

Kingston Whig-Standard – Candidate Questions, Annie Palone for Sydenham District Councillor

1) Municipal Services Corporation for water/wastewater

After conversations on this topic with Councillor Glenn, my understanding is that this isn't about privatizing our water, which would be disastrous, but about paying for infrastructure. Water and wastewater compete with every other city priority under the province's annual repayment limit, and the City's debt payments already use close to a third of that room. An MSC would move that debt off the City's books and unlock more borrowing capacity, but at a cost: more interest over a longer term, and a separate board making decisions Council makes directly today. Council has voted to move ahead, so what matters now is binding safeguards written into the shareholder agreement: debt limits, the quarterly public reporting the City has promised, and Council control. I would vote against transferring further core services to arm's-length boards. Residents deserve to understand exactly what they'd be giving up in exchange.

2) Urban boundary expansion

I don't think Kingston should expand its urban boundary before we've maximized infill and brownfield development within our existing limits. Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland a day, and Kingston shouldn't add to that. That said, provincial planning rules require us to plan for projected growth, and consultants told Council in 2024 that Kingston will need more employment land, so a permanent freeze may not be realistic. And infill-first only works for neighbourhoods when it's done well, which right now it often isn't. I'd push Kingston to build a clear framework and wishlist for what good infill looks like, especially in historic areas, instead of leaving quality to chance.

3) Affordability

Residents are squeezed because costs have risen faster than paychecks: global inflation, a trade war we didn't start, and wealth concentrating at the top while everyone else's rent, groceries, and tax bills climb. Council can't fix any of that, but it decides how much more we ask residents to carry. Kingston's 2026 budget is \$530 million, with a 3.75% property tax increase, proposed by the Mayor under Strong Mayor Powers. I'd hold every budget to three tests.

Honest: Say what things cost, including the trade-offs, before promising them. Legal spending on OLT appeals should be strategic and budgeted, not a blank cheque, and any Municipal Service Corporation proposal needs real transparency and community feedback.

Durable: Look after what we already own before we build new. Deferred maintenance costs more later, and our borrowing room is finite: debt payments already use close to a third of it.

Shared: Kingston shouldn't have to shoulder alone what the federal and provincial governments should help fund. I'll pursue cost-shared funding for housing, infrastructure, and transit more aggressively, instead of defaulting to property tax increases every time.

4) Alto high-speed rail

I strongly oppose the Alto project entirely, including Kingston's inclusion in it. I was formerly under the mistaken impression that advocating for a Kingston stop meant asking Alto to follow the 401 corridor. But a 300 km/h line needs new track with very gentle curves, so it can't simply follow the highway or the existing rail line. That means cutting through farmland and environmentally sensitive land, and rural landowners, Frontenac County Council, and the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network (which cites 54 species at risk) are already opposing it. As of this summer, nothing is confirmed: neither the route, nor Kingston's inclusion.

Meanwhile, VIA Rail is cutting eight weekly trains to Kingston, from 187 to 179, starting Oct. 25, even as an internal estimate reported by the Globe and Mail puts Alto's infrastructure capital alone at \$83.5 billion. That money should go toward reliable VIA service that works for everyone along the corridor, not a small number of Montreal-Toronto commuters. High frequency before high speed! I'm also alarmed that AtkinsRéalis, the rebranded SNC-Lavalin, whose construction division pleaded guilty to fraud in 2019, is part of the consortium developing the project with Alto. And Kingston signed an NDA with Alto over the objections of residents who had petitioned against it. Residents deserve transparency on projects of this scale.

5) Canada-US trade war

Food sovereignty is a real local answer: protecting agricultural land and investing in local food systems reduces our exposure to cross-border volatility. This is also a moment to look beyond our reliance on the US; Canada already has CETA with the EU, and Kingston's exporters deserve support connecting to international and interprovincial markets.

As a Great Lakes city, Kingston should also be paying attention to water. The U.S. executive order renaming Lake Ontario "Lake America" also says the U.S. "claims most of the Lake's volume," which is either a joke or a declaration of war, depending on the day. While it doesn't change actual legal jurisdiction (the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty still governs the lake), it's a warning we can't afford to shrug off.

6) Housing availability and affordability

Housing done right means real affordability and real accountability, and Kingston isn't there yet. I've advocated for near-campus upzoning with the SDA, and I'd push to finally launch the Landlord Registry that Council approved in 2024, so residents and the City actually know who owns what, and we can track repeat offenders.

Upzoning alone isn't enough, though. A 2022 City feasibility study, cited at the SDA's October 2025 student housing Town Hall, found that even the cheapest possible build in the upzoned Johnson-Brock area wouldn't reach developers' 10% return threshold. Conditions have changed since, so I'd ask the City to update that analysis and share it with residents as part of the Student Housing Strategy (which I advocated for – and helped name – as an SDA Board Member). If we're going to encourage growth, we need to get the economics right, not just the intentions.

Queen's is the other half of this. Bill 185 exempted publicly assisted universities' projects from the Planning Act, so Queen's housing can proceed without municipal planning approvals. Meanwhile, Queen's guarantees residence only to first-year students admitted by April 15; later offers go into a lottery. With the Province handing Queen's that much autonomy, the City should push Queen's to use it, starting with housing more of its own students. And the new Official Plan is due in 2027, but the Student Housing Strategy won't be finished until Q2 2029. We need to speed it up so it informs the Official Plan instead of trailing it by two years, so we know how many units we need to build, and where.

7) Homelessness

I'd focus on improving quality of life at existing sites and making our data reliable and operational; Kingston already keeps a real-time by-name list. Longer term, we need faster housing exits, which means more transitional beds and more affordable / attainable housing supply.

Homelessness is unavoidably also a reconciliation issue: Indigenous people make up 3.4% of Kingston's population, but 31% of people counted as homeless in the 2021 point-in-time count identified as Indigenous. That's a direct legacy of colonial policy and multigenerational trauma. Reconciliation in this context means genuinely resourcing Indigenous-led transitional housing providers alongside other social housing partners to fill the gaps.

Kingston's approach has leaned too heavily on enforcement. After a November 2023 Superior Court ruling that an overnight camping ban at Belle Park was unconstitutional, the City turned to a daytime camping ban, a route the court left open. In September 2024, the encampment site was cleared after Kingston Police declared it a crime scene, and the City then closed it for remediation. The people didn't disappear. They moved from the parking lot and ICH-adjacent encampment, deeper into the park. Advocates say there's a critical lack of access to potable water. Displacement doesn't end homelessness; it just moves it out of sight.