

2023 Questionnaire

Toronto Mayoral Candidates

The Catholic Church considers that elected democratic office is a position of immense responsibility, to be held in high trust and exercised with great humility, wisdom, and respect, in the interest of the common good. Our leaders are meant to help gather us in a spirit of mutual cooperation and support, setting for us an example of listening and collaboration as together citizens seek common ground for authentic growth as human beings. This applies fully to municipal offices, including that of Mayor. Cities are homes to the majority of citizens, and are often the first recourse of new citizens for safety, housing, and well-being.

The 10 open-ended questions below are meant to allow you to share, in your own words, your plans for working toward the true welfare of all Torontonians.

Please start by confirming your name and preferred contact information:

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YOUR VISION FOR SERVICE AS MAYOR

Your Political Vocation

Q. 1. What draws you to the vocation of service as Mayor of Toronto, a city of nearly 3 million people?

I have had an interest in politics since I was a child, and this intensified when I spent 3 months studying architecture in Rome in the 80s and returned to Canada with a greater sense of identity and commitment to democracy - so I was involved in party politics for many years but never intended to run. In 2011 I became involved in local planning issues, then in 2014 decided to run against the councillor who had misled the community, when nobody else I could support was running.

So, I am a policy wonk at heart with a public spirit and a desire to act to make things better for myself and others. In particular, I am frustrated as what I see or read in the media where the real causes of problems are not mentioned as they are sacred cows or raising them is contrary to the interests of the powerful and/or rich, so we get misdirection to causes and solutions that will not be effective.

I tend to dislike politicians who are in it for ego or power with no real core ideas or beliefs, or who will pander or say whatever is needed to win power.

I tend to be brutally honest, so I would caution you to not fall for those who will tell you what you want to hear or will obfuscate.

I don't have all the answers - I consider myself to be a "radical centrist".

Q. 2. What experience do you have that qualifies you to serve as Mayor? (Please feel free to point to an online or attached CV if desired)

I have lived in Canada since birth here in Toronto - my father was also born here over a century ago. I grew up in Don Mills. I own a house in the Beaches.

My education includes a degree in Environmental Studies, a degree in architecture, and an MBA in finance and real property from Schulich. I worked in architecture, real estate and finance but am currently not employed. I have additionally obtained a real estate license and working towards an appraisal designation.

I have experience in urban planning matters, and have served on the board of a major local non-profit involved in building housing in the GTA.

I have been involved in politics for decades at all 3 levels.

I enjoy travel and have visited every major city in Cuba to see art deco and other architecture before it is lost. Other hobbies include classic cars, home renovations, movies (film noir in particular) and reading non-fiction books, and I am happiest driving my Miata with the top down and classic rock blasting out loud.

Q.3. What are the most important things you hope to accomplish as Mayor?

To be honest, given there is a maximum of \$25,000 of their own money that candidates can spend, my lack of being elected, being famous or having rich connections, I am not considered a top tier candidate by the media and not getting much attention in the media, save for an op-ed the Star published online (more on that later).

I am running mainly to raise the issues that are the root causes of problems like housing affordability. We are told the problem is "lack of supply" when we also boast that there are "record numbers of cranes" - the most in North America and maybe the world. There were only 2100 vacant homes paying the tax when this was touted as a main driver of prices. Missing middle and exclusionary zoning are not the problems politicians and the media claim - this is misdirection because nobody wants to tackle a sacred cow - immigration.

Nobody is talking about how the main cause of Toronto's problems with housing affordability, congestion, inadequate public transit, inadequate parks and some other issues is the insanely high population growth of the GTA, driven by federal immigration which is doubling an already high level of immigration of 250,000 in 2015 to 500,000 in 2015 (look up "Century Initiative" plan for 100 million population in 2100), and in fact we let in 1.05 million people last year when TFWs and foreign students are included. About 220,000 immigrants came into the Toronto area last year, on top of 21,000 natural growth - so we are growing by 240,000 people a year, save for 96,000 net moving out to other places.

The new Mayor has to get the upper governments to reduce growth as top priority. See my Star op-ed at <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2023/05/10/the-real-cause-of-torontos-traffic-congestion-and-housing-crisis.html>

Life & Human Dignity

Q.4. Catholics believe that we are all lost children of God, and that the purpose of this life is to find our way home to God – most importantly, by ensuring that our neighbours are enabled and encouraged to search for truth as well. What is your understanding of the purpose of life, and how does that inform your proposed policies?

I was born into a Christian family but have been agnostic since I was a child and also stopped believing in Santa Claus. I have read on things including zen buddhism and philosophy but really cannot categorize my set of beliefs.

I do respect people who do have been faith and who "walk the walk" - including Pope Francis (Note - I got to see JP2 beatify a Canadian Saint when in Rome in 1982). I tend to see organized religion as dividing people or causing conflicts, instead of loving each other. I myself doubt I could live up to Christ's teachings, such as his line about rich men and eyes of needles.

I believe we are not born good or evil, but babies start out to be self-ish then need to be socialized. Most people have compassion, except for a few true psychopaths or where people have been indoctrinated to hate - sometime by religion sadly. "Do unto others..." is a good rule.

I try to be a good person but I also like the rabbi Hillel line "If I am not for me, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, then when?" I am running because I think others are not speaking the truth, which needs to be heard now given the cost of delaying.

Q.5. Many Torontonians are rightly concerned with making diversity, equity, and inclusion a reality within our city. True efforts in such direction will not neglect those challenged by mental or physical disabilities. What is your plan for making Toronto truly accessible to all?

To be frank, this has not been an area where I have developed much in the way of policy or plans, given my long odds of winning and my focus on other issues.

The city's motto may be "Diversity: Our strength" but diversity has its good and bad aspects - it can also mean division, not unity. Toronto is nearly half visible minority, and nearly half foreign born. It is remarkable that we get along so well.

When it comes to mental or physical disabilities, I have suffered from both (wrist, eyes, injuries, depression, etc.) and have had family members who also suffered from one or both. For example, my father lost his lower left leg in WW2 fighting for Canada, but later ran the North York Library system. My stepfather had dementia (Lewy Body). My mother was ill and I had to help care for her in her final years. It is tough on the people who have to provide support.

We need to do better, but so much of this depends on the support of the other levels of government and working with the 25 councillors, to all work together. I will have to leave it there

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Q.6. Prominent current issues facing Toronto include homelessness and access to affordable housing. What can or should the City of Toronto do about housing? Are there others – other levels of government, charitable agencies, for example – that might be supported, called upon, and encouraged to help in such work? How should any such organizations cooperate?

I am on the board of a non-profit that builds housing - it is finding it harder to have any social benefit or be effective in helping people and the problem is not zoning limits.

Ed Keenan in The Star interviewed former Mayor David Miller who said that Tory's main failure was not challenging Premier Ford. Miller referred to the "big stick" of the mayor having a vision, getting council to back him/her. The mayor is the only politician representing the 2.8 million people who live here - but is really just 1 vote in 26 on most issues.

Q.7. The news suggests that anxiety and mental health are also among the important issues facing Toronto – incidents, including violent attacks, on the TTC, for example. What can or should the City of Toronto do about to address mental health and safety on the sidewalk? Are there others – other levels of government, charitable agencies, for example – that might be supported, called upon, and encouraged to help in such work?

I wish I had a great answer to this, but I don't. My focus on reducing demand on housing, roads, transit, parks and infrastructure will have a longer term impact but not do anything in the short term.

Reducing immigration will impact the labour market - we are told we have labour shortages and high numbers of job openings, but wages have been stagnant since 1990 and productivity growth has lagged the US.

Affordability isn't just an issue of high houses prices but also low incomes. A UBI and lower inequality will help some, but not all. "Homes First" programs to get people into housing are one solution.

Homelessness solutions requires we deal with all the individual types/causes - mental health or physical disability, addictions, transient youth, financial distress leading to evictions, family breakups or domestic abuse. And often the people come from the 905 or beyond - again, it requires everyone to work together and the mayor has to be one of many leaders.

Care for the Environment

Q.8. The City of Toronto has long been engaged with care for the environment. Yet it can do more, particularly as awareness grows of the urgent nature of climate crises. Catholic teaching recognizes that what happens with the environment affects every aspect of our lives, everywhere on the planet. Pope Francis, like many faith leaders before him, has called on us to “work together” to ensure God’s creation is protected for future generations. How do you intend to promote collaborative and effective approaches to municipal climate change commitments, such as the TransformTO Net Zero strategy, to ensure care for the environment is consistently and urgently prioritized?

I watch "nature" shows on TV and despair at the likely permanent loss of unique species and habitats in the next decades - yet alone the human suffering from weather events.

The main direction for this has to come from the federal and provincial governments. Electrification is of little benefit if the province relies on natural gas plants instead of other solutions (nuclear power is a last resort in my view - we should not build new plants if we have alternatives).

The federal government needs to build an east-west power grid with power from BC MB QC and DNL being sold to other provinces instead of being exported to the US, and then some provinces spending more money for clean power. Windmills are harming bats and birds, solar is little help in the cold stormy days of winter.

Every person who comes to Canada increases their footprint on the earth several times when they adopt our lifestyle. And Canada's population has grown by 33% in 23 years - when we also have a target of reducing GHGs by 30% in the 25 years from 2005 to 2030, which mean a per capita cut of 50% not 30% when combined. Politicians are now promising 45% cuts when they have no plan or realistic hope, and are doubling immigration. I am frustrated and no doubt this adds to public cynicism over green issues.

(We should be helping people in other countries through foreign aid, not taking their best and brightest. The people we let in under the points system are the rich and educated of poorer countries - not the poor).

We tackled smog by a top down solution of federal and provincial governments imposing pollution controls on cars and major industrial polluters, same with cleaning up our rivers. Municipal governments lack the taxing powers and it is easy to drive businesses and people to move a few miles next door by inappropriately regulating or taxing.

Unfortunately, Toronto is broke and is supposed to run balanced budgets, except for major capital investments. We need to get the upper tier governments to provide the funding and regulations to fairly spread the burdens and ensure equal sacrifice/compliance.

An Economy to Serve People

Q.9. Among the greatest challenges faced by Toronto is affordable, accessible, and timely public transportation, particularly as an alternative to the use of personal vehicles. Vehicle congestion aggravates not only health concerns, but difficulties faced by Torontonians in maintaining dignified and fulfilling work. What are your plans for effectively addressing this problem? What approach would you take to expanding public transit, improved access for pedestrians and cyclists, and rejuvenation of infrastructure to make it easier for people in Toronto to access all the opportunities Toronto has to offer?

As particular examples:

- How do you propose to address highway congestion, including for example on the 401, 427, Gardiner, and DVP highways?
- In view of its success, do you support rapid expansion of the King Street Pilot Project to other streetcar lines?
- Do you support expansion of the streetcar system?
- Do you support expansion of the bike lanes system?
- Do you support installation of overhead electrical charging for the electric buses the TTC proposes to buy?

The private automobile is not going away. If anything, it will become easier and cheaper to use in future (apart from congestion). Apart from driverless cars and trucks, the shift to EVs means that once someone owns a car, using it is cheaper - I pay \$1.50 to drive my Civic 12-15km in the city - with plug in electrics it could be pennies. Then remote work is making it easier for people to live farther away from the Core. GO trains actually encourage people living in far off suburban and exurban homes then getting a major provincial subsidy to cover the cost of each train or bus ride - more than the TTC subsidy.

There is also the left wing, utopian "war on the car" view in this question - this is unrealistic for people to walk or bike everywhere. Toronto's residential neighbourhoods were mostly built after WW2 and the "15 minute" city is an impossibility (I grew up in part of Don Mills with the longest distances to the plaza!)

Congestion will only get worse with 1.5 million people expected to move here in the next 25 or so years - this is why we have to slow down growth. Highway 413 isn't needed now - but just wait and growth will make it necessary.

I think the King st project goes too far. I would rebuild the Gardiner as planned, but not sell off any land and have all park space on the east waterfront lands, to make up for the travesty at Ontario Place.

Maybe we should consider trolleys instead of streetcars... but we need more LRT lines and to increase capacity. I oppose most bike lanes as demand is not there and few use them in the winter months. The TTC will need to eliminate diesel buses - what they replace them with when is really dependent on the technology and cost.

Order & Public Safety

Q.10. As noted above, anxiety and mental health issues arising from the pandemic seem to be the cause of an alarming number of violent assaults in Toronto, including on the TTC, with many people - including those suffering mental illness - becoming victims. Street racing remains a hazardous and potentially lethal pastime among young Torontonians. What steps would you take to both reduce the threat of these and other hazards, and to address their underlying causes?

Violence and murder rates seem to be increasing across north America since 2014, and obviously the 2020 pandemic had an impact too. Nobody has really explained why violence is increasing among youth. Opioids and guns come across the border, maybe social media has an impact, or things we have yet to discover (chemicals?).

Mental illness is a huge issue and it obviously has all sorts of impacts and not just on crime and violence. I have found that medical help and in particular prescription drugs or standard treatments have low rates of success and the brain is a mystery (serotonin might not play the role previously thought).

I am not sure that street racing is a huge issue in the 416 it once was, when muscle cars would hang out at the Harvey's at Jane and 401. Aren't pundits saying that fewer young people drive and few can afford cars because of student loans and low incomes?

Sorry but I lack the campaign team to develop a full platform and listening to the debate tonight with 5 "frontrunners" (except Saunders who ducked it) talking about housing and all 5 promising solutions that will have little or no effect just makes me want to not offer up solutions when I know I am out of my depth.

Thank you for this opportunity to run my mouth off and good luck making your choice.