development in Ontario podcast.

I have proven results, a fresh perspective, and am ready to serve.

2. AI DECLARATION: Please state whether you have used AI to answer this questionnaire and for your campaign - in what ways and why? Describe your relationship to AI and its role in municipal government.

Answer: I used it to check spelling and grammar for a couple of questions and did not have time to check the others (sorry in advance). AI can be great if actually used properly as a tool not a crutch. If you want more about how to use it in municipal government to speed things up and reduce costs, please check out my award-winning paper on my LinkedIn: "AI: Amplified Individuals and the future of Economic Development in the public sector."

3. Food affects everyone in Orillia. It influences whether families can afford groceries, children have access to healthy food, local businesses can thrive, and residents can easily reach food programs, markets, and how we care for the land, water, and natural resources that support food production. The [Orillia & Area Food Strategy](#), endorsed by Council in 2026, provides a community-developed roadmap for strengthening food access, local food

production, food literacy, food infrastructure, and the local economy. If elected, what is one specific action you would champion during your first term to help advance the Orillia & Area Food Strategy, and how would you measure success?
Question submitted by [OA Food Strategy](#)

ORILLIA AND AREA

Food Strategy

Answer: I would champion food waste, as someone who just completed a Sustainable Future Cities course during my Master's in Economic Development and Innovation (MEDI) at the University of Waterloo, where I also received the Award of Excellence from the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development (SEED). My final project was titled: "SDG LOCALIZATION IN THE CITY OF ORILLIA: FOOD, FACTS, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY"

Here is my Abstract for those interested in learning more down the road, seeing the paper, and helping with the problem. Also, the measurables are outlined within the report and are related to utilizing much of the data the city currently has and using low-cost mechanics and strategies to move the needle in the right direction and toward a more sustainable food future.

"ABSTRACT: Household food waste, particularly avoidable waste in homes caused by poor meal planning, inadequate storage practices, and limited awareness of best-before dates, represents a critical challenge for sustainable urban development. Globally, nearly one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted, generating substantial environmental, social, and economic burdens. Framed under SDG 2, Target 2.4, calling for sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices that maintain ecosystems and strengthen adaptation to climate change, the intervention is localized in Orillia, Ontario. Orillia recently declared a household food insecurity emergency affecting nearly one-third of households. This report defines the challenge using Brundtland's principle of intergenerational equity and maps its root causes through systems thinking, combining Malthusian and disaster risk reduction lenses alongside Meadows' leverage point of information flows. It examines the policy environment spanning international, national, and local strategies, analyzes synergies and manageable trade-offs. It details an SDG localization plan featuring accessible education programs and a user-friendly digital tool for meal planning, best-before awareness, and smart storage. Supported by stakeholder engagement and community-based monitoring, the project builds individual capacity per Gibson's

socio-ecological civility criteria, delivering measurable reductions in avoidable household food waste while advancing resilient food systems.”

4. Ontario's Strong Mayor legislation gives the Mayor powers that differ significantly from those of other members of Council, including the ability to propose certain by-laws that can pass with the support of more than one-third of Council, veto certain Council-approved by-laws, and propose and veto amendments to the municipal budget. Do you support these expanded powers? If elected, what safeguards or changes would you push to ensure they do not undermine the Council's role, public participation, or democratic accountability?

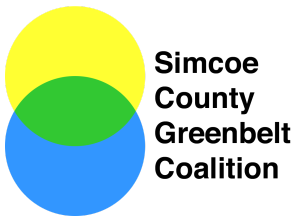
Answer: No, I would push for their removal. We have observed the negative impact of these powers firsthand in Orillia, and even at the Ontario Small Urban Municipal Conference, Orillia was referenced by many as an example of clear abuse of power.

5. What is your position on the proposed transfer of the Lakehead University lands for the new Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital? Do you support the City proceeding with the land transfer and related agreements? If elected, what would you do to ensure that the deal protects the public interest, provides appropriate value and accountability for publicly owned assets, and supports timely delivery of a new hospital and university expansion?

Answer: Get it done as soon as possible and get out of their way. We need a new hospital desperately, as well as the University to expand. Help them make it happen with zero cost to the taxpayer; no-brainer and a win-win scenario; it will attract additional investment to our community. Yes. Very simple: actually read the reports, make logical decisions, consult with the experts, and get involved in the process to make sure this happens and the hospital does not end up going to Barrie and Lakehead along with it. We need to think big picture, plan, and understand these are big stakes and big impacts for our community.

6. Complete communities are an urban and rural planning concept that aims to meet the basic needs of residents through integrated land-use planning, transportation planning and community design. As Orillia [implements its new Official Plan and plans for growth through its boundary expansion](#), how would you support the development of complete communities while accommodating appropriate intensification, a range of housing types and densities, and efficient use of existing and new infrastructure? What ideas do you have to ensure that growth in both the existing urban area and newly added lands creates complete, connected and sustainable communities? *Question supported by [Simcoe County](#)*

[Greenbelt Coalition](#), [Stop Sprawl Orillia Campaign](#), and [Lakehead University Student Union](#)



What a fantastic question (bravo!) I would need to do a ton of research and put together a substantial report on this to give you a full and worthwhile answer. However, as the campaign clock is ticking and there are 33 questions in this Q&A I need to be precise and general for you: Simply put: Good research, logical decision-making, and appropriate economic development and planning knowledge, with extensive stakeholder involvement and input in a time-sensitive frame. Tons of ideas and many around the importance of placemaking, strategic economic and workforce development, and Orillia being proactive, not reactive, to many scenarios. Things are moving quickly, and we need a council that can keep up, understand the information, make an informed, logical decision, and move on to the next task at hand. There is a lot of work to do, and we are already behind. We will also need all of your help. We need to do this as a community that is united, not divided and divisive.

7. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued [94 Calls to Action](#) to address the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. What specific actions would you take as a municipal councillor to advance reconciliation in Orillia? Please identify at least three Calls to Action that you believe the City can meaningfully advance, and explain what you would do to work toward their implementation.

Answer: Focus on relationship building within Orillia and the many Indigenous organizations that we could better support; also continue to build a positive relationship with members of Rama First Nation and their Band Council. Once these relationships are developed, we can all sit down and pick the top 3 together. My focus would be on economic reconciliation and ways to bring the community together, help people make money, and create jobs for our community.

8. The future of Orillia's Champlain Monument has become a highly contentious issue, raising questions about colonialism, Indigenous representation, reconciliation, heritage and the role of public monuments. What is your position on the future of the Champlain Monument? The dispute has also [significantly strained the City's relationship with the Chippewas of Rama First Nation](#). What

specific actions would you take to acknowledge the harm caused, rebuild trust, and establish a respectful Nation-to-Nation relationship with Rama First Nation going forward?

Answer: I want residents to be presented with clear information about the available options, costs, timelines, and potential outcomes before holding a citywide vote. To the other question, it's simple: build an actual relationship, show up, and work together for the betterment of both our communities.

9. There are four City-supported Community Gardens in Orillia (York Street; Hillcrest Garden; High Street; and Lakehead Community Garden), among numerous other community gardens tended to by church groups, schools and non-profits. Despite this, there is reportedly a waiting list for residents to access garden plots. Meanwhile, food prices continue to rise, worsening local food security. Are you committed to supporting both city-sponsored and community-based community gardens and expanding growing opportunities for people in Orillia? Would you support exploring the creation of a community farm or other larger-scale municipal growing initiative? What would you do to ensure that nobody in Orillia is waitlisted to access a place to grow food for their families?

Answer: Yes. Yes. Create a better local food system and use the latest technology to make it happen. We must move quickly as 1/3 of Orillia is food insecure. Now is the time to deal with these issues.

10. What actions would you recommend in order to educate residents about diversity and inclusivity in Orillia; and how should the City celebrate that diversity in an ongoing manner? *Question submitted by [Inclusive Orillia](#)*



Answer: Show up, support cultural events, learning opportunities, and encourage community building.

11. ARTS:

- a. What role do you believe arts, culture and heritage should play in the future of a small-to-mid-sized community like Orillia? In your response, please address the value of arts and culture as a contributor to local economic development and tourism, community wellbeing and quality of

life, and inclusion and accessibility. How should the City support and prioritize arts, culture and heritage alongside other municipal priorities?

Question submitted by [Orillia Museum of Art and History](#)



Answer (A): It's huge and a massive economic driver. Economic development must be prioritized, and part of that is supporting arts and culture. Plain and simple.

- b. How do you see the City of Orillia partnering with arts organizations to help ensure the successful delivery of financially accessible Youth programs in the Arts? Question submitted by [Arts Orillia](#)



Answer (B): Build the relationship and ask what is needed. Then help solve the issue.

12. Orillia faces significant challenges related to mental health, substance use, addiction and toxic drug poisoning. What specific actions would you take as a municipal councillor to help address these issues, including improving access to supports, reducing harm and preventing deaths? What role should the City play alongside community organizations and other levels of government?

Answer: Another super complicated question that needs research and a proper report. In the meantime: Orillia needs to support enforcing the laws, treat people with dignity, and get people the supports they need in their community. We need to rattle the cage, sound the alarm, and actually get some meaningful results.

13. What specific actions would you support to prevent and reduce homelessness in Orillia, expand access to emergency shelter and supportive housing, and help people experiencing homelessness move into stable housing? What role should the City play, and how would you work with community organizations and other levels of government?

Answer: Super complicated, as many experiencing homelessness are in the situation for different reasons (Job loss, mental health, addictions, brain injury, etc.). I recently spoke to Dale from the Lighthouse in a meeting, and it was a big

eye-opener. To keep things simple: More economic development, more jobs, more workforce development, keep supports funded for Orillia. Build a big systems map to understand the root issues and then actively work towards solving them. Happy to expand at a later date when more time is available.

14. Orillia adopted its [2023 Affordable Housing Action Plan](#) to address the local housing affordability crisis, and the City has an [Affordable Housing Working Group](#) that advises Council on affordable housing policies and development proposals. What specific actions would you take to advance the goals of the Action Plan and increase the supply of affordable housing, including deeply affordable, non-market, supportive and purpose-built rental housing?

Answer: Proud to have Chaired and founded the City's Affordable Housing Committee. It's simple: focus on economic development, getting vacant lands into production, and encouraging various housing types through strong, strategic community improvement plans.

15. What specific actions would you take to support renters, prevent renovations, address unsafe or poorly maintained rental housing, and protect Orillia's long-term rental stock?

Answer: We need to clean up Orillia, enforce the laws, and actively pursue slum lords. We have laws and need to make sure they are enforced.

16. Crime affects the safety, health and well-being of our community. What is your crime reduction strategy for Orillia?

Answer: Support the OPP, enforce the Law, and create economic opportunities for all.

17. In 2022, Orillia City Council adopted the [Age-Friendly Orillia Community Action Plan](#) to help create a more inclusive, accessible, and age-friendly community. If elected, what specific steps would you take to advance the municipal recommendations in the Action Plan, and how would you apply an age-friendly lens to future City of Orillia practices and policies? *Question submitted by [Age-Friendly Orillia](#)*



Answer: Create opportunities to bring people together, get involved, and create a more integrated and accessible City.

18. In light of the climate and biodiversity crises facing our community and the broader region, how do you intend to lead the City of Orillia toward a more sustainable future, including through proven nature-based climate solutions? How would you ensure that the City's commitments to its Natural Heritage System and natural heritage mapping are maintained and meaningfully integrated into municipal planning and decision-making, particularly where they may conflict with provincial directives, or with development proposals and private development interests? *Question submitted by [The Couchiching Conservancy](#)*



Answer: With logical, fact-based decision-making. Speak to the experts, understand the information, and get things done. We need to build infrastructure for tomorrow, build it to last, and build it for our new environmental reality.

19. According to a [2024 article](#), the Orillia landfill has an estimated life span of 40 years remaining, at the present rate of use. What is your plan to improve waste diversion in Orillia to achieve Zero Waste?

Answer: When I was on Council, we had the 2nd best waste diversion in Ontario. I would continue to support new technology, push for waste reduction, and empower our citizens to learn more and help with the battle.

20. What is your plan to improve public transit (the bus system) and active transportation (such as walking and cycling) in Orillia? Additionally, what would you do to improve regional and inter-city transit connections, including coordination with services such as Simcoe County LINX and GO Transit, so that residents can more easily travel between Orillia and surrounding communities and major regional centers?

Answer: The plan is simple: support them and look for ways to do it better. Regarding regional connectivity, we need to push for a more integrated system. I was successful when I pushed for the LINX system, and I will push for even better connectivity.

21. The City of Orillia has endorsed the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition's [Protect Our Plan: From Good Goals to Practical Progress](#), which identifies practical actions needed to strengthen protection of Lake Simcoe, including reducing phosphorus pollution, protecting natural heritage, improving stormwater management, and

ensuring growth does not come at the expense of the lake. If elected, how will you support implementing these recommendations through local planning and infrastructure decisions and advocate to the provincial government for the actions needed to better protect Lake Simcoe? *Question submitted by [Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition](#)*



Answer: I supported all of these items while on Council and was successful in getting millions approved in the budget cycle to invest in our wastewater management system to reduce phosphorus pollution. I will continue to be an advocate at Council, with the Province, and with the Federal government to protect our water.

22. Orillia has a history of formal youth engagement, including the Orillia Youth Opportunities Committee and, more recently, the Sunshine Youth Senate. In 2024, Council dissolved the Sunshine Youth Senate after concluding that a formal committee structure and meeting schedule were not effectively engaging young people, and that less-structured, activity-based opportunities were more successful ([see here](#), p. 21). Given this history, how would you ensure that young people are meaningfully represented and have a real voice in municipal decision-making? What role, if any, should a formal youth council or advisory body play, and how would you ensure it is accessible, representative and responsive to the diverse experiences of young people in Orillia?

Answer: We need a Youth Council and a Youth Mayor program to get youth involved, educated on government, and empower them to make a difference in the community they call home with our support. Each Councillor should be paired up with a Youth Councillor to provide mentorship and perspective.

23. On June 29, 2026, [council adopted Option 1](#) of report CS-26-30-A and committed to paying all full-time and permanent part-time employees a living wage of \$24.60 per hour, covering 291 full-time staff and 15 permanent part-time staff at a cost of about \$15,000 a year. Council did not adopt Option 2, which would have extended the living wage to the roughly 500 part-time, casual and seasonal staff the City employs, or Option 3, which would have added the 1,008 contractors

and vendors providing services to the City. Those were costed at \$1.45 million and more. As a result, Orillia is not a certified living wage employer at any level. Would you support extending the living wage to the City's casual and seasonal employees and requiring living-wage provisions in City service contracts and procurement? The living wage rate is recalculated annually in November; would you support automatically adjusting the City's living-wage commitment when the rate changes?

Answer: Sadly, I can not give an informed answer based on the information provided due to this section of the question: "requiring living-wage provisions in City service contracts and procurement." This dramatically changes the question and the potential impact on the city, its ability to get work done, etc. What I can say is that I support better-than-living-wage jobs. This is why we need strong economic development.

24. How is [Orillia's Climate Change Action Plan](#) incorporated into your platform? If elected, what specific actions would you initiate or support to revitalize and implement the plan? *Question submitted by [Sustainable Orillia](#)*



**Sustainable
Orillia**

Answer: We need to support our environment, and my literature speaks directly to this. We need factual, logic-driven solutions that make an actual impact in our community, not just greenwash it.

25. Downtown Orillia is at a [crossroads](#), with the Downtown Tomorrow project reduced from \$50 million to \$18 million and ongoing questions about the timing of underground infrastructure replacement. What is your vision for a vibrant, successful downtown Orillia, and how would you balance investment in streetscape improvements, infrastructure renewal, fiscal responsibility, and the needs of downtown businesses and property owners?

Answer: We need to support and fully revitalize the downtown. We also need to pair this with a strong downtown dig program, enhanced community improvement plans, and a designated construction liaison position to make sure the project is on track, people get up-to-date communications, and we can keep our business open, attract new ones, and get the job done.

26. Orillia's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is a provincially mandated committee that advises Council on the identification, removal and prevention of

barriers for people with disabilities. The City also has a [2023–2028 Accessibility Plan](#), developed and reviewed by the AAC, to guide the City's work on preventing and removing accessibility barriers. What specific actions would you take as a councillor to advance the City's accessibility commitments? How would you ensure that Council meaningfully considers and acts on the advice of the AAC?

Answer: Council should support creating a fully accessible City and Downtown.

27. Orillia continues to face significant needs for road and sidewalk maintenance. In 2026, [Council voted](#) 5-4 to add \$700,000 to the budget for roads and sidewalk repairs, which would have resulted in a 1% tax increase (the decision was subsequently vetoed by the Mayor using the City's new strong-mayor powers, and Council was unable to override the veto). What is your approach to funding the City's roads and sidewalks over the next four years? How would you determine what should be repaired or replaced now versus deferred, and what level of tax increase, reserves, or other funding would you consider appropriate to ensure Orillia's infrastructure does not fall further behind?

Answer: Fund it, and actually follow the policy to do it on a logical priority basis. The level of support and budget amount would be TBD as it's a Council decision, but it must go up.

28. During the last two winters, Orillia has received record amounts of snowfall, leading to significant challenges in maintaining safe and accessible roads, sidewalks, parking lots and driveways. What is your plan to improve winter snow removal to ensure safety and affordability?

Answer: It's not rocket science: Increase funding, have stronger oversight, and do it logically. There are also new and old technologies to make it better; we need to actively research and talk about them. Winter is coming! (GOT reference).

29. What specifically should the City of Orillia do to strengthen the local economy?

Answer: Listen to my Hyper Local: Economic Development in Ontario podcast. Take the best ideas, support our economic development department, and actually implement them. A quick top 3 general ideas: Support Workforce Development, Support Business Retention and Expansion efforts, and actively pursue Canadian and Foreign Direct investment to bring more jobs and housing.

30. What is your plan to increase public participation in decision-making processes in the City and strengthen local democracy?

Answer: I will host Ward 2 ward meetings throughout the year, create a citywide newsletter with members of Council to keep people informed, and create a new

Orillia-specific podcast to teach people about government, the city, and how to get more involved, etc.

31. How do you plan to promote fiscal responsibility while on City Council to ensure our limited resources are spent effectively? Are there areas where you would prioritize reducing or increasing municipal spending?

I always promote fiscal responsibility and did during my 8 years on Council, saving the citizens millions of dollars and pointing out millions in waste. I would continue to be the financial watchdog for the taxpayer. Yes, we need to invest more in economic development and other areas with a strong return on investment; we also need to reduce “pet projects” that don’t make logical sense.

32. Finally, is there anything else you’d like to add about your policy priorities and what you hope to accomplish?

Answer: If you live in Ward 2 and would like to learn more, please email me at VoteAinsworth@gmail.com or call me at 705826-4967, and we can arrange a time to speak. Sadly, the time for these questions was limited, as I could greatly expand on all of the answers. But time is tight, and this is our starting point. If you want more, reach out directly.