

Responses from Gwen Glover Ward One Candidate

1. What position are you vying for: mayor or councillor?

I am running for Councillor for Ward One.

Let me provide some background that is relevant to your interests and concerns. I lived in Selkirk, Manitoba, where I became worried about the unusually high number of toddlers experiencing severe ear infections. I began researching potential causes, including the possibility that viruses or other contaminants could be present in the drinking water. That search for answers led me into politics.

I first ran provincially against the Premier, but that didn't work (no kidding). I then ran for municipal council and was elected.

During those campaigns, I repeatedly heard troubling stories about the Red River. People reported that the river was making dogs sick, many avoided contact with the water, the smell was unbearable, and some people developed rashes after touching the water. However, it was not until Dr. Ian Reid, a recipient of the Order of Canada, showed me a piece of his aluminium boat that had been eaten away by the Red River that I truly understood this was not merely a complaint or a concern—it was a serious health and environmental issue.

While serving on Council, I learned that the water Selkirk discharged through its sewage-treatment system was of considerably better quality than the water the town took in. In fact, Selkirk was suing the City of Winnipeg, although the lawsuit had been held up in the discovery process for several years.

I also found a research document indicating that the water at the Lockport Locks had contaminant levels 150,000 times higher than the potable-water standard. As a result, the quality and protection of the Red River became my cause.

While on Council, I initiated an Environmental Week and helped persuade the province to designate portions of the riverbank and floodplain as environmentally protected areas. I also joined the International Coalition on Red River Stewardship and served as its vice-president.

After being elected provincially, I was able to devote more resources to an extensive review of the Red River's water-quality issues. My research indicated that the primary source of the pollution was Winnipeg's North End Treatment Plant, which, at the time, provided only limited treatment before discharging waste into the Red River. (they basically just took the lumps out). The river carried this contamination north into Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg. In

fact, portions of the Red River north of Winnipeg did not freeze during the winter—even in a Manitoba winter.

As a result of my research and advocacy, I was contacted by Manitoba's Chief Medical Officer of Health, who encouraged me to continue pressing the province because she had reason to believe the river could potentially spread a serious and deadly disease. In essence, I became one of Canada's leading advocates and experts on the river's water quality.

My research and advocacy helped encourage Winnipeg to install ultraviolet purification systems at its North End Treatment Plant. Under Mayor Glen Murray, the city did so.

Given this background, it is safe to say that concerns about water quality and the potential impact of toxic waste are issues that resonate deeply with me.

Our family also built a cottage on Skootamatta Lake in 1961. At that time, my father submitted a lake-water sample for testing, and the results indicated that the water was safe enough to drink. However, approximately a decade later—coincidentally around the time septic systems began to be installed on cottage properties—the fecal coliform count increased dramatically. Perhaps it was a coincidence; perhaps it was not.

Continuing my work through environmental networks, I have held executive positions with two environmental organizations and helped build a straw-bale house.

For additional local context, I also worked for two summers at the Mazinaw Inn.

2. Working Relationship with Lake Associations

Lake associations represent a significant part of the North Frontenac community and should be treated as important partners—not simply as groups to be consulted or advised after a decision has been made.

My approach would be to establish a more consistent dialogue with lake associations and the NFLAA, perhaps through informal or ad hoc committees. The purpose would be to ensure that the information and concerns put forth by any Lake Associations become part of the decision making process of Council. Certainly I would welcome any presentation or open discussion from Lake Associations at any Council Meeting.

Council should be available as a resource for lake associations by helping connect them with municipal staff, provincial agencies and other relevant organizations or by locating published documentation of help in managing lake systems.

When I was first elected, one of my greatest needs was to have people tell me what was really happening in the community. I would therefore welcome open communication with the people connected to each lake and neighbourhood. I, personally, and hopefully Council as a whole would welcome hearing of any updates, concerns, or requirements any lake associations might have.

3. Septic System Re-Inspection Program

My comments above may give you some indication of how I feel about septic systems. In today's cottage environment, they are essential. Although I am still teased by my family for dropping a flashlight into the outhouse, which illuminated our "duties" for days, septic systems are no laughing matter.

Like anything with the potential to cause harm, septic systems need standards and regular inspections. A continuous inspection program, rather than a one-time initiative, could improve standards and help identify maintenance issues before they become expensive problems for both property owners and the environment.

One of the greatest concerns about inspections is the potential cost to property owners. I had my own system updated two years ago and was able to cover the cost, but for some people, the expense could significantly affect their ability to maintain their property and lifestyle.

For that reason, I would like to explore whether provincial or federal programs and grants could help support necessary upgrades. The municipality could also investigate whether some form of tax deferral or other financial assistance would be possible within its legal authority.

A failing septic system is not simply a private-property issue. Its effects can extend to groundwater, neighbouring properties and surrounding water sources, including lakes, streams and wetlands.

I therefore support the principle of mandatory septic re-inspections and would encourage a comprehensive inspection program across the municipality. It should be made clear that inspections are intended to protect property owners, their neighbours and the environment—not to impose financial penalties.

Information about inspections must clearly explain what each inspection involves, why it is necessary and what happens if a problem is identified. Timelines should be clearly defined, and potential financial assistance should be identified wherever possible.

The municipality should also maintain an open and ongoing public-education program explaining the importance of properly functioning septic tanks and leaching beds. Speakers or municipal representatives could attend lake-association meetings to discuss these issues directly with residents.

4. Short-Term Rentals

I understand the concerns surrounding short-term rentals. They can provide economic benefits and an additional source of accommodation, but they can also create legitimate concerns for neighbouring residents and waterfront communities—particularly regarding noise, occupancy, parking, garbage, septic capacity, safety and the character of residential areas.

I believe the Township has a responsibility to find a reasonable balance.

I support the Environmental Task Force's work and believe its recommendations deserve serious consideration. At the same time, I would like to have any final policy circulated to pertinent, involved residents for their vetting before decisions are finalized and in the end, the policy must be **fair, enforceable and proportionate. **

I would not support a blanket approach that treats every short-term rental as though it creates the same problems. A rental in one setting may have very different impacts from one located on a small, heavily developed lake.

The question I would ask is: How do we protect neighbouring residents and the environment while still allowing responsible property owners to operate legitimate businesses?

Good regulation should address demonstrated problems—not regulate some new concept simply because it is new or unpopular.

5. Balancing Development and Environmental Protection

In my view, development should be environmentally responsible by definition. Land clearing, land use, location, building materials, building design, heating and cooling, drainage, waste disposal and other factors should be assessed at the planning stage. Where appropriate, these considerations could influence permit requirements or costs.

North Frontenac's lakes, forests, wetlands and rural character are not obstacles to our economy. They are the reasons people want to live here, visit here and invest here. Any development must be an enhancement to what exists.

The municipality needs a sustainable tax base, but that should not mean development at all costs. What we can promote as a strength is North Frontenac's beauty and integrity. Growth must not change our essential character.

People come here, live here and cottage here because of what we have now. We cannot improve upon nature, but we can decide whether we protect and enhance it or whether we give in to fast money and permit it to deteriorate.

And somewhat conversely, growth that threatens our environment ultimately restricts our economic and business potential.

6. My Top Three Priorities

1. Give residents, service providers and associations a stronger voice

This is easy to say but difficult to achieve. It begins with creating a welcoming mindset. Councillors are elected by their neighbours and serve their communities. My first priority is to help maintain and protect a safe, healthy environment—not to accept change simply for the sake of being bigger or to pursue change without demonstrating that it will make things better.

Who knows our neighbourhoods best? The people who live there.

As mentioned above, I would like to see Council establish informal or ad hoc committees that meet regularly with residents in their neighbourhoods and communities.

2. Protect all things that make North Frontenac better

Our lakes, water quality, rural character and natural environment are our greatest assets. Environmental protection should not be an afterthought. It must be considered when we make decisions about development, septic systems, short-term rentals and infrastructure.

We are not yet, and hopefully will never become, another Muskoka. However, full-time residents need broader employment opportunities so that their children can return home and build their lives here. The challenge will be to find inventive ways to boost the employment base without sacrificing what makes us outstanding.

3. Make responsible, sustainable decisions about our future

We need to look beyond the next election cycle. That means responsible financial management, sensible development, maintaining infrastructure and making decisions based on evidence rather than simply responding to the loudest voice in the room.

We also need to strengthen the connection between seasonal and permanent residents. Having two influential groups remain separate weakens the area's ability to develop in a stable and sustainable way. I do not yet know exactly how best to accomplish this, but I would welcome ideas from anyone who has suggestions.

I am running for Council in Ward One. Like many people, I deliberately chose to retire to this region because my soul knows it as home. Running for Council is my way of helping North Frontenac remain the paradise it is.

Please keep in touch.

...

...