



Brendon John Da Costa For Regional Chair

Question 1:

Over the last two and half years it feels as if we have become a less compassionate and caring community and are seeing increased incidences of racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia and sexual and gender-based violence, not only in the broader community but in our schools. If elected, what are steps you would take or policies you would propose/support to begin addressing this troubling trend?

- The past few years have been difficult - Canada has never been more divisive of a country, and this is spreading from Federal to Provincial to Municipal communities. We need strong leadership that not only encourages community engagement in local affairs, but is an ambassador for change. We must have well thought out solutions to this Region's many problems, and we must most importantly listen to the residents. The Region of Waterloo collects data about community support for budgetary and policy implementations, but often neglects to learn from the feedback. We need to develop a better method of communicating the direction of local policies by including the people in the problem solving.

Question 2:

What is one decision made by Cambridge/Regional Council in the last four years that you believe has had the most impact on the lives of women and gender-diverse individuals? What more would you like to see?

- Being new to politics, this is a hard question for me to answer. I'm certain there are plenty of policies and decisions that are made in this respect that deeply impact the lives of diverse individuals, but problematically, it doesn't appear that these policy measures are reaching the eyes and ears of the broader residents of Waterloo Region. I'd like to see policies of this kind made more widely known and accessible to community members who may be unaware.



Question 3:

Data from neighbouring municipalities and cities across the globe show that Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) reduce the risk of overdose and drug poisoning. Waterloo Region currently ranks as having the eight highest rate of overdose deaths in Ontario. This is a crisis and punitive “war on drugs” models of managing it have failed time and again, causing countless preventable deaths. If elected, are you prepared to support a CTS in Cambridge as it has been proposed and agreed to by Council? Please explain your rationale.

- I fully support proper mental health and addiction treatment facilities, though CTS and other safe consumption sites require that we very carefully assess the data available, and consult with local residents, and experts about the potential impact to the community. Whether that is logistical, economic, social, or environmental, we must ensure that we are gauging the location and impact of these services in a fair and informed way.

Question 4:

From children to seniors, adults and couples, people across the community are facing mild to severe mental health challenges. We have heard many stories of people not being able to access the mental health supports they need. From community counselling to crisis and residential supports, organisations and institutions are lacking the resources to meet the community need (<https://www.cambridgetoday.ca/local-news/cmha-still-seeing-high-demand-for-mental-health-supports-5559717>), and waiting lists are significant. Why do you believe this to be the situation, and if elected, what will you do in your capacity to support the mental health needs of the community?

- Having a background in Psychology, I understand the dire need of mental health resources across Canada and in our communities. Placing a spotlight on counselling services in the Region will be of utmost importance. I was recently at a local fair, and had the pleasure of chatting with a private counselling service that had significant capacity, and staff that were trained and ready to take on new patients. There may be a place for private counselling services to work with the Region of Waterloo to enhance existing support systems.



Question 5:

More than 5,500 individuals living in Cambridge visited the Food Bank this year for emergency food assistance. Of those, 1,200 individuals accessed the food bank for the first time in their lives. What will you do to ensure that no one in our community goes hungry?

- I had just met with Trinity Community Table earlier this morning, and one of the highlights they mentioned was a lack of volunteers to keep doors open at shelters and foodbanks. There is a particular lack of youth involvement in volunteer services - I will place a specific attention on working with schools, post-secondary institutes, and community services to broaden the scope of outreach campaigns to target the younger generation of residents who will eventually inherit these responsibilities.

Question 6:

An unprecedented number of people are experiencing homelessness, either accessing shelter or living unsheltered. This is happening across the country, and we know that no one level of government can fix this issue.

What will you:

- a) do, in your capacity, to support the people currently experiencing homelessness?
- b) do, in your capacity, to ensure that everyone has access to affordable housing?

- We need long term solutions to tackle this problem, which is steadily becoming a national crisis. We cannot simply lay the blanket of responsibility on Provincial, or Federal governments - we must commit to helping our own local communities. My goal is to provide for those experiencing homelessness due to mental health or addiction, a place where they can get proper treatment and have access to proper interim housing solutions. I don't believe encampments are a positive strategy on a long-term, so we must focus on removing bureaucratic red tape like zoning, and other bylaws to enable the rigorous development of affordable housing solutions. We must also encourage community engagement with the growing population of those experiencing homelessness to remove the stigma associated with it.



Question 7:

Last year's Child and Youth Planning Table survey of the Region's youth, particularly the report with disaggregated data by municipality (<https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CYPT-YIS-GEOGRAPHY-SNAPSHOT.pdf> and <https://www.cambridgetimes.ca/opinion-story/10651359-the-kids-aren-t-all-right-cambridge-youth-are-sounding-the-alarm/>) showed youth in Cambridge experiencing more significant challenges than their peers in other parts of the region. This includes lower outcomes in their sense of belonging, mental health, support from family and community, and access to recreational facilities. Youth in Cambridge have clearly identified significant issues growing up and becoming successful adults in our community. Why do you believe this is the case, and what will you do to improve child and youth wellbeing and outcomes in our community?

- "KW" is a fun colloquialism when we refer to Waterloo Region, but many people will often forget to recognize Cambridge and the 4 Townships - we need to do a better job at viewing the Region holistically. Leveraging connected data from all regions to inform our decision making policies will help us to identify problem areas where one city or township may be advantaged over another. If we can zero-in on why this is happening in Cambridge specifically, we can begin to develop policies around this. We need better mechanisms to understand the struggles of our youth and the different mini-cultures that exist between different parts of the region. We also need more involvement from relatable public figures - average people. I'm hoping as a young man myself, that I can influence the younger generations to speak up and voice their needs directly to the community.

Question 8:

Do you have a candidate page or social media you would like to direct people to for more information?

- dacostaforkw.com
- dacostaforkw@gmail.com
- @dacostaforkw on socials

