

A Municipal Voice for Action

One of the things I have learned through my time on Council and as Chair of the Police Service Board is that homelessness, addiction, mental health, housing and community safety cannot be dealt with separately. They are connected, And municipalities across Ontario are dealing with many of the same pressures.

AMO reported that approximately 85,000 Ontarians experienced known homelessness in 2025. This is bigger than Cobourg and bigger than Northumberland County. It requires all orders of government working together.

That is why, if elected Deputy Mayor, one of the initiatives I intend to bring forward for Council's consideration is the creation of an Ontario Municipal Action Coalition on Homelessness, Mental Health, Addictions and Community Safety. This would not replace AMO or duplicate the important advocacy already being done by municipal organizations.

I envision something more focused: municipalities choosing to work together on these interconnected issues, sharing what is working and what is not, identifying gaps, developing specific recommendations and taking those recommendations directly to Queen's Park and Ottawa.

Why I believe we need it

- Municipalities are often dealing with what happens at the end of the system.
- Someone is experiencing a mental-health crisis.
- Someone cannot get treatment for an addiction.
- Someone loses their housing.
- An encampment develops.
- Residents and businesses become concerned about safety.
- Police, paramedics, hospitals, municipal staff and community organizations respond.

But responding to the symptoms over and over again is not the same thing as addressing what is causing them. Police have an important role in community safety and enforcing the law. But we cannot expect police officers to become our mental-health system, addiction-treatment system and housing system.

Not everything is a criminal matter.

We need treatment. We need mental-health services. We need appropriate housing and supportive housing. We need prevention and recovery services. And when laws are broken, we also need appropriate enforcement. Compassion and accountability can exist together.

Bringing municipalities together

I would propose inviting municipalities across Ontario to participate voluntarily and designate representatives to this initiative. But I don't want this to become another committee that simply meets and talks. Its mandate should be focused on results.

I would want participating municipalities to bring forward evidence about what they are experiencing: service gaps, policing pressures, emergency-room pressures, housing shortages, treatment wait times, successful programs and programs that are not achieving the intended results.

We should identify approaches that are working in other communities and determine whether they can be adapted elsewhere.

We should also hear directly from police and first responders, healthcare and mental-health professionals, addiction and recovery providers, housing and social-service organizations, businesses, residents, families and people with lived experience.

Then we should develop specific recommendations for the provincial and federal governments, identify which order of government is responsible for each issue and advocate together for action.

Accountability has to be part of it

I don't believe the answer is simply asking governments to spend more money. We should be able to answer:

- Where is the money going?
- What service is it providing?
- How many people can actually access that service?
- Are people getting into treatment?
- Are people moving into stable housing?
- Are repeat crisis calls decreasing?

- Are neighbourhoods becoming safer?
- And when something isn't working, why isn't it working?

Funding should come with measurable outcomes and accountability. But this also has to be about bringing people together Perhaps the most important part of this for me is how we have this conversation.

These issues have divided communities. I don't want that to happen to Cobourg.

- A resident who is frightened by what is happening in their neighbourhood deserves to be heard.
- A downtown business owner dealing with theft, property damage or disruptive behaviour deserves to be heard.
- A parent desperately trying to find addiction treatment for their son or daughter deserves to be heard.
- And someone sleeping outside who is struggling and asking for help deserves to be heard and treated with dignity.
- One person's concerns do not invalidate another person's suffering.

We have to stop treating this as though compassion and community safety are opposing positions. **They're not.**

We also have to be willing to listen to people we disagree with. Listening doesn't mean agreeing. It means understanding why someone believes what they believe, considering their ideas, looking at the evidence and then having the courage to disagree respectfully when necessary.

That is how communities solve difficult problems. Now