

Municipal Elections Guide 2026

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7



Municipal elections will be held across Ontario on **Monday, October 26, 2026**. Municipal governments and local school boards have a direct impact on our everyday lives, providing services such as schools, libraries, parks and recreational programs, public transportation, and the management of water and waste. Municipal governments also deliver social assistance, emergency shelter, affordable housing, and childcare programs, and are responsible for planning and land use decisions. These responsibilities put municipal governments at the forefront of addressing poverty reduction, affordable housing, and environmental protections. At the same time, municipal governments have the lowest level of legislative authority, subject to the provincial government, and the most restricted revenue base, having to rely on property taxes rather than being able to earn money through income and sales tax.

In recent years, increasing cynicism about politicians and the political process has led to a drop in voter turnout. In 2022 only 32.9% of eligible voters cast ballots in Ontario’s municipal elections – a record low, down from 38.3% in 2018. Recent provincial legislation overriding municipal decisions and appointing regional chairs and county wardens in some upper-tier municipalities may lead voters to wonder if their municipal votes even matter. Yet these changes to municipal governance make it all the more important to vote for candidates who understand local issues and stand up for their constituents.

Civic engagement – including voter turnout – is vital to a healthy and functioning democracy. As Christians, we are called to seek the welfare of the places in which God has placed us [Jer. 29:7], to seek justice [Isaiah 1:17] and uphold the rights of those in need [Prov. 31:8-9]. We are not to seek merely our own interests but also those of others [Phil 2.4], loving our neighbours as ourselves [Matt. 22:39]. In our baptismal vows, we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons”, to “respect the dignity of every human being”, and to “safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.” Voting in elections is not the only way in which we respond to these calls, but it is one of the key mechanisms open to us in a democratic society.

We know that no candidate or government is perfect – none of them can usher in God’s reign on earth! But voting still makes a difference. Electoral choices have real, tangible impacts on the lives of everyone in a community, impacts that are most deeply felt by our most vulnerable neighbours. Elections give us an opportunity to have a say in choosing our leaders, and to have conversations about how we can contribute to the common good.

Opting not to vote just allows others to choose who will make decisions that affect you and your neighbours. Our democracy is stronger and more responsive to local needs when more people are engaged through their vote and their voice.

Please be sure to exercise your right to vote on October 26. We hope this resource will assist you in asking key questions of candidates in your community.

- The Social Justice & Advocacy Committee

VOTE on October 26, 2026

Municipal Councils 101

There are two types of municipal structure in Ontario: single-tier and two-tier.

A **single-tier structure** has one level of municipal government. In our Diocese there are five single-tier municipalities: the cities of Barrie, Kawartha Lakes, Orillia, Peterborough, and Toronto. Voters in single-tier municipalities vote for the mayor, local councillor, and school trustee.

A **two-tier structure** consists of an **upper-tier municipality** (Region or County) with two or more **lower-tier municipalities** (Cities, Towns, or Townships.) For example, the Region of Peel (upper-tier) includes three lower-tier municipalities: Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga. Municipal responsibilities are divided between upper and lower tiers. In our Diocese there are seven upper-tier municipalities: the Regional Municipalities of Durham, Peel and York, and the Counties of Haliburton, Northumberland, Peterborough, and Simcoe.

Recent provincial legislation provides for the provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint Regional Chairs of Ontario's Regional Municipalities, including Durham, Peel and York, as well as the Warden of Simcoe County. Voters in **Regional Municipalities** can still vote for regional councillors as well as for their local mayor, local councillor, and school trustees. The **Regional Council** consists of the Regional Chair (now appointed by the province), the mayors of the lower-tier municipalities, and the regional councillors.

In a **county**, voters only vote for their local mayor, local councillor, and school trustees. **The county council** is composed of the mayors (and sometimes the deputy mayors) of all the lower-tier municipalities in the county; the **County Warden** is elected by the County Council from among their members, except in the County of Simcoe, where the Warden is appointed by the province.

Municipal Roles and Responsibilities

The **mayor** is the chief executive officer of a single- or lower-tier municipality and the chair of municipal council. A mayor is elected by all citizens within a municipality and thus represents the whole community, rather than a specific geographic area. While a mayor has only one vote at council, they have a higher profile and usually exercise greater influence than other members of council. Since the last municipal election, provincial legislation has granted most mayors in Ontario "strong mayor powers" - a veto over by-laws that would hamper certain provincial priorities. This veto can only be overridden by a two-thirds majority of council. In two-tier structures, the mayors of the lower-tier municipalities are also members of the upper-tier municipal council.

A **municipal councillor** usually represents a specific geographic area, or ward, and is elected by citizens living in that ward. In Regional Municipalities, voters elect **regional councillors** as well as municipal ones. Councillors represent the interests and needs of their specific constituents, while also being able to speak to issues affecting the whole municipality. Each councillor has an equal vote at council.

School trustees are elected by voters within a specific area or ward and represent local concerns and needs at the school board while upholding the rights of all students to public education. Each area is represented four different publicly-funded school boards (English Public, French Public, English Catholic, and French Catholic). Each voter can only vote for one trustee, so be sure that you are registered to vote for the appropriate board. You can change the school board you vote for at school-support.mpac.ca.

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Questions for Candidates

Housing and Homelessness

Access to safe, affordable housing is a crucial factor in lifting people out of poverty, improving the health of our communities, and strengthening local economies. Municipal zoning by-laws control where and what kind of new housing can be built, while municipal tools such as vacancy taxes can help compel owners of residential properties to rent or sell them to people who will live in them. Municipal governments also play an important role in coordinating and delivering housing services in their communities by managing affordable housing programs and rent subsidies, providing emergency shelters, and delivering key social services to those who are homeless or precariously housed. With homelessness dramatically increasing in communities across Ontario, municipalities are under pressure to respond, all too often through encampment clearings that push unhoused further to the margins, denying their Charter rights without resolving their basic needs for housing and supports.

Ask your candidate:

- Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable for Ontarians on low and moderate incomes. What will you do to ensure more truly affordable housing is built and maintained in our community?
- What measures would you propose to ensure all residential properties are used for housing?
- The number of people experiencing homelessness is rising across Ontario. While more housing is desperately needed, what will you do in the short term to ensure that unhoused people have access to safe shelter and support services and are treated with dignity, compassion, and regard for their human rights?

Poverty Reduction

Municipal programs and policies have significant and direct impacts on individuals and families living in poverty. Many municipalities are responsible for administering social assistance programs such as Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Municipal councils and school boards play important roles in the delivery of childcare, including before- and after-school care, as well as access to libraries and recreational programs. Municipalities can help to foster local food security through supporting initiatives such as community and allotment gardens, community kitchens, local food hubs, and health and nutrition programs. Municipal governments also have primary responsibility for local public transit infrastructure, which is used disproportionately by lower-income people. Ask your candidates how they will address the issues that affect those living in poverty within your region.

Ask your Candidate:

- Social assistance rates for both OW and ODSP leave recipients well below the poverty line, and clawbacks on earned income make it especially difficult for OW recipients to enter the workforce. Would you advocate with the provincial governments for improving income supports to meet the real cost of living for people on social assistance, and reforming earnings exemptions to support those who are able to transition to employment?
- Food security is worsening due to rising inflation. Many people are forced to choose between putting food on the table and paying rent and other household bills. What will you do to improve access to sustainable, nutritious foods for local residents?

- What will you do to ensure that public transit is affordable and accessible for everyone, especially low-income people?

Environmental Issues

Policy decisions made by local governments have significant impact on the environment in our communities. Municipalities manage our water supply from drinking water to sewage and stormwater management, collect and process much household and commercial waste, and play a key role in tackling traffic congestion and improving public transit infrastructure. Action on environmental concerns by municipal governments is crucial to addressing climate change and creating vibrant, healthy communities.

- As climate change intensifies, extreme weather events are becoming more common. How will you work to protect our community against flooding and other impacts of extreme weather?
- While recycling in Ontario is no longer a municipal responsibility, municipalities continue to play a role in the collection and processing of other waste, including organic waste. How do you plan to reduce waste and in particular, enhance and expand the diversion of organic waste from landfill?
- How do you plan to reduce traffic congestion, improve public and active transit, and combat air pollution?
- The rise of AI is driving the creation of large data centres that consume large amounts of land, water, and energy. If an AI data centre is proposed for our community, how will you protect access to water and energy for local residents?

Key Dates:

- **August 21, 2026:** Last day for prospective candidates to submit (or withdraw) their nomination.
- **August 24, 2026:** Candidates are certified by the clerk of their municipality.
- **September 1, 2026:** The voters' list is finalized and made public. After this date, voters must apply to the clerk of their municipality to add their name or change their information.
- **October 26, 2026:** Election Day! (Some municipalities may hold advance polls as well). Polls are open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

More information:

- For general information, see <https://www.ontario.ca/page/municipal-elections>
- Before Sept. 1, see if you are on the voters' list by visiting <https://www.registertovoteon.ca/>
- Did you know that youth who begin voting as soon as they are eligible are more likely to keep voting later in life? Encourage the young people in your life (and your parish) to learn about the issues and cast their vote. Check out Apathy is Boring at <https://www.apathyisboring.com/>
- For specific information on voting in your municipality, check your local municipal website.
- The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) website <https://www.amo.on.ca/> has helpful information on municipal government as well as backgrounders on various municipal policy issues. Find election-specific resources at <https://www.amo.on.ca/about-us/municipal-101/municipal-elections>

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