

South Shore Housing Action Coalition

Town of Lunenburg
Candidate Responses

Housing *IS* a Municipal Election Issue



<http://sshac.ca>



Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

The South Shore Housing Action Coalition invited candidates to respond to questions about housing, if elected to municipal council.

Candidates were provided the opportunity to respond to our questions via email or complete an online questionnaire. Candidates who completed the questionnaire had the opportunity to provide responses to additional questions.

Question 1: If elected, what action(s) will you take to address housing in your community?

Jamie Myra, Candidate for Mayor

Address short term rentals – I feel that NON-Owner-occupied short-term rentals should not be allowed in residentially zoned areas. I also feel that those types of rentals should be taxed commercially. Both of these simple changes could free up some houses and increase our housing stock. This is one of the quicker and simpler things that we can do to make a difference. I would work with town council and town staff to create policies and processes that reduce the red tape and barriers for developers who want to work with the Town of Lunenburg on their housing goals/strategy. We do need to be careful though as we still need some rules in place that make sense in our Town. For example, no on-site parking does not make sense in a community with no transit system as families could have at least one vehicle.

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

These are steps I can take individually as Mayor, while the housing initiatives that would require collaboration with Council are discussed in my subsequent answers:

- Immediately, I will ensure that housing initiatives are discussed monthly by Council by adding a standing item to Committee of the Whole meetings.
- I will frequently communicate publicly on the Town's ongoing and planned initiatives towards improving housing. (These are explored in the next questions.)
- I would immediately ensure active Town representation on the South Shore Housing Action Coalition Committee.
- I would play a proactive role in working with municipal, provincial, and federal partners on housing initiatives.

Alison Strachan, Candidate for Council

I feel that the disconnect for housing in our community happens through the lack of our traditional committee formats that can be updated to have housing on the community radar. What we learned through our Comprehensive Community Plan meetings has not been connected to a committee. Although our current land use plan came into effect in 2021, our committee level has not been actively gathering information or holding public meetings to help measure ourselves as a community in whether the new plan is meeting housing needs in the community. This results in a disconnect between a community voice at the committee level to keep the public informed of housing options created through the plan. The ideal committee would be the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC). As a single member of Council, I would like to have the support of colleagues in including housing needs in regular monthly PAC Meetings, have that committee meet monthly and report back to Council and the community regularly. Given the urgency of needs, it may be that we connect both the PAC and the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) to address the issue. It is important to me that we include someone from the immediate housing advocacy community, whether it be SSAHC or South Shore Open Doors Association (SSODA) at the Committee level for informational purposes. I feel that Committee level is an important link for the community and for Council that has the power to keep challenging housing needs at the forefront in the 2024 to 2028 term. We also can use the Committee level to leverage housing advocacy in the community to access partnership funds through provincial and federal government funding options.

Renea Babineau, Candidate for Council

Continue to provide updated needs assessments, ensure our Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaws are helping and not hindering effective housing development, if the community is interested, pursue funding for non market housing options through CMCH. I would also like to pursue the development of an inter municipal strategy per the SSHC's policy toolkit recommendations.

Rachel Bailey, Candidate for Council

Review the Municipal Planning Strategy and the accompanying Land Use Bylaw for the Town of Lunenburg with intention to ensure that the various forms of housing identified in the data presented by the South Shore Housing Action Coalition can be accommodated.

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Question 2: In your opinion, what are the housing needs of people living in your district or municipal unit?

Jamie Myra, Candidate for Mayor

We need options for various generations and demographics of our citizens. We need housing options for folks to age in place safely and comfortably, so they don't need to make the choice to leave their community. We also need options for families to grow and thrive here. These are the types of housing needs that I am hearing at the doorsteps of our residents. We have a large demographic of older people that will be looking to downsize soon, and they are hoping to stay in the community they have lived most of their lives.

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

Improved affordable rental options: Our 2023 Municipal Housing Needs Report indicates 38% of residents were renters in 2021. As cited by SSHAC, data from the most recent census in 2021 shows that 38% of renters in the Town of Lunenburg are spending more than 30% of their income on shelter related costs.

Spending 30% or more of household income on shelter-related costs indicates financial strain, and spending over 50% puts households at risk of homelessness.

We can expect this has worsened since the last census. 28% of respondents to a Town survey in 2022 said they saw their rent or mortgage increase in 2021 by an average of \$215/month.

We need to increase our stock of affordable rentals suitable for families, single individuals and seniors of all circumstances.

Accessible housing for seniors: Our need for more accessible, senior-friendly housing is becoming more urgent. The Town of Lunenburg Municipal Housing Needs Report in 2023 indicates from 2022-2027, "Senior-led households, especially those maintained by individuals aged 85+, are expected to show the highest growth rate."

A significant number of our seniors reside in large heritage homes that no longer meet their mobility needs, and downsizing or moving into appropriate housing options while remaining in Lunenburg is not an option due to a lack of availability. Ensuring our seniors can age in place with dignity must be a priority.

More housing overall: The Town of Lunenburg Municipal Housing Needs Report in 2023 indicates: "Lunenburg's current estimated housing unit shortage stands at 65 (as of the end of 2022). This shortage is projected to rise to 120 units by 2027. Despite this, only about 10 new units are anticipated to be added to the market annually over the next five years, suggesting a potential deficit of 70 units by 2027."

Increased stock of rentals for seasonal workers: Lunenburg's tourism industry depends heavily on seasonal workers, yet many of our businesses struggle with these workers not being able to find suitable housing during peak seasons. The lack of rental options for workers is compounded by the rise in short-term vacation rentals, which displace potential homes for local workers.

Alison Strachan, Candidate for Council

According to information gathered by South Shore Open Doors Association, the Town currently has 38% of its residents spending more than 38% of shelter costs and core housing need with 5% needing core housing.

In my opinion, this data is undisputed and the best we currently have to measure our housing needs.

Renea Babineau, Candidate for Council

The housing needs are varied, but affordable housing of all types. Lunenburg has a shortage of "missing middle" housing types and overall the rental market in Lunenburg is very tight.

Rachel Bailey, Candidate for Council

There is a need for housing across the spectrum within our small town and it is important to be able to shelter individuals and families of all descriptions in the community where they wish or need to be.

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Question 3: What role do you think municipal government can play in addressing those needs?

Jamie Myra, Candidate for Mayor

We need to encourage developers to look at areas where developments can be possible. We need to really address the non-owner-occupied short-term rentals ASAP.

When the new Harbour View Haven (HVV) opens we need to work with their Board of Directors and other levels of the Government to try and get the current HVV converted into some form of retirement or seniors housing similar to the Cornwallis St. apartments or the Blockhouse Hill apartments.

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

There are many ways municipal governments in Nova Scotia can play a role in housing needs. I will focus on some ways I believe the Town of Lunenburg could adapt to our current situation to address these needs.

Ensure we understand our infrastructure's capacity to support housing and plan accordingly: Ensuring we understand our infrastructure's capacity to support housing is crucial for sustainable growth in Lunenburg. To do this, I would propose to Town Council that we join Phase 2 of The Nova Scotia Asset Management Program through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. This program would provide valuable tools and resources to help us assess our existing infrastructure, build an inventory, and plan ahead for these assets. By participating, we would be more informed to make data-driven decisions about future housing developments, ensuring they are aligned with what our current systems – such as water, sewage, and roads – can support. This proactive approach will prevent costly, reactionary fixes down the line and allow us to grow responsibly. Additionally, understanding our infrastructure's capacity will improve financial forecasting and budgeting, ensuring we prioritize necessary upgrades and plan effectively for future needs.

Ensure responsible administration of our Housing Accelerator Fund, and factor these initiatives into a Lunenburg Housing Strategy: Lunenburg is expected to receive over \$1.1 million through the Federal Government's Housing Accelerator Fund to address critical housing needs. At the same time, we are the only municipality in Lunenburg County without any kind of Housing Strategy or list of initiatives in a work plan describing housing targets and how we intend to achieve them. While the Housing Accelerator Fund represents a significant opportunity, ensuring transparency and accountability in administering the fund is essential. Since the fund was approved in March, it has not been mentioned at any Council meetings, and we have had no public updates on these initiatives. We need to establish a Lunenburg Housing Strategy that accounts for the goals and initiatives identified in our Housing Accelerator Fund plan. As stewards of these funds, Town Council must ensure we provide the public with regular updates on progress, including timelines, budget allocations, and measurable outcomes for each initiative.

(In a release in March, the Town announced these initiatives that are intended to “result in a total of 135 new units over the next three years”: Establish comprehensive development districts; Establish a new policy to transfer municipally owned land to developers to build new homes including 10% affordable housing; Implement an incentive program to increase the number of affordable homes; Roll out a policy that provides a rebate on municipal fees for creating new accessible units to help meet the needs of an aging population; Implement a heritage conservation plan and bylaw to promote redevelopment of underused sites close to amenities; Develop a new sustainable infrastructure policy to subsidize infrastructure costs that align with housing targets.”)

Seek grants and partnerships to protect homes from climate risks: As climate change continues to affect our region, protecting homes from increasing environmental risks, such as flooding and fires, is becoming more urgent. I have met with multiple neighbours at the door who tell me that flooding they've experienced over the last decade has made their basements uninsurable, which can be financially devastating. We need to take proactive steps to identify how to fund improving our infrastructure and ensure new housing developments are designed to withstand climate risks. Exploring opportunities for funds to incentivise homeowners to retrofit their properties to protect against flooding and other climate-related issues would help keep homes safe and insurable.

Seek grants and partnerships to help residents escape energy poverty: With the rising costs of oil and energy, many Lunenburg residents are experiencing energy poverty, where a significant portion of their income goes toward heating their homes. This not only adds financial strain but also forces many to choose between heating and other essential expenses. We should follow the lead of the Town of Bridgewater's Energize Bridgewater program, working with partners and supporters to reduce energy poverty by incentivising efficiency upgrades in homes and apartments.

Seek grants from Parks Canada for heritage home repairs: We should actively pursue funding from Parks Canada to establish a grant program that offsets the costs of repairs and upgrades while adhering to heritage guidelines. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Old Town Lunenburg is subject to strict heritage preservation guidelines that, while essential for maintaining our town's unique character, can place a significant financial burden on homeowners. Many of our heritage homes require highly specialised labour to meet preservation standards, which are more expensive than standard repairs – which are already prohibitively expensive for many homeowners. (Even just keeping your wooden house painted is very expensive.) To support residents in maintaining and restoring their heritage properties, the town should actively seek funding from Parks Canada to establish a grant program. This fund would allow homeowners to apply for financial assistance through the town to help offset the costs of repairs and upgrades that adhere to the required heritage guidelines. We need this to be part of a larger strategy where we work more closely with Parks Canada on the proper stewardship of our Old Town Lunenburg World Heritage Site with a dedicated WHS Management Strategy. (Response continues on next page)

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Question 3: What role do you think municipal government can play in addressing those needs?

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

(Continued)

Assess the impact of vacant homes: A concern frequently raised by neighbours during my door-to-door visits is the growing issue of homes in Lunenburg sitting vacant year-round. The municipality should see if there is an opportunity to work with the Province to assess the extent of this issue by conducting a thorough audit of vacant homes, understanding how many properties are being left unused, and examining the impact this has on the local housing market. This would enable us to explore any potential value of implementing a vacancy tax.

Assess the impact of short-term rentals in commercial zones: I intend to work with Council to restrict short-term rentals in residential zones to owner-occupied properties. Beyond this, we should conduct a review of short-term rentals in other zones. Short-term rentals have a unique role in our local economy, particularly in enabling tourists to have a place to stay while all other accommodations are booked, but they also have the potential to displace long-term housing options and inflate rental prices, even outside of residential areas. By conducting a thorough review of short-term rentals in commercial zones, we can better understand how they affect the availability of housing for local workers, seasonal employees, and long-term residents. This review should include an analysis of how many units are being diverted from long-term use, the economic benefits and drawbacks, and the effect on neighbouring businesses and community cohesion.

Work with the Federal Government to fund infrastructure to support development on the back slope of Blockhouse Hill: I will work with Council to explore non-market housing options for development on Blockhouse Hill. By securing federal funding for the necessary infrastructure, we could support the creation of co-operative housing on the Town's land on the back slope. Instead of selling the land, we could explore leasing it to a developer, ensuring long-term community control and affordable housing options.

Alison Strachan, Candidate for Council

I've watched what non-profit groups have done in the HRM closely over the last four years and am excited and inspired by the opportunities for individuals and families created by non-profit groups such as Adsum House, the North End Community Health Center, the YWCA, and St. Vincent de Paul. However, we cannot compare Lunenburg to HRM on the basis of scale division between the two communities.

These non-profits know best what their "communities" need in terms of housing (sometimes including on site supports).

I am familiar with cooperative housing (Kabuki in HRM) and have watched existing single family housing bought and transitioned into multiple housing units by dedicated cooperatives throughout Nova Scotia in the past. Nova Scotia has a long tradition of cooperative housing in both urban and rural communities. To my knowledge, Lunenburg has not yet had a cooperative housing model from which to grow.

Lunenburg has updated its bylaws significantly to streamline the process for conversion of single family units and this option has been slow to catch on in our rural community.

The Town cannot create non-profits or cooperatives, but I see Council only this past year beginning to connect with non-profits and cooperative housing models of housing delivery. We need to continue on that path.

The housing toolbox is no good if we don't have the tools we need.

Renea Babineau, Candidate for Council

In addition to the items I mentioned above municipal governments can lobby provincial and federal governments for funding and adopt more effective policies and bylaws that support affordable housing goals.

Rachel Bailey, Candidate for Council

Municipal governments need to collaborate with other levels of government and organizations dedicated to housing issues so we can do our part to address the identified housing needs of citizens.

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Question 4: If elected, what are you willing to do to ensure that your council addresses the issue of housing in your community?

Jamie Myra, Candidate for Mayor

I will discuss with council the short-term housing issue as this is the most direct way for us to tackle the issue of housing in Lunenburg. We also need to make sure that we aren't putting roadblocks in place to hinder development.

We need to work with other levels of Government to see if we can get some more subsidized style housing units in the Town. Without help from the Provincial and Federal governments there isn't a lot a Town government the size of Lunenburg can do. Housing is a market driven system so without government help we aren't able to do much.

The most important thing we can do is to get our electrical and waste-water systems updated and expanded so that when a developer wants to build in town we can accommodate growth.

We need to make sure that the TOL appoints a councillor to the SSHAC and that we have representation at the table and work with groups who are already advocating.

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

I would aim to lead Council through exploring the initiatives listed to my answers in Question 3, and other initiatives we identify, through immediately establishing an Affordable Housing Committee. An Affordable Housing Committee would be separate from our Planning Advisory Committee. It would be responsible for ensuring the transparent and responsible administration of our Housing Accelerator Fund initiatives and carrying through the work of prioritising other housing initiatives.

Establish an Affordable Housing Committee: I will work with Council to establish an Affordable Housing Committee composed of local residents and industry experts in housing, with the goal of identifying opportunities for increasing Lunenburg's stock of affordable and attainable housing.

We will work to identify shortcomings in existing policies and opportunities to work with the province, the federal government, the Municipality Of The District of Lunenburg and other partners like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to ensure we do everything possible to offer attainable housing options.

We should invite representatives from the South Shore Housing Action Coalition and South Shore Open Doors Association. They're already doing significant work in gathering data on housing, helping people navigate housing challenges, and advocating for a broader range of housing options including non-market housing.

When this happens in properties not occupied by an owner, this takes away essential opportunities for housing to people who would love to live here year-round.

Towns like Annapolis Royal and Yarmouth that faced a similar challenge with short-term rentals have successfully restricted short-term rentals when it's not the homeowner's primary residence.

I would like to work with the Town Council to update our Municipal Planning Strategy to restrict short-term rentals to owner-occupied properties.

Ensure Town Council Attendance on the South Shore Housing Action Coalition Committee (SSHAC): The South Shore Housing Action Coalition invites municipalities to have representatives attend their committee meetings to become informed and get involved on housing initiatives, but the Town of Lunenburg has not recently been attending.

We need to ensure we send a delegate from Town Council to these meetings, be a part of the conversation and action around improving housing on the South Shore, and bring back status reports to Town Council for discussion and to inform our own plans.

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Question 4: If elected, what are you willing to do to ensure that your council addresses the issue of housing in your community?

Alison Strachan, Candidate for Council

According to information gathered by South Shore Open Doors Association, the Town currently has 38% of its residents spending more than 38% of shelter costs and core housing need with 5% needing core housing. In my opinion, this data is undisputed and the best we currently have to measure our housing needs.

Renea Babineau, Candidate for Council

The housing needs are varied, but affordable housing of all types. Lunenburg has a shortage of "missing middle" housing types and overall the rental market in Lunenburg is very tight.

Rachel Bailey, Candidate for Council

There is a need for housing across the spectrum within our small town and it is important to be able to shelter individuals and families of all descriptions in the community where they wish or need to be.

Question 5: If you have identified other opportunities for action on housing, please share them with us here.

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

I am curious if there is interest at the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities to collaborate on a joint minimum housing standards bylaw and enforcement strategy.

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Question 6: What are your questions or comments about housing?

Jamie Myra, Candidate for Mayor

What does SSHAC see as the issues the TOL are facing?
What do you see as some solutions?
What can the SSHAC do to help curb the perception around subsidized housing?

Jesse Ward, Candidate for Mayor

Specific to Lunenburg, these are issues I’m actively researching:
Is there interest at the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities to collaborate on a joint minimum housing standards bylaw and enforcement strategy?
How can Lunenburg best balance the drive towards densification and its benefits emphasized in our new Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw, while minimising disruptions with transportation and parking?
What is the current number of vacant properties or units in Lunenburg, and is there a plan to address the underutilization of these spaces to increase housing availability?
What is the current number of in-law suites built in Lunenburg since we enabled these in 2021?
What is the current number of units anticipated to be built in Lunenburg over the next five years based on current and anticipated permit applications? What types of units?
What can Lunenburg do specifically to ease the concerns of residents in the Adams/Whynacht neighbourhood which has faced challenges with road safety and parking since we removed mandatory off-street parking provisions?
What is the feasibility of working alongside the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg for housing initiatives in land adjacent to the Town of Lunenburg?

Renea Babineau, Candidate for Council

re: Elimination of Non-Owner-Occupied Tourist Accommodations - I would be interested in eliminating them from residential areas, though not entirely throughout Lunenburg.

Rachel Bailey, Candidate for Council

I have not committed to all the actions identified as opportunities for Municipalities to address housing needs as I am not well enough informed as to what is entailed in committing to all. I do believe it is important for municipal governments to understand what can be done and commit to playing a role in addressing housing shortages for our citizens.

Town of Lunenburg: Candidate Responses

Additional Questions from Candidate Questionnaire

Question 7: Which of the opportunities for municipalities to address housing needs in your community would you consider?

Vacant Property Registration	Jamie Myra	Alison Strachan Rachel Bailey
Incentives for Renting Out	Jamie Myra	Alison Strachan
Registration of Tourist Accommodations	Jamie Myra	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau
Elimination of Non-Owner-Occupied Tourist Accommodations	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau Rachel Bailey
Developing a Municipal Housing Plan/Strategy	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Rachel Bailey
Initiatives to Support Energy Efficiency for Homeowners and Renters	Jamie Myra	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau

Question 8: Which actions will you commit to doing, as a member of Council, with respect to supporting community housing needs?

Adopting a Municipal affordable housing plan that increases the support of safe, affordable housing that meets peoples' needs.	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau
Championing the role of Municipal Government in addressing issues related to housing	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau Rachel Bailey
Ensuring local policies reflect the vision of Federal and Provincial Housing Policies	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau
Engaging with local agencies, NGO's and stakeholders in creating a community driven action plan	Jamie Myra Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau Rachel Bailey
Ensuring local agencies are heard by funders and government stakeholders	Jamie Myra Rachel Bailey Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau Rachel Bailey
Ensuring local businesses are supported in the effort to make a living wage the baseline for all employee compensation	Jesse Ward	Alison Strachan Renea Babineau

Irma Da Sie, Candidate for Council provided a link to their facebook post about housing in response to our questions. You can view the response here: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61565078626346>