



Elgin St. Thomas
Coalition to
End Poverty

POVERTY TO
POSSIBILITY

Central Elgin 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.

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



Scan Here
for more info!



Candidate Questions & Responses

Linda Westaway, Central Elgin, Ward 2



- 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?

The living wage for the London-Elgin-Oxford region is currently \$21.75 per hour, while Ontario's minimum wage will increase to \$17.95 per hour on October 1, 2026.

I believe that fair wages are important in helping employees and families manage the rising cost of living. At the same time, as a municipal decision-maker, I believe it is important to understand the financial implications of any new commitment.

I would research the costs, benefits and challenges associated with becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer, including the potential impact on municipal operations, employees and taxpayers.

With a clear understanding of the information, I would make an informed and responsible decision that balances supporting employees with responsible management of public funds.

- 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 Elgin County, St. Thomas and area municipalities and community organizations have an important role to play in working together to address the need for affordable and supportive housing in our region.

I would work collaboratively with municipal partners, community organizations and housing providers to better understand the current supply of subsidized and affordable housing available for families, individuals and seniors, and identify where gaps exist.

I would also review the progress and outcomes of the Housing Accelerator Fund and the City's targets for new housing, including the creation of affordable units. In addition, I would look at existing tools and programs such as affordable housing grants, rent supplements and supportive housing initiatives.

By understanding what programs are currently available, what is working and where the greatest needs exist, we can identify opportunities to make better use of the municipal tools and resources available to us.

My goal would be to work with others to support practical solutions that increase access to safe, affordable rental housing for working individuals, families and seniors while ensuring responsible use of public resources.

Linda Westaway, Central Elgin, Ward 2 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?

Food security is an important issue in our community, and I believe the first step is understanding the current needs. I would speak with individuals at the Health Unit, members of the local food providers network, including the St. Thomas-Elgin Food Bank, and review the Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan to gather current information about food insecurity in our area. From this information, I would work with local organizations, community partners and individuals to understand where the greatest needs exist and support the important work that is already underway. I would also look for opportunities to bring people and organizations together to build on existing programs and identify practical ways that municipalities and community partners can work together to strengthen food security throughout our region. A huge thank you to Harvest Hands and the amazing volunteers who give their time and energy to support individuals and families experiencing food insecurity throughout our community. Their work demonstrates what can be accomplished when people come together to help their neighbours.

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- 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 review the Transit Master Servicing Plan to better understand the current challenges, needs and opportunities within our transit system. As Elgin-St. Thomas continues to grow, I believe we need to plan ahead for how transit can best serve our residents. I would listen to residents and work with municipal partners and transportation providers to identify current gaps and future needs, and develop a practical plan for transit that supports our growing communities. Good planning today can help ensure that future transit services are accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of our residents.

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- 5 Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?

Yes

Candidate Questions & Responses

Tom Marks, Central Elgin, Ward 4



- 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?

Paying a fair wage to employees helps attract and keep good people. Constant turnover in staff creates problems. Working coop

- 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?

Working and cooperating with the city and neighboring municipalities always provides the best results. More effort in this area needs to be encouraged.

- 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?

Until the federal government succeeds in getting a trade deal with our American neighbors local municipalities will continue to struggle with these problems. Expanding bus service

- 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?

Expanding bus services to built up areas around the city will help but cooperation is needed to make it happen.

- 5 Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?

Yes

Candidate Questions & Responses

Leigh Mauer, Central Elgin, Ward 4



- 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 having Central Elgin investigate becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer. People who work for our municipality should be able to meet their basic needs and participate fully in the community they serve. Before making a final commitment, I would want Council to receive a transparent staff report outlining the current wage structure, certification requirements, financial implications and any effect on contracted services. This would allow Council to make an informed and fiscally responsible decision. Fair compensation can help attract and retain qualified employees, reduce turnover and strengthen the quality and continuity of municipal services. Supporting employees and managing public funds responsibly should not be viewed as competing priorities. With careful planning and open discussion, I believe Central Elgin can demonstrate leadership as a fair and responsible employer.

- 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?

Affordable housing and homelessness are complex issues requiring cooperation among Central Elgin, Elgin County, St. Thomas, senior governments, community organizations and housing providers.

If elected, I would work to better understand Central Elgin's role and carefully consider practical options within the municipality's authority and financial capacity. This could include reviewing planning and zoning policies, identifying barriers to appropriate housing development and considering responsible partnership opportunities as they arise.

Any proposal should be supported by reliable information, clearly defined responsibilities and a transparent assessment of costs and long-term implications. I would approach these decisions with compassion, an open mind and a commitment to responsible use of municipal resources.

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- 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?

Food insecurity is primarily an income issue, but municipalities can still help remove barriers and strengthen local access to affordable food.

I would support planning and zoning policies that allow community gardens, farmers' markets, farm stands and other community-based food initiatives in appropriate locations. Central Elgin can also protect agricultural land, support local producers and make it easier for residents to connect with locally grown food.

Through its community grant program and partnerships, the municipality can consider supporting organizations that provide community meals, food distribution, gardening programs and food-skills education. Municipal facilities or underused public spaces might also be made available for appropriate community food programs.

Central Elgin should consult directly with residents experiencing food insecurity, local farmers, food banks and community agencies before deciding where municipal resources will have the greatest impact. Any funding decisions should be transparent, measurable and coordinated with existing services so that limited municipal dollars strengthen successful programs rather than duplicate them.

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- 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?

Transportation is a significant challenge in a municipality containing rural areas and several distinct communities. A conventional fixed-route system may not be practical everywhere, but the need for affordable and accessible transportation is real—particularly for seniors, people with disabilities, youth and residents without vehicles.

I would support working with Elgin County, St. Thomas and neighbouring municipalities to assess regional connections and identify gaps in access to employment, medical appointments, education, shopping and essential services. Options should include demand-responsive or on-demand transit, community transportation partnerships and improved connections to existing services. Future growth, including the hospital lands, should be designed from the beginning to be transit-ready, walkable and accessible. Before expanding a service, Council should examine ridership needs, operating costs, available grants and opportunities to share costs with regional partners. Any transit plan must be both useful to residents and financially sustainable. I would also support regular public consultation and service reviews so routes, hours and fares reflect actual community needs.

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- 5 Would you support the principles outlined above if elected?

Yes

ELGIN ST. THOMAS COALITION TO END POVERTY

*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.