



Centre Wellington **Municipal Election 2026**

Your vote matters!

Find out what the 2026 Mayoral candidates had to say regarding important questions about Centre Wellington's green spaces, urban canopy and environmental goals for the future.

Election Day: October 26th, 2026
Scan here for voter information



Shawn Watters

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1. Championing Environmental Stewardship is goal number four of the Township's current Strategic Plan. How will you work to advocate for the environment in your role as mayor?

Under my leadership, I will continue to advocate for strategic growth boundaries, integrated infrastructure planning, and clear forestry objectives to protect tree canopies and natural areas across both our urban and rural communities.

We will continue to preserve and enhance publicly owned trees in both urban and rural areas, maintain an annual tree-planting program that considers the quality and diversity of plantings, and build our tree inventory. Personally, I would like the goal to be working towards 40% tree canopy coverage, particularly in the urban areas of Centre Wellington.

We also need to protect our naturalized areas, including important groundwater recharge zones. Where possible, we should establish buffer zones between active agricultural lands and sensitive natural areas such as wetlands, woodlots, and water corridors. I believe that protecting our natural environment will help ensure a healthier, more sustainable community for the future of Centre Wellington.

2. Despite the many community, environmental, and economic benefits of our parks, we recognize that the Township's Parks and Recreation Department is understaffed. Would you support reallocating resources to support protecting and enhancing our green spaces? Would you support a stewardship program whereby trained volunteers would help maintain and improve our public parks?

This is an intriguing idea. I would like to sit down with staff to better understand where the gaps are, explore best practices, and learn from other communities that have successfully implemented stewardship programs to support their parks and green spaces.

Many of our gardens are currently cared for by volunteers through the Fergus and Elora Horticultural Societies, and they do an incredible job for the Township. We are fortunate to

have their dedication and support, but I also recognize that they are already stretched and cannot be expected to take on additional responsibilities.

Our challenge is to find the right balance between staff, volunteers, and appropriate funding to ensure our parks and green spaces are well cared for, remain healthy, and can be enjoyed by our community now and in the future. It is about building on the great work already being done and finding a long-term and practical approach that works for Centre Wellington.

3. The increasing pressures of development and infill are reducing our tree canopy. If elected, would you support a private tree bylaw to protect healthy trees?

I agree that infill development can put pressure on our existing tree canopy. That's why it's so important that site plans carefully consider the location and scale of infill to minimize impacts on existing trees wherever possible. When trees must be removed, replacement planting needs to be meaningful, with a clear plan to establish new trees on the site or, where that isn't possible, in another appropriate location. We need to think beyond simply replacing what is lost and look at how we can grow our tree canopy over time.

Much of our future growth will take place on former farmland where there are currently few trees. This presents an opportunity to build a greener community by incorporating trees, urban forests, connecting trails, and forested corridors into new developments from the outset.

I would also like to bring together a committee of tree specialists and other knowledgeable community members to explore the best approach to a private tree bylaw for Centre Wellington. It's important that we get this right, balancing the protection of our existing trees with the realities of growth and the opportunity to create a healthier, greener community that is environmentally responsible. I would also look into potential tax credits that might benefit private owners for protecting trees on their property.

4. Would you support collaborative representation from all Township departments and community advocates in relation to any and all projects, tasks, and repairs related to our green infrastructure to help ensure best practices and effective use of resources?

Yes, I would support this initiative. I think the next step is to determine the best forum to bring the right people together, gather meaningful input, and explore best practices. It's about working collaboratively to develop practical solutions and identify a clear path forward that will benefit our community.

Bronwynne Wilton

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1. Championing Environmental Stewardship' is goal number four of the Township's current Strategic Plan. How will you work to advocate for the environment in your role as mayor?

This is an excellent question, thank you! I am proud of my track record as Councillor for advocating for the environment and I would definitely continue this work as Mayor. During this current term of Council, we included climate change actions in the strategic plan for the first time ever in the history of Centre Wellington. As a result of this strategic direction, the Township hired a Climate Change Coordinator (this is a shared position with Mapleton Township). Through this role, we have already been successful in obtaining grants to support climate actions in Centre Wellington.

I also advocated for work to be done to remove invasive species out of our parks, in particular, Confederation Park in Fergus. I voted in favour of the urban tree canopy project and as mayor, I would be interested in seeing this expand to include a rural tree canopy assessment as well.

As mayor, I would definitely continue to advocate for climate smart technologies and for a low impact development (LID) approach for our housing and infrastructure projects. I would also advocate for the implementation of a climate strategy which would include optimizing energy efficiency at our public facilities and with our fleet. I would advocate for the continuation of work in water conservation that was started in this term of council. Our water conservation officer is doing an excellent job and I would like to see that continue. One example is the water softener rebate program to protect water quality and conserve water. I'm also very proud of the fact that the Township purchased the Middlebrook Well during this term of Council.

We also need to continue to advocate for the protection of farmland, wetlands, and our sourcewater protection zones. I have included in my platform to explore the possibility of collaborating with willing landowners and not-for-profit organizations to implement conservation easements of farmland and important ecosystems.

I firmly believe that the natural environment is what makes Centre Wellington so special and it is definitely the responsibility of the municipal government to provide meaningful and innovative stewardship of our important natural assets.

2. Despite the many community, environmental and economic benefits of our parks, we recognize that the township parks and recreation department is understaffed. Would you support reallocating resources to support protecting and enhancing our green spaces? Would you support a Stewardship programme whereby trained volunteers would help maintain and improve our public parks?

Yes, and yes. As a councillor, I am on record for asking about our staffing levels in the parks and recreation department. Previous councils did not prioritize parks and recreation unfortunately so we have some catching up to do! While we do need to be cognizant of spending and resource allocation, I believe our parks are worth investing in. And as a way to be as efficient and cost-effective as possible, the idea of a stewardship program with trained volunteers could be very productive. I have an item in my platform to create an Energy and Environment Committee and my vision for this committee would be to have an action-oriented working group that could do exactly what you are suggesting. I know there are interesting models at other municipalities across Canada that we could learn from and there is also incredible expertise within our community. For example, we could build on the work of the Elora Environment Centre, Neighbourwoods and the CW Native Plant group to expand stewardship services such as the removal of invasive species and planting native species in our parks.

3. The increasing pressures of development and infill are reducing our tree canopy. If elected, would you support a private tree bylaw to protect healthy trees?

Yes, I think Centre Wellington is growing at a pace that would benefit from a tree protection policy. Again, we can look to other municipalities for best practices for tree protection policies and I think this would be an important component for protecting, and enhancing our urban tree canopy. A good tree bylaw would also extend to rural areas to ensure there is appropriate management of rural woodlots.

4. Would you support a collaborative representation of all township departments and community advocates in relation to any and all projects,

tasks and repairs related to our green infrastructure to help ensure best practices and use of resources?

Yes, this is my vision for the Energy and Environment Committee. I see this committee as a catalyst for enhancing our approach to environmental stewardship, natural asset management, green infrastructure and climate change actions. As mayor, I would like to see a shift in how the Township's advisory committees function - I believe there should be a more participatory action approach as opposed to just listening to staff reports. There is a wealth of expertise in this community, we just need to set up the right conditions to mobilize it. I also think we can tap into funding for proactive environmental stewardship and climate change actions through the Green Municipal Fund (GMF). There are also interesting resources available through the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative (MNAI). I would look forward to working with staff and community advocates/volunteers to make sure Centre Wellington becomes a leader in green infrastructure and climate action.

Neil Dunsmore

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1. ‘Championing Environmental Stewardship’ is goal number four of the Township’s current Strategic Plan. How will you work to advocate for the environment in your role as mayor?

The things people love most about Centre Wellington, the Grand River, the Elora Gorge, our farmland and the tree-lined streets of our older neighbourhoods, are easy to lose and very hard to get back. With our population expected to nearly double by 2051, protecting them must be built into how we grow, not added afterward.

As mayor, I’ll advocate in three places.

In how we plan. My central commitment is a Community Planning Permit System for our growth areas. Under a CPPS, environmental protections are written into the rules before any application arrives, rather than negotiated case by case. Natural heritage features, wetlands, river corridors and tree canopy will be mapped and protected in every secondary plan and in the CPPS itself. I’ll protect the Grand River buffer and riparian areas from encroachment and protect prime farmland from conversion.

In the standards we set. No development without municipal water should proceed without an independent hydrogeological assessment that protects private wells and the aquifer, peer-reviewed at the applicant’s cost. Environmental Impact Studies should be required for any application in or next to mapped natural heritage features, regardless of parcel size. Low-impact stormwater design should be standard for new development. And I’ll set a measurable 2030 target: all new residential approvals inside our existing settlement boundary. Density isn’t the threat to our environment. Unplanned sprawl is.

At the County table. The mayor also sits on Wellington County Council, which handles the Official Plan, waste management and the County’s tree-planting programs. I’ll bring Centre Wellington’s environmental priorities to that table and report back publicly after every meeting.

I’ll also keep the Township on track with its 2025–2029 Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan for our own buildings and fleet, because we should hold ourselves to the standard we ask of others.

2. Would you support reallocating resources to support protecting and enhancing our green spaces? Would you support a Stewardship programme whereby trained volunteers would help maintain and improve our public parks?

Yes, to both, with one honest condition on the first. Our own Parks and Recreation Master Plan (July 2025) identifies real gaps, and the growth ahead will add pressure on every park and trail we have. My approach to the budget is efficiencies first. When there’s a

documented service gap, it should be funded, with a clear service standard and public reporting on whether it's being met. Parks maintenance fits that test. I'm not going to promise a specific dollar figure before I've seen the budget. I will commit to making green-space maintenance a funded priority, measured against the Master Plan, rather than the first thing cut when budgets get tight. I'll also push to expand the trail network connecting Fergus, Elora and our rural communities. I strongly support a trained volunteer Stewardship programme. It's one of the best returns a municipality can get: it builds care for our parks, connects neighbours, and brings in local knowledge staff can't always have. I'd want it designed with staff from the start, with proper training, insurance and safety, and set up to complement our parks staff rather than replace them. Done that way, it strengthens the department instead of being a reason to underfund it.

3. The increasing pressures of development and infill are reducing our tree canopy. If elected, would you support a private tree bylaw to protect healthy trees?

I share your concern, and my platform already commits to a Township Tree Canopy Protection Policy requiring replacement planting for trees removed during development. That's where most of our canopy loss is coming from, and it's where I'd start, immediately. On a broader private tree bylaw, I support the goal of protecting healthy mature trees. I'm open to a private tree by law and would want to hear from residents especially rural land owners, before deciding on its scope. To work, it would need sensible exemptions: working farms, hazardous or diseased trees, and smaller trees on residential lots. It would focus on significant healthy trees and include a permit process that's simple and affordable. I'd also want our Community Planning Permit System to set canopy standards for new neighbourhoods, so we're growing canopy, not just slowing its loss.

4. Would you support a collaborative representation of all township departments and community advocates in relation to any and all projects, tasks and repairs related to our green infrastructure to help ensure best practices and use of resources?

Yes, I support the principle. Some of the costliest mistakes happen when one department doesn't know what another is planning. A road project removes trees that parks just planted, or a stormwater fix ignores a natural feature the community knows well. Community advocates often hold knowledge that never makes it into a staff report. The way I'd make it work is a standing Green Infrastructure working group. It would bring together Public Works, Parks, Planning and Engineering with community advocates. It would review capital plans, major projects and annual priorities before they're finalized, and publish its recommendations. Routine maintenance and urgent repairs would stay with staff, so the work doesn't slow down. But anything that shapes our green infrastructure for years would get that shared review first. That fits my wider commitment to consultation: residents should be heard before decisions are made, not after. It also fits my belief that once we've listened, we should decide and get on with the work.

Kelly Linton

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1. 'Championing Environmental Stewardship' is goal number four of the Township's current Strategic Plan. How will you work to advocate for the environment in your role as mayor?

- The next Council must create a much more effective strategic plan. "Championing Environmental Stewardship" requires more definition, the four directives that fall under this goal require measurable actions. For example, "Protect our farmland" must be more than vague words. It needs clear actions, measurable targets, and accountability. I'll work with Council and staff to build an inspirational and practical 2027–2031 Strategic Plan that is a roadmap for action. I will propose the following items be included in this plan:
- Set a measurable target to expand our urban tree canopy in consultation with Neighbourhoods and other community groups. Work with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture to make farmland protection and
- local food access explicit priorities.
- Pursue grants to help purchase and protect important farmland and natural areas.
- Explore legal protections to preserve conserved farmland for food production permanently.
- Residents deserve a plan that spells out what we will do, when we will do it and how we will measure success.

2. Despite the many community, environmental and economic benefits of our parks, we recognize that the township parks and recreation department is understaffed. Would you support reallocating resources to support protecting and enhancing our green spaces? Would you support a Stewardship programme whereby trained volunteers would help maintain and improve our public parks?

- Based on my organizational review work with similarly sized municipalities across Ontario, I have not seen evidence that Centre Wellington is understaffed. Council has approved 50 additional full-time positions over the past four budgets, with another 16 planned over the next two years.
- I'll work with Council and staff to ensure we use our staffing resources effectively and deliver value for taxpayers.
- I also strongly support involving trained volunteers in maintaining and improving our parks and trails. It's a practical way to give residents a meaningful role in caring for our community.

3. The increasing pressures of development and infill are reducing our tree canopy. If elected, would you support a private tree bylaw to protect healthy trees?

Yes. As long as this can be introduced with minor administrative and staffing costs.

4. Would you support a collaborative representation of all township departments and community advocates in relation to any and all projects, tasks and repairs related to our green infrastructure to help ensure best practices and use of resources?

Absolutely. We must ensure that all departments are trained in best practices in maintaining our trees and other green infrastructure. This is typically not a focus of public works-related departments, so additional policies and associated training is probably required.

Stephen Kitras

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- 1. 'Championing Environmental Stewardship' is goal number four of the Township's current Strategic Plan. How will you work to advocate for the environment in your role as mayor?**

First There will be a new Strategic plan made with the new Council to address environmental issues. Regarding the environment I have an ambitious proposal under Economic Development but could be the Environment also on my Election Priorities platform. Ontario is under tremendous pressure because it has only 10 years left of Landfill for trash and it is boxed in a corner. Bill 197 does not allow greater expansion of recycling so 70% of Ontario Trash goes to Landfill. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) cites it as one of the greatest crises in the future of the Ontario environment. I propose to help the Ontario Government pilot the Swedish "Trash to Energy" project <https://earth.org/sweden-waste-to-energy/> to turn trash into Energy in Centre Wellington. You can check it out yourself or any of your members on my website. Sweden is the world model for the environment in the world, so why reinvent the wheel .Trash landfills create 25x more CO2 than ordinary car usage. It pollutes the water table, adds air pollution and uses up precious farmland. The Trash to energy in Sweden is so advanced the pollution is minimum and enough energy is created from their system to power 300,000 homes and businesses. That is just one trash to energy plant so, Less than 1% of their trash goes to landfill.Incredible . Sweden has over 21 plants and they actually do all of Denmark's trash and some of UK and Ireland . You never hear about an oil crisis from Sweden. I think this is a game changer and a positive solution to a problem.

- 2. Despite the many community, environmental and economic benefits of our parks, we recognize that the township parks and recreation department is understaffed. Would you support reallocating resources to support protecting and enhancing our green spaces? Would you support a Stewardship programme whereby trained volunteers would help maintain and improve our public parks?**

I firmly believe in creating and developing a comprehensive volunteer policy as part of my platform. You can see it on my website. I believe strongly in creating tax credits for citizens on committees and extending it to certified community groups. It will be small but I believe that it is vital to our Community character. I would like your group and Horticulture society better acknowledged and by volunteer awards and a large plaque in public of hours volunteered as public service. Volunteerism is the core of our roots and character as Centre Wellington.

Paid staff are very important but volunteers build lived experience and community character. I would like a public ceremony acknowledging them not just from the Chambers of Commerce awards.

3. The increasing pressures of development and infill are reducing our tree canopy. If elected, would you support a private tree bylaw to protect healthy trees?

Although I think the tree canopy is important, we must prioritize housing, especially affordable housing in our infill policy. So, I know your group feels every tree is precious. I think we must provide housing opportunities first. I think replacement trees must be encouraged. I think we should start a program with school children to start a seed to tree to roadside planting program. I think we would use indigenous trees of course. Every side road will be lined with trees. After a generation it would be phenomenal. I won't be around to see it but I transplanted some maples 23 years ago on the farm when I moved there and the colours are great now.

4. Would you support a collaborative representation of all township departments and community advocates in relation to any and all projects, tasks and repairs related to our green infrastructure to help ensure best practices and use of resources?

I am not sure what you mean and what that would entail. I think best practices is a good goal for all endeavours.