

A Path Home—and Our Public Spaces Back

Max LeMarchant calls for appropriately located accommodation, coordinated services and a County-wide plan

COBOURG, Ontario — September 2026 — The present situation in Cobourg is not acceptable.

We cannot accept a future in which people are left to live in parks, on streets, in the downtown or in other public spaces. That is not compassionate to people experiencing homelessness, and it is not fair to residents, families, businesses or visitors.

The present system is failing both.

My objective is therefore twofold: **help people move out of homelessness while restoring Cobourg's downtown, neighbourhoods, parks and public spaces for the entire community.** These objectives are complementary, not contradictory.

People who have lost their housing deserve appropriate shelter and a genuine path back to stability. People suffering from addiction deserve access to treatment and recovery. People experiencing serious mental illness deserve appropriate healthcare. Cobourg residents have an equally legitimate right to safe streets, parks and neighbourhoods.

Homelessness is not a crime. Addiction is not a licence to commit one.

Policing and law enforcement are fundamental to addressing crime, repeat harmful behaviour and public disorder. But policing alone cannot provide housing, mental-health care or addiction recovery. Lasting progress requires enforcement and accountability to work together with appropriate accommodation, treatment and support.

Establish appropriate places for people to go

I believe Northumberland County must establish one or more dedicated places where people experiencing homelessness can be safely accommodated, assessed and connected with the appropriate path toward treatment, recovery and stable housing.

These facilities must be carefully located and properly managed so they do not create unacceptable conflicts with adjacent neighbourhoods, businesses or other surrounding uses. They should have sufficient space and separation while remaining reasonably accessible to healthcare, transportation and other necessary services.

Providing appropriate accommodation is essential. We cannot restore Cobourg's parks, streets, downtown and neighbourhoods—or humanely address homelessness—unless people have somewhere appropriate to go.

Coordinate the resources already being provided

Northumberland already directs substantial public and charitable services, funding and community resources toward homelessness. Many dedicated organizations and individuals are doing important work, but their efforts are divided among different governments, agencies, mandates and locations.

One of our greatest opportunities is to coordinate these existing resources around each individual and a common objective: moving people from homelessness toward treatment, recovery and stable housing.

The answer is not simply another disconnected program. It is appropriate accommodation, better coordination of what already exists, and action to fill the gaps that remain.

Investigate every useful resource—including HART

All potentially useful resources and proven practices should be carefully investigated and applied where appropriate. This includes Ontario’s Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment—or HART Hub—program.

HART was established specifically to help communities coordinate addiction treatment, mental-health care, primary healthcare, recovery services, supportive housing and other assistance for people with complex needs. It represents a potentially major source of provincial funding, expertise and support that Cobourg and Northumberland County should examine carefully and constructively.

But support for HART does not mean automatic support for one large, concentrated facility in downtown Cobourg or an established Cobourg residential neighbourhood.

A HART Hub is not necessarily a single “drug campus.” Ontario permits locally designed, hub-and-spoke and multi-location systems. Northumberland should use that flexibility to develop an appropriately located, recovery-focused system, placing each service where it can operate effectively and responsibly.

Cobourg already carries a disproportionate concentration of Northumberland’s shelter, housing and social-service infrastructure. Cobourg should not remain the automatic location for every additional facility simply because many services have historically accumulated here.

This is a Northumberland-wide challenge and requires a Northumberland-wide response. Every municipality should participate, while each facility should be located according to need, suitability, access and neighbourhood impact. The objective is not to move the problem from Cobourg to another community. It is to share responsibility fairly and build a system that works.

My commitment as a candidate for Mayor

As Mayor, I will work to mend and strengthen Cobourg’s relationship with Northumberland County and the other member municipalities. I will use Cobourg’s seat at County Council to:

- negotiate a fairer sharing of responsibility across Northumberland;
- press for a coordinated County-wide homelessness, treatment and housing strategy;
- establish one or more appropriately located places for accommodation, assessment, treatment and recovery;
- coordinate the substantial services and resources already being provided;
- investigate and pursue HART and every other appropriate source of funding, support and proven practice;

- protect neighbourhoods and surrounding uses from inappropriate facility locations;
- support police in addressing crime, repeat harm and public disorder;
- and require clear public reporting on results, costs and community impacts.

Success must be measured by outcomes: fewer people living outside, fewer repeat calls to police and emergency services, more people entering treatment and recovery, more people moving into stable housing, and safer public spaces.

Finding Paths Home Together

I am also working to establish **Finding Paths Home Together (FPHT)**, an independent, private-sector not-for-profit initiative dedicated to helping resolve the homelessness crisis in Northumberland County. Its purpose would be to help connect public agencies, healthcare, housing providers, police, charities, churches, businesses, volunteers and philanthropy around the needs of each person.

FPHT is not intended to become another government program or duplicate existing services. It is a complementary community effort being developed to help coordinate existing resources, learn from successful models and focus on measurable pathways from homelessness to stability.

I am pursuing FPHT regardless of my candidacy for Mayor because this issue is too important to depend upon the outcome of an election. However, the initiative is complementary to my mayoral commitment.

I believe the homelessness crisis is too serious and too urgent to be treated merely as a political campaign issue.

However, serving as Mayor would substantially enhance my ability to provide leadership and help accomplish these objectives. The Mayor can provide leadership within Cobourg, work directly with Council, police, municipal administration and community organizations, and advocate publicly for the changes required.

Just as importantly, the Mayor of Cobourg has a seat at Northumberland County Council.

That is significant because many of the responsibilities, services and resources associated with housing, homelessness and social services are delivered at the County level.

As Mayor, I would use that position to work constructively with County Council and the other municipalities to negotiate, coordinate and advance a Northumberland-wide solution.

FPHT would help mobilize and coordinate private-sector and community participation. The Mayor's office would provide municipal leadership in Cobourg and a seat at Northumberland County Council from which to negotiate and effect the required public action.

Northumberland should actively learn from communities that are achieving measurable results. The recent United Way conference in Cobourg demonstrated the value of bringing together experienced organizations and practitioners to discuss homelessness, affordable and supportive housing, community safety, treatment, recovery and coordinated community responses.

My guiding principle is simple:

Establish appropriate places for people to go. Coordinate the resources already available. Pursue every useful source of treatment, recovery and housing support. Help people move out of homelessness. Restore Cobourg's public spaces for the entire community.

We do not have to choose between compassion and accountability, or between helping vulnerable people and protecting our community. We need both, organized around results.

It is time to stop merely managing this crisis and begin solving it.

Max LeMarchant

Candidate for Mayor of Cobourg

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