Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty

POVERTY TO POSSIBILITY

Aylmer Candidate Guide

Get to know your candidates!

Get to Know Your Candidates

An informed community is a stronger community. The Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty believes that when voters have access to clear information about the issues that matter most, they can make more informed decisions at the ballot box.

To help support informed voting, we invited all registered candidates to respond to four questions focused on issues related to poverty, housing, affordability, and community well-being in Elgin County and St. Thomas.

This package contains the responses we received from candidates, along with a brief overview of the Coalition's priorities. Our goal is not to endorse any candidate or political party, but to provide voters with information that may help them better understand where candidates stand on issues that affect our community.

All certified candidates are listed in this package. Where responses were submitted, they are included as provided by the candidate. Blank sections indicate that no response was received by the submission deadline.

We encourage you to review the responses, learn more about the candidates, and most importantly, participate in the democratic process by voting.

Together, **informed voters** help build a stronger, more equitable community for everyone.

Scan Here for more info!

Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty

Our Vision: Elgin St. Thomas is a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive because no one lives in poverty.

Visit our website for more information: povertycoalition.ca

Candidate Questions & Responses

Becky Simons, Aylmer

1	Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step. Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?	I do support the living wage for all communities. With that said, as a business owner, I also understand it is not that simple! There are small business in our area that pay staff as much as they can, and they themselves (business owners) are having to use community resources to allow their families/themselves the ability to eat, have shelter and have basic needs. I would love to continue speaking with small businesses and allowing for their voices to be heard and recognized as well, in the change for all to succeed. Balance is key to allow for security and need fulfillment. It is not just one scenario but many varieties all with equal value.
2	It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need. How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?	Although they have and seem to continue the housing increase. I do wish to work more closely and build connections with builders, planners and resource groups to really assess the growing needs of our community. As well as speaking with residents about how their day to day lives and stresses could be assessed and improved. Work in partnership with the frontline resource groups to understand and gather information so together we could see better perspective and allow for more efficient planning and results. I am a member of this coalition and am wishing to work towards becoming more established with The Family Central as well as ECAP.
3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	Become that presence needed in our municipality and work with all of the valuable resources to seek more attention to the needs of our community. To continue my work with connections and bring in more partnership and representation of our municipality with Elgin/St. Thomas organizations/ resources as well as provincial to be seen, be heard and bring support. Speak and build relationships of trust and action to bring results. As well as bringing awareness to our community about where to find this information more readily, so we are able to assess the needs and issues of our community for its actual needs not assumptions of its needs. The Family Central and the Aylmer food Bank among others, are amazing supports for our community and they need to feel more supported by the town.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	Although this is a more difficult situation the more rural your community is. It is even more difficult for residents to receive the needs and requirements they need due to the accessibility to transportation. I know this has been conversation many times in our meetings. With that the importance is greatly there. I am in understanding as well it certainly is not that simple. It takes many building blocks, funds, supports and planning. But things I would all be committed to as accessibility to transportation in a rural community is a basic need and all are deserving.
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?	Yes.

Candidate Questions & Responses

Jamie Chapman Aylmer

1 Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step.

Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?

My concern is that the minimum wage was never intended to be a final or permanent wage. It is generally an entry-level wage that allows businesses to hire inexperienced workers, train them, and help them advance into more skilled positions. If the minimum wage continues to increase substantially, it may become more difficult and expensive for businesses to hire and train people with little or no experience.

I do support income subsidies that help bring low-income workers up to a livable income. However, continually requiring small businesses and municipalities to raise wages can also make life less affordable for everyone. Higher labor costs may lead to higher taxes, prices for goods and services, and operating costs. As a result, wage increases may be partly canceled out by the rising cost of living.

A better approach may be to combine a reasonable minimum wage with targeted income supports, such as tax credits or wage subsidies, while considering regional differences and the needs of small businesses.

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2 It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need.
How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?

As a lower-tier municipality, I recognize that we do not control all the tools needed to address affordable housing and homelessness. Social services are primarily delivered through the County and the City of St. Thomas, and much of the region's existing rental housing is concentrated in St. Thomas. However, municipalities still have an important role to play in creating the conditions for more affordable housing to be built and maintained.

First, I would use municipal tax tools and incentives to make affordable rental housing more financially viable. Where permitted, the municipality can consider property-tax reductions, deferrals, or other incentives for developments that provide a meaningful number of long-term affordable rental units. The goal would be to make affordability part of the development proposal from the beginning, rather than trying to create affordable housing after a project is approved.
Second, I would use our planning and development tools to encourage a greater mix of housing. This could include supporting higher-density development where appropriate, permitting a wider range of housing forms such as secondary units, townhomes, small apartment buildings and mixed-use developments, and working to reduce unnecessary delays and costs in the approval process. When developments are proposed, the municipality should also look for opportunities to encourage a portion of the units to remain affordable.

Third, I would focus on partnerships, because homelessness and housing insecurity cannot be solved by a lower-tier municipality acting alone. We should work closely with the County, St. Thomas, local housing providers, non-profit organizations, developers and community agencies to identify gaps and coordinate resources. Our municipality can bring land, planning expertise, tax tools and local knowledge to the table while larger partners bring housing programs, social services and other supports.

Finally, I would focus on prevention as well as new construction. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is essential, but so is keeping people housed. Municipal decisions should consider the impact of property taxes, development policies and community growth on the supply of rental housing. Where possible, we should support programs that preserve existing affordable rental units and encourage landlords and developers to maintain them as long-term housing.

The municipality's role is not to replace the County's social-service responsibilities or try to solve homelessness independently. Our role is to use the tools we do have—tax policy, planning, approvals, municipal land, incentives and partnerships—to increase the supply of housing that residents can afford.

In short, I would use municipal resources to make affordable housing easier to build, more attractive to develop, and more sustainable to maintain, while working with the County and other partners to address the support services required to reduce and ultimately prevent homelessness.

Jamie Chapman, Aylmer, Continued

3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	Access to affordable, healthy food is important to every community. As a municipality, there are several ways we can help make it easier for residents to access food locally. Through planning and zoning, we can make it easier for grocery stores, farmers' markets, community gardens, and other food-related businesses to locate and operate in Aylmer. Through licensing, we can look at ways to make the process as straightforward as possible for local food businesses, while still maintaining the necessary health and safety standards. Through partnerships and municipal funding, we can support community gardens, farmers' markets, food programs, and local organizations that are working to improve food access. We should also look for opportunities to work with the County and other levels of government to bring additional resources into our community. I believe the Town's role is to remove unnecessary barriers, encourage local food options and support community partnerships. We may not be able to control food prices, but we can take practical steps to improve access and make Aylmer a community where residents have more choices for affordable food.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	Aylmer currently does not have public transit, and I believe better transportation options to St. Thomas would make a real difference for our residents. Affordable transportation can help people get to work, appointments, shopping, education and other activities without having to rely on a personal vehicle or someone else for a ride. This is something that is already being looked into, but it would be a County-led project. As a Town Councillor, I would support working with the County and other partners to explore practical transportation options that could better connect Aylmer and St. Thomas. Good transportation is about more than getting from one place to another. It is about creating greater access to employment, services and opportunities for the people who live in our community.
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?	Unsure

Candidate Questions & Responses

Kathryn Derosiers, Aylmer

1	Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step. Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?	To my knowledge, the Town of Aylmer already compensates its employees at or above the living wage standard, although I am not aware whether the municipality is formally certified as a Living Wage Employer. I would support pursuing certification. Municipalities should lead by example as responsible employers, and ensuring employees earn a wage that reflects the actual cost of living supports workers, families and the broader local economy.
2	It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need. How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?	As a municipality, we should focus on the tools within our control while advocating for additional resources where they are needed. I would support planning policies that encourage a greater variety of housing, including rental units, attainable housing and appropriate higher-density development. I would also look for opportunities to use municipal land, incentives and partnerships to support affordable housing projects where there is a demonstrated need and a responsible financial plan. At the same time, housing alone does not address homelessness. Supportive housing, mental health, transportation and other community supports must be part of the conversation .Over the past four years on Council, I have worked collaboratively with local service providers and have advocated for stronger communication and coordination among our social service partners. I would continue building on those relationships to identify gaps, pursue available funding and develop practical solutions that support long-term housing stability.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	In a smaller municipality like Aylmer, I believe we need to look beyond our municipal boundaries and explore regional solutions. I would support further investigation into regional transit opportunities, including exploring a partnership with the City of St. Thomas and neighbouring municipalities. Better connections between Aylmer, St. Thomas and surrounding communities could provide residents with greater access to employment, healthcare, education and services while sharing costs and resources across municipalities. Any transit solution must also be financially sustainable. I would want to understand ridership needs, costs, available provincial and federal funding, and opportunities to build on existing transportation services before committing taxpayers to a new program.
3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	As a municipality, we should focus on the tools within our control while advocating for additional resources where they are needed. I would support planning policies that encourage a greater variety of housing, including rental units, attainable housing and appropriate higher-density development. I would also look for opportunities to use municipal land, incentives and partnerships to support affordable housing projects where there is a demonstrated need and a responsible financial plan. At the same time, housing alone does not address homelessness. Supportive housing, mental health, transportation and other community supports must be part of the conversation .Over the past four years on Council, I have worked collaboratively with local service providers and have advocated for stronger communication and coordination among our social service partners. I would continue building on those relationships to identify gaps, pursue available funding and develop practical solutions that support long-term housing stability.
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if	Yes

Candidate Questions & Responses

Bryanna Kamermans, Aylmer

1	Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step. Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?	I would support it, as for Aylmer that would be a $2-3 raise for minimum wage workers. These employers could apply this after a time the employee was employed. Further we could show recognition for these employers by: - For example, an annual recognition at a Council meeting or community event. - Put certified employers on a page of the Town's website. -This costs very little but gives businesses positive public recognition.
2	It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need. How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?	I believe we need to look at a range of housing options, including smaller and more affordable units, while making sure new development fits within the character and infrastructure capacity of our community. Which I feel like over the last 10y Aylmer has been helping that by building apartments and town houses.
3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	The Town cannot solve food insecurity on its own, but we can support the organizations already doing this work and look for ways to make it easier for residents to access available resources. I would support partnerships with local food banks, community organizations, businesses and Elgin County to strengthen food-support programs and make sure residents know what resources are available to them. I would also love to look into to back yard chicken bi-laws and putting in place a program where residents can receive a free vegetable or fruit baring plant every spring to benefit residents and a learning opportunity for children.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	As of now Aylmer has no public transportation, I would love to see over the years a part time bus. This bus would go up Talbot street from EESS to PetValue. Then also make a route from the Aylmer Fire station to nofrills groceries. I think providing this even 2 days a week from 8-5pm would allow residents to have more accessibility to the growing towns resources and jobs.
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?	Yes

Candidate Questions & Responses

Ted McDonald, Aylmer

1	Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step. Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?	As an employer, the Town of Aylmer should support a living wage for their employees and I would support this.
2	It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need. How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?	There are private organizations such as Cherry Street that provide lower income rental units. The municipality should support these non-profits and for profit organizations that try to meet these needs. The municipality should use whatever resources they have to cut development charges, building permit fees, etc. to encourage these entities to provide low income housing.
3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	In Aylmer, the Corner Cupboard and the Family Central are two of the resources that help with affordable food. The Town of Aylmer should encourage and support these organizations in a meaningful way.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	The Town of Aylmer has no public transit and I am not sure that this would be a feasible option for the town to explore
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?	Yes

Candidate Questions & Responses

Peter Blain, Aylmer

1	Living wages help people meet basic needs and strengthen local communities. Municipalities can show leadership by becoming Certified Living Wage Employers. Six municipalities in Ontario have already taken this step. Please tell us why you would or would not support St Thomas/your municipality becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer?	I would support Aylmer exploring Living Wage Employer certification, provided Council confirms the costs are reasonable and sustainable. Fair wages help employees meet basic needs while attracting and retaining qualified staff.
2	It is projected that our region will need significantly more affordable rental and supportive housing over the next 10 years. Municipal tools such as land use, partnerships, rent supports, and tenant protections can help address this need. How would you use municipal tools and resources to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness?	I would support more flexible zoning, faster approvals and partnerships with Elgin County, senior governments, nonprofits and responsible developers. Municipal incentives should require long-term affordability. We must also support coordinated housing, mental-health, addiction and outreach services while ensuring growth does not exceed our infrastructure capacity.
3	Food insecurity is growing in our community, driven by low incomes and limited access to affordable food. How would you use municipal planning, zoning, licensing, and funding to improve access to affordable food?	I would support zoning and licensing that encourage community gardens, farmers' markets and local food vendors. I would also work with community organizations to improve access to food programs and pursue available funding, while keeping municipal costs responsible and sustainable.
4	Affordable, reliable transit helps people get to work, school, appointments, and other essential services. Transit is a public service that should serve all residence equitably. What would you do to improve transit service and keep it affordable and accessible?	I would support working with Elgin County and neighboring municipalities to improve affordable regional transit connections. Priorities should include accessible vehicles, practical routes and schedules, and links to employment, healthcare, education and essential services. Any expansion must be based on demonstrated need and sustainable funding.
5	Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?	Yes

ELGIN ST. THOMAS COALITION TO END POVERTY

POVERTY TO POSSIBILITY

Working together. Creating change.
Building a community where everyone thrives.

OUR MISSION

The Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty is a community alliance whose mission is to work collaboratively to eliminate poverty in our communities through sustainable solutions.

OUR FOCUS:

Seven interconnected action areas that address the root causes of poverty and create lasting change.

- Transportation
- Housing
- Income Support
- Pathways to Employment
- Community Connectedness
- Amplifying Community Voices

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Diverse Membership Open to municipal leaders, front-line service providers, local business and government representatives, healthcare professionals, and passionate citizens.

Lived Experience Coordination committees and working groups actively center the voices of individuals with lived and living experiences of poverty.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY

- 2018 Transportation Leadership Workshop
- 2019 Deputation to City Council around a Living Wage
- 2020 Vulnerable person task force in response to COVID-19 pandemic
- 2021 St. Thomas Elgin Symposium on women's experiences of homelessness
- 2022 All Candidates Forum during the federal election
- 2023 Community Forum on local experiences of homelessness
- 2024 Community Consultation Symposium on Poverty – local challenges and opportunities for poverty reduction
- 2026 Social Issues are Business Issues – spotlight on housing stabilization
- **Annual flag raising at City Hall** for the International Day to Eradicate Poverty as well as participation in Living Wage education, announcements and celebration of local certified living wage employers.

COMMUNITY SUCCESSES

BUILT FOR ZERO

Members participate in this ambitious, data-driven initiative to end chronic and veteran homelessness through a centralized, coordinated access system. The region successfully ended veteran homelessness, hitting rigorous "Functional Zero" metrics.

HOUSING STABILITY MILESTONES

Through the Built for Zero framework, St. Thomas-Elgin achieved a recognized Quality By Names List and has successfully supported hundreds of individuals and families in transitioning out of homelessness. New housing investment and development by Indwell, Eastwood Housing, Fresh Start Support Services and YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin along with additional shelter beds created at The Inn.

FOOD PROVIDERS NETWORK

Formed to address local food insecurity, coordinate emergency meals, food bank resources, and grassroots food distribution.

POVERTY AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

The coalition shares strategic social media updates and advertising campaigns featuring local statistics and stories to reduce stigma and promote positive change.

HISTORIC POVERTY REDUCTION

The St. Thomas and Elgin County region successfully reduced its overall poverty rate by **50%** in the last 10 – 15 years.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

- CTV – Heartbeat Away from Homelessness
- The Spec – St. Thomas Supports Day to Eradicate Poverty
- St. Thomas Today – Day Long Consultation aims to transform poverty to possibility
- Living Wage Ontario Network
- Coalition to End Poverty Facebook

Stronger together.
Poverty to Possibility.

By working collectively, listening to lived experience, and investing in sustainable solutions, we can build a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.