

2SLGBTQIA+ Questionnaire for Waterloo Region Municipal Candidates

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

Yes

What role are you running for?

Ward 4 Councillor - Waterloo

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?

I think that there needs to be very explicit care to give 2SLGBTQIA+ youth (especially trans, non-binary, 2 spirit youth) consistent spaces in which to connect with their community. 2SLGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk for developing mental illnesses and experiencing abuse or bullying, but finding community can be very difficult. I believe that having expanded permanent, diverse, and consistent safe spaces for people to access both to connect with others and services is critical for the health both of the community and individuals.

To this end, I also think that there needs to be greater support for people and organisations currently doing work on the ground. I don't feel like at this time I can give a clear answer of what exactly that support is because I feel very strongly that the direction and type of support should be decided by members of the community. I think that, broadly speaking, there is a really critical need to expand public services as a means of removing the burden of providing social assistance to vulnerable peoples from volunteers and/or non-profits with limited grant funding. I also think it is critical to take policy proposals that community organisations have already developed to heart and to implement them as best as possible. The community knows best and there are people spending thousands of hours in the community identifying issues and developing networks through which to resolve them - there is no need to 're-invent the wheel' so to speak and I feel that for me to try to figure out what supports the community needs the best course of action is to ask what needs exist and to work to meet those needs and actualise the proposals and policies the community puts forward.

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

I have done anti-oppression training three times which includes content on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues.

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 think that this is a really complicated question - it needs to be fought through every day actions by creating policies to make sure council and City offices are inclusive and accessible spaces, and by upholding and pushing through proposals brought forward by community organisations.

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

I would work to create and expand programs and services currently geared towards supporting unhoused people. I think there is an extreme need to expand municipal construction and investment in subsidized housing, for example, and a need to support the development of alternative housing models like co-operatives which are community centred. Not to be too repetitive, but I would also support initiatives put forward by community organisations to address these issues, and I would be in favour of creating permanent, official group for unhoused persons and other equity deserving/marginalised people to provide input and direction on housing issues.

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

Yes

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 do not have any draft motions yet. Frankly, before drafting any motions my priority would be to reach out to SPECTRUM (and other community organisations) to have a meeting to ask what types of change and policies they would like to see, or which they have already drafted. I think it would be a disservice for me to propose a motions without having first consulted with any representative body for the community. That being said, I would be interested in motions that would create alternative sorts of community space, establish a grant for 2SLGBTQIA+ projects, which would make changes to the city's heritage policy to better reflect diverse, intangible heritage (eg Points of Pride in Hamilton, and other queer mapping projects across the country), and which would create accessible and inclusive community specific resources. I think it would also be interesting to explore ways to create opportunities for people from these communities to sit on community specific advisory boards or committees, at present there are regional equity committees but none for the City of Waterloo itself - increasing representation at the city level would be an important way to increase visibility for these issues.

I am also interested in finding creative solutions to help Waterloo become a more inclusive city.

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?

Yes. I would support 2SLGBTQIA+ policies and measures to help support youth at all grade levels. I apologise that my action plan is not yet developed, but I would tackle this issue by reaching out to community groups and doing everything in my power to turn their concerns into action, and to implement their proposals. Something I take pride in, although it might be out of place in municipal politics, is that I am very willing to admit that I am not an expert on every issue, and I feel strongly that it is a representative's job to recognise that community members are experts in their own communities and to directly translate their demands into action.

Broadly, however, I am happy to be a vocal advocate in opposition of regressive removal of 2SLGBTQIA+ content and conversations from schools and in favour of creating more inclusive school environments.