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A Path Home—and Our Public Spaces Back

Max LeMarchant's Position and Plan for Action on Homelessness, Public Safety and HART Services

The fundamental position

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 the broader community.

The present system is failing both.

The objective must therefore be 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.

My position has four central commitments:

1. **Establish appropriate accommodation.** Northumberland must establish one or more dedicated places where people experiencing homelessness can be accommodated, assessed and connected with the right path toward treatment, recovery and housing. Each facility must be located and managed so it does not create unacceptable conflicts with adjacent neighbourhoods, businesses or other uses.
2. **Coordinate existing services and resources.** A substantial amount is already being directed toward homelessness. The primary opportunity is to organize these divided resources around each person and the shared objective of moving people out of homelessness.
3. **Investigate and use every appropriate resource and proven practice.** This includes Ontario's HART Hub program, which was created for this purpose and represents a potentially major source of provincial funding, expertise and support.
4. **Develop complementary private-sector leadership.** I am working to establish Finding Paths Home Together as an independent not-for-profit initiative regardless of the election. Serving as Mayor would complement that work by allowing me to lead in Cobourg and act at Northumberland County Council to negotiate and effect the required public action.

These commitments are guided by five principles:

1. Everyone deserves dignity, shelter and an appropriate path toward a stable life.
2. Residents, families, businesses and visitors have a right to safe, accessible public spaces.

3. Criminal conduct and repeat harmful behaviour require effective policing and enforcement.
4. Homelessness, addiction and mental illness cannot be solved by policing alone.
5. Northumberland needs a coordinated, County-wide system focused on measurable results rather than fragmented crisis management.

1. Move beyond division and focus on what works

The public discussion has too often been framed as a choice between enforcement and compassion, protecting neighbourhoods and helping vulnerable people, or supporting services and opposing their impacts.

I reject that false choice.

A dysfunctional and poorly coordinated system can fail everyone simultaneously. It can leave people suffering from homelessness, addiction or mental illness without an effective path toward recovery, while leaving residents and businesses to deal repeatedly with disorder, crime and the loss of public spaces.

Compassion without an effective pathway is not enough. Enforcement without somewhere appropriate for people to go is not enough. We need both, organized around results.

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

Criminal behaviour must be addressed through policing and the justice system. Homelessness, addiction, mental illness and medical vulnerability must be addressed through appropriate accommodation, treatment and support. A successful system must be capable of doing both.

2. Establish dedicated, appropriately located places to go

It is not enough to tell people that they cannot remain in parks, doorways, streets or encampments. **Northumberland must establish one or more dedicated places where people experiencing homelessness can be safely accommodated, assessed and connected with appropriate treatment, recovery and pathways toward stable housing.**

Those alternatives may include emergency shelter, short-term cabins or other transitional accommodation, supportive housing, addiction treatment, mental-health care, specialized accommodation for seniors or people with disabilities, and permanent affordable housing.

These places must be safe and well-managed. They must be carefully located so they do not create unacceptable conflicts with adjacent neighbourhoods, businesses or other surrounding uses. They should provide sufficient land, space and separation for their intended operations while remaining reasonably accessible to healthcare, transportation and other necessary services.

This accommodation is not an optional addition to the strategy. It is a primary requirement. We cannot humanely move people out of public spaces, connect them consistently with services or restore Cobourg's downtown, parks and neighbourhoods unless appropriate alternatives exist.

Once appropriate alternatives are available, public spaces should not continue to function as permanent places of residence. Outreach, transportation and individual support should help

people relocate. Laws and bylaws should then be applied lawfully, fairly and consistently where alternatives are refused or harmful conduct continues.

The guiding principle is:

No one should have to live in Cobourg's parks or streets because appropriate accommodation, treatment and support are available elsewhere.

3. Different people require different paths home

Homelessness has no single cause and therefore no single solution. Each person should be assessed individually and connected to the path appropriate to their circumstances.

A path may involve:

- homelessness prevention or rent assistance;
- emergency or transitional accommodation;
- affordable or supportive housing;
- addiction treatment, rehabilitation and recovery;
- psychiatric, mental-health or primary healthcare;
- income support, education, skills training or employment;
- family reunification;
- assistance for seniors or people with disabilities;
- or policing, court intervention and the justice system where criminal behaviour occurs.

The system should organize its resources around the person instead of expecting someone in crisis to navigate numerous disconnected agencies alone.

The pathway should be:

Prevent → Identify → Accommodate → Assess → Connect → Treat → Recover → House → Follow up

The ultimate objective is progress toward stable, healthy and increasingly independent lives—not permanent dependence upon an institutional system.

4. Coordinate the substantial resources already being provided

Northumberland already directs a large amount of public funding, charitable effort, professional services and volunteer support toward homelessness. Municipal and County departments, police, hospitals and healthcare providers, housing and social-service agencies, mental-health and addiction organizations, charities, churches and community groups are all contributing.

The problem is not simply the absence of effort or resources. Much of that effort remains divided among separate governments, agencies, mandates, funding streams and locations.

A primary requirement—and one of our greatest opportunities—is to coordinate those existing resources around the needs of each person and a common outcome: movement from homelessness toward treatment, recovery and stable housing.

Better coordination should identify duplication, expose gaps, improve accountability and allow existing services to be focused where they can achieve the greatest result. New programs should fill demonstrated gaps rather than become additional disconnected layers.

5. Investigate every resource and best practice—including HART

Every potentially useful resource and proven practice should be investigated and applied where appropriate. Ontario’s Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub program is especially relevant because it was created to address precisely the combination of homelessness, addiction, mental illness and complex needs facing communities such as ours.

HART can support addiction and mental-health treatment, primary healthcare, case management, recovery services, supportive housing and related assistance. It represents a potentially major source of provincial funding, expertise and support that Cobourg and Northumberland County should examine carefully and constructively.

Do I support Northumberland pursuing HART resources?

Yes. Northumberland should pursue provincial treatment-and-recovery resources that help address the crisis effectively.

Does that mean supporting one large HART facility in downtown Cobourg or an established Cobourg neighbourhood?

No. A HART Hub is not necessarily a single centralized “drug campus” or residential institution. Ontario allows locally designed systems, including hub-and-spoke and multi-location models in which services are delivered by different partners at appropriate locations.

Northumberland should use that flexibility to build a distributed, recovery-focused system. Clinical care might be delivered through health partners; emergency and transitional accommodation may require other appropriately located sites; supportive and permanent housing can be distributed; and outreach and navigation can connect the components.

HART should therefore be understood as a potentially valuable source of clinical infrastructure and provincial support—not as a predetermined building or location.

My position is:

Support the HART treatment-and-recovery concept and pursue the resources, but do not accept the automatic concentration of another high-impact facility in Cobourg.

The right questions are:

- What services does Northumberland need?
- Where can each service operate most effectively and responsibly?

- How will the components be coordinated?
- How will neighbourhood and community impacts be addressed?
- How will each service help people move toward recovery and stable housing?

6. Cobourg should not carry a disproportionate share

Cobourg already accommodates a substantial concentration of Northumberland’s emergency shelter, supportive and affordable housing, homelessness-related services and County social-service infrastructure.

Northumberland’s facility at 310 Division Street includes emergency shelter and transitional units. The County is also developing additional housing assets in Cobourg, including the proposed 473 Ontario Street project. These are among the reasons many residents reasonably ask why Cobourg continues to be the default location for additional services.

My answer is clear: **Cobourg should not continue carrying a disproportionate share simply because services have historically accumulated here.**

This is a Northumberland-wide challenge and requires a Northumberland-wide response. Every municipality should contribute, but fair responsibility does not necessarily mean placing an identical facility in every community. It means deciding openly what is needed, selecting sites according to function and suitability, distributing facilities and housing more fairly, and ensuring Cobourg is no longer treated as the automatic location for everything.

The objective is not to transfer the problem from Cobourg to Campbellford, Port Hope or another community. It is to construct an effective multi-municipal system in which responsibility is genuinely shared.

7. Rebuild the Cobourg–County relationship

Cobourg cannot solve this alone. Northumberland County has major responsibilities for housing, homelessness and social services, while health, policing, municipalities, community organizations and senior governments control other essential pieces.

The working relationship between Cobourg and the County needs to be mended and strengthened. Public confrontation may identify legitimate frustrations, but it does not by itself produce the cooperation, sites, funding or services required.

As Mayor, I would use Cobourg’s seat at County Council to:

- rebuild a constructive working relationship with County Council and the other municipalities;
- advocate firmly for Cobourg’s residents and neighbourhoods;
- negotiate a fairer distribution of accommodation, housing and services;
- establish a shared County-wide plan with clearly assigned responsibilities;
- pursue appropriate provincial and federal resources;
- and report openly to Cobourg residents on decisions, outcomes, costs and impacts.

The Mayor must have both the determination to protect Cobourg's interests and the diplomatic skill to persuade, compromise and build the consensus required for action.

8. Policing is essential—but crisis management is not a solution

Police and municipal enforcement are indispensable to protecting the public, responding to crime and addressing repeat harm and disorder. Cobourg Police Service has shown that a small number of prolific offenders can generate hundreds of calls and consume substantial police resources.

That evidence reinforces two conclusions.

First, behaviour—not housing status—must remain the focus of law enforcement. People experiencing homelessness must not be treated as criminals merely because they lack housing.

Second, repeatedly cycling the same people through police calls, emergency departments, shelters and courts is an expensive form of crisis management. It does not resolve the underlying problem.

Appropriate accommodation combined with effective treatment and coordinated support can improve individual outcomes and, particularly for people with high needs, reduce repeated reliance on police, paramedics, hospitals and other costly emergency systems.

The United Way *Community Matters* gathering and models presented from other communities reinforce the need to join public safety, housing and healthcare rather than treating them as competing philosophies.

9. Build one coordinated pathway

The answer is neither one building nor one program. It is a coordinated pathway that prevents homelessness where possible, provides immediate accommodation where necessary, connects each person to appropriate treatment and support, and ultimately helps them find a stable home.

This can be understood as three complementary layers:

HART and health partners provide clinical infrastructure: addiction treatment, mental-health care, primary healthcare, case management and recovery support.

Housing and community organizations provide the accommodation continuum: prevention, shelter, transitional accommodation, supportive housing and affordable or permanent housing.

Municipal and County leadership provides public accountability: planning, policing, public-space management, funding decisions, site approvals and coordination across municipalities.

These layers must be connected around shared outcomes, not left to function as isolated programs.

10. Learn from successful models

Northumberland does not need to invent every answer from scratch.

The United Way conference demonstrated the value of learning from organizations experienced in homelessness prevention, transitional accommodation, supportive and affordable housing, treatment, recovery, community safety and coordinated local responses.

We should continue examining models that:

- provide safe, well-managed temporary or transitional accommodation;
- integrate housing with appropriate health and recovery supports;
- prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place;
- distribute responsibilities across municipalities and partners;
- reduce repeated use of emergency and justice services;
- and demonstrate measurable movement into treatment, recovery and stable housing.

The approach should be simple:

Find what works. Adapt it to Northumberland. Coordinate it across municipalities. Measure the results. Improve continuously.

11. Finding Paths Home Together—a complementary community initiative

In support of these objectives, I am working to establish **Finding Paths Home Together (FPHT)**, an independent, private-sector not-for-profit initiative dedicated to helping resolve homelessness across Northumberland and restore Cobourg's public spaces.

FPHT is not my entire mayoral policy, and it is not intended to replace the responsibilities of Cobourg, Northumberland County, police, healthcare or senior governments. Nor should it duplicate services already being delivered effectively.

Its proposed role is complementary: to help bring public and private resources together around the needs of the individual and the measurable objective of leaving homelessness behind.

An independent community organization could connect governments, healthcare providers, police, social-service and housing agencies, charities, churches, businesses, employers, educational institutions, service clubs, volunteers, donors and people with lived experience. It could help research successful models, identify gaps, convene partners, support appropriate accommodation projects and maintain a consistent focus on results across institutional boundaries.

FPHT remains work in development. Its establishment would require a credible founding board, community consultation, defined governance, partnerships, proper financial accountability and a practical implementation plan.

The point is not to launch too many disconnected initiatives. It is to create one complementary vehicle that can help the public, private and community sectors work together more effectively in support of the broader County-wide strategy.

I am pursuing FPHT regardless of my candidacy for Mayor and regardless of the election result. The crisis is too important for this work to depend upon an election.

However, FPHT and my mayoral candidacy are complementary. FPHT would help mobilize and coordinate private-sector and community participation. Serving as Mayor would give me the opportunity to provide leadership within Cobourg, work directly with Cobourg Council and police, and hold a seat at Northumberland County Council from which to negotiate and effect the required public action.

12. What I will do as Mayor

As Mayor of Cobourg, I will:

1. **Restore safety and public order.** Support effective policing and municipal enforcement focused on behaviour, repeat harm and the lawful protection of public spaces.
2. **Establish appropriate accommodation.** Work with the County and partners to establish one or more dedicated, properly located places where people can be accommodated, assessed and connected with the right path forward.
3. **Coordinate existing resources.** Bring the substantial services and resources already being provided into a more accountable, person-centred system focused on outcomes.
4. **Pursue every appropriate resource and proven practice.** Carefully investigate HART, other government funding and successful approaches from other communities, and apply them where they advance Northumberland's strategy.
5. **Protect established neighbourhoods.** Ensure facilities are located and operated so they do not create unacceptable conflicts with adjacent neighbourhoods, businesses or other uses.
6. **Negotiate fair County-wide responsibility.** Use Cobourg's seat at County Council to secure participation from all Northumberland municipalities and a more appropriate distribution of services and housing.
7. **Coordinate around the individual.** Press for a shared process that assesses each person and connects them with the right accommodation, treatment, recovery, housing or justice pathway.
8. **Measure and report results.** Require transparent objectives, costs, community-impact measures and regular public reporting.

13. How success should be measured

Success is not the number of meetings held, programs announced or services delivered. It is whether conditions actually improve.

We should measure:

- the number of people sleeping outside or using encampments;
- movement into appropriate temporary accommodation;

- entry into treatment, recovery and healthcare;
- movement into stable housing;
- returns to homelessness;
- repeat police, paramedic and emergency-department use;
- crime, disorder and repeat harmful behaviour;
- safety and accessibility in parks, downtown and neighbourhoods;
- program costs and avoided crisis-service costs;
- and the distribution and community impact of facilities across Northumberland.

The objective

The long-term objective is clear:

No one living in Cobourg's parks or streets because everyone has somewhere appropriate to go.

No normalization of street homelessness or encampments.

No abandonment of people who need help.

Strong policing and enforcement where required.

Treatment and recovery where required.

Housing and support where required.

Fair County-wide responsibility instead of disproportionate concentration in Cobourg.

Coordination instead of fragmentation.

A safer Cobourg and a genuine path home for people experiencing homelessness.

That is the practical, balanced leadership I will bring as Mayor.

Max LeMarchant

Candidate for Mayor of Cobourg

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