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2022 Municipal Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name:

Municipality

Date:

Elizabeth Van Houtte

Orillia (Simcoe County)

September 6, 2022

Please return the completed questionnaire to the sender as soon as possible, but no later than September 15, 2022. The answers will then be posted on the AWARE Simcoe website.

N.B: As this is a Word document, you can take as much space as you wish to respond.

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1. AWARE Simcoe considers the preservation of farmland, the protection of water resources and natural heritage, and providing transparency and accountability in government decision making to be the primary issues of this election.

Our goal is to elect representatives who support those objectives. Do you agree with this?

Of course. My campaign is based on accountability in government and on the knowledge that we, as humans, need to interact much more faithfully with our surroundings (all of them).

2. Do you feel there is a need to protect water, wetlands and recharge areas from development, aggregate extraction and other intrusive activities in your municipality? If so, how will you achieve this?

Water is essential, as we can all see from the various problems associated with NOT having clean, available water (or too much, as with current flooding). Aggregate extraction can be required to recycle the water they use if there is a municipal will to do so.

Developments can be made eco-friendly, again, if there is a will to do so and not simply grab at any tax rate offered by the developers. Orillia has a good number of retired professionals who can assist with this. We likely do not need more “studies” – there are tons on the shelf.

3. Ancient deposits under the Simcoe Uplands in Simcoe County’s Tiny, Springwater, Oro-Medonte and Tay townships contain pristine groundwater. This water is the purest water known to science, and is the gold standard for water worldwide, a national and global treasure. Ongoing gravel pit extractions on French’s Hill, the water recharge area, now

threaten to destroy this precious water. Will you work to protect this important local resource?

Being in Orillia means we are “out of the loop” on French’s Hill but that does not mean we cannot be vocal in our support and bring these issues to the County Council on behalf of our neighbour municipalities. Orillia carries the task of protecting portions of two lakes and the feeder streams that lead into them. Our concerns re: extraction and polluting development are as serious as those in the aquifer areas.

4. Do you support/oppose expansion of the Greenbelt into Simcoe County? In either case, please explain why

If the only way to protect receding farmland is to dictate that it is part of the Greenbelt, then, yes, we should expand it. There appears to be an assumption these days that farmland is expendable because there is more money to be made selling your family land to developers. This is a fact of modern life but can be mitigated by supporting local farms and small farms to continue in the business. Simply dictating portions as part of the Greenbelt will not stop the sale of family farms and the demise of local source food. Again, this is a provincial issue that we can only lobby for at the local level.

5. What are your plans to combat climate change in your municipality?

Orillia has a climate policy. Arguably, this policy is not the best, but it exists and is a base from which to open discussion with our community on climate change. Eliminating the fear factor would be one way to start, in my opinion. We, as humans, can combat climate change at the local level without impeding business or economic growth – if we use our brains and work together. I would begin by requesting a follow-up from staff on the progress with the current plan.

6. Every municipality in Ontario is faced with row-on-row sprawl-style development, and surrounding farmland is being destructively gobbled up with little regard for future agricultural needs. Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland every day; it needs to be protected before it's too late. We need to ensure we have the land to grow food for today and future generations. Once it's paved over, it's gone forever!

How will you protect agricultural lands within your municipality?

Orillia, per se, has no agricultural lands. However, there is talk afoot about expanding the boundaries into Oro-Medonte and Severn Twps to allow for “growth”. This growth is not natural but is required by the province. I would oppose this expansion. Instead, Orillia needs to make use of the acres of land currently within its borders. Reclaiming this land and property in “smart” ways will meet or exceed our provincially dictated goals and can

make the city a model community. Too much talk focuses on the needs of developers and that they will not come if there are restrictions or requirements., I know that there are solutions around the world that allow for profit as well as smart development for better communities. The important piece is that we not “cave” to developer demands but rather use our land as the prize for smart design.

7. Simcoe County Council chose a county forest in Springwater Twp – zoned Agricultural, as the site for a (much needed) waste handling facility, the Environmental Resource Recovery Centre (ERRC). Many residents in Simcoe County objected to this location, pointing out that this is an industrial use and there are suitable properties zoned Industrial where the facility should be built. What is your view?

Again. This is caving to the least difficult solution. The contractors who bid on these facilities do not want to spend money reclaiming land. They’d rather go to a clean site that is easily stripped of trees than to work hard to remediate a more suitable site from an environmental point of view. Local government needs to stop taking the quick and easy route.

8. If elected, what are your top three priorities?

1. Housing – Attainable Housing – where your son or daughter can move out of your basement and afford a place of their own. This is a larger issue than municipalities can manage but there needs to be a start. Again, this can be done by using the “prize” we have of land and infrastructure to demand attainability.

2. Mental Health – there is a crisis in mental health which overflows into what is viewed as “the drug problem”. People cannot access services when they need them. Again, this would require pressing for appropriate service levels within Orillia planned new hospital setting and within the new County Hub on West Street, N.

3. Infrastructure – Orillia has allowed its infrastructure to wane as we focused on developing West Ridge and building the MURF. Too mush has been left “for down the road” – including roads. The growth already experienced in this city has put strain on the existing infrastructure and there is no end in sight. Planning clearly needs to be done for the future, not for 10 years ago as seems to be done presently.

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Thank you for completing the AWARE Simcoe candidate questionnaire.