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July 3, 2025

City Clerk's Office
City of Guelph
1 Carden Street, Guelph, ON N1H 3A1

RE: Application for City Councillor Vacancy – Ward 6

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to express my sincere interest in serving as City Councillor for Ward 6. Guelph is more than where I live - it's the community I've chosen, invested in, and fallen in love with. I bring to this role a deep commitment to public service, extensive experience in community engagement, and a strong foundation in public policy, food systems, and social justice. I would be honoured to represent the people of Ward 6 with integrity, energy, and care.

Everyone who knows me knows how deeply I love Guelph. I left a high-paying job in my field in Regina, Saskatchewan because my heart was here. From the moment I arrived, I felt I had found my people. Nowhere else have I experienced a community so supportive, caring, and environmentally conscious.

I moved to Guelph three years ago from Ottawa after completing my undergraduate degree in Political Science and Public Administration. I was selected to pursue a Master's in Family Relations and Human Development, building on work I had begun with a First Nation in Alberta. Together, we secured funding through a collaborative grant-writing process that led to the construction of a year-round hydroponic greenhouse; a project that now serves as both a teaching tool and a local food security initiative. My graduate research was fully funded by the Arrell Food Institute, allowing me to connect with scientific leaders, policymakers, and food systems practitioners across Canada, and to present at national summits.

My academic and professional background has consistently focused on the intersection of politics, food systems, and social justice. A transformative moment during my undergrad came when I took a course on the politics of food. Growing up in Toronto in a household that experienced poverty and food insecurity, I had not yet connected the dots between food, equity, and climate justice. My master's studies brought these threads together. I worked alongside researchers exploring soil's capacity to sequester carbon, scientists reducing livestock emissions, and Indigenous seed keepers revitalizing heirloom crops—work that speaks to the urgent environmental solutions we need.

My passion for this city only deepened when I was chosen to represent Canada at the 5th Global Food Security Conference in Leuven, Belgium. There, I spoke about Guelph's

groundbreaking initiatives: sliding-scale grocery stores, mobile food rescue programs that turn food waste into high-quality meals, and a university lab exploring how to grow food in space. Delegates from around the world were inspired by what our small city is achieving.

What I cherish most about Guelph is the balance between its urban and rural perspectives. I grew up in Toronto and later spent formative years in Woodstock, Canada's Dairy Capital, so I relate to both realities. I've worked with farmers and understand the complexities they face, and I've lived through urban poverty. This dual perspective informs my commitment to inclusive, community-based policy that improves quality of life for all.

I live in Ward 6 and tend a beautiful community garden plot, where I connect with neighbours and hear firsthand about the issues that matter most to families in our area. Most Saturdays, I can be found volunteering at the Guelph Farmers' Market, supporting small-scale farmers and chatting with longtime vendors and newcomers alike. I feel equally at home in these local spaces as I do in national and international ones—collaborating with world-renowned researchers and policy leaders through my academic and professional work. Politics has always been close to my heart. As a child, I used to have dinner with former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who was close with my great-grandmother, and I would proudly tell anyone who'd listen that I was going to be the first female Prime Minister. While my path has shifted from national to local, that same spark remains, and I now believe there's no better place to channel it than right here in Ward 6.

I'm actively engaged in the Guelph community in many ways. I supported the Indigenous Circle at Hillside Music Festival and collaborate regularly with small business owners, including Heritage House Farms—whose produce I proudly sell each Saturday—and the Refill Bar. I've helped sustain Community FEWD through grant writing and fundraising during a time of financial hardship. I'm also a dedicated member of Shift Yoga Collective, where I find both personal grounding and community connection. Friends often joke that going to the Farmers' Market with me feels like walking with a local politician—I'm always stopping to catch up with familiar faces and check in on what's happening in the community.

My journey in politics began on Parliament Hill, where I served as a Parliamentary Intern and later as a Junior Program Officer at Indigenous Services Canada. In the Strategic and Innovative Reporting Branch, I helped prepare high-level reports for the Prime Minister's Office, showcasing the impact of infrastructure investments in First Nations communities. My focus was on elevating community voices—bringing the numbers to life through stories and testimonials that reflected reconciliation in action.

One of my most formative experiences was supporting my aunt during her successful campaign for City Council in Ottawa. Living with her throughout the campaign and her first term showed me the powerful, often underappreciated, role that municipal government plays in shaping people's everyday lives: from zoning to housing to food access and green space. That experience sparked my belief that local government holds the greatest potential to make meaningful, visible change.

I've carried those lessons into every role I've taken on. I've helped establish a community farmers' market in a former food mirage, researched zoning bylaws to support co-living housing models, and written policy briefs that reflect local priorities. I've responded to constituent concerns, participated in high-stakes meetings, and always led with a commitment to listening deeply and acting with integrity.

One of my greatest strengths is my ability to connect with people from all walks of life. This has guided my community-based research, including work on the Law and Sex Work Project, which examined how legal frameworks affect sex workers' health and safety. More recently, I collaborated with three First Nations in Northern Ontario to co-develop community events, educational resources, and land-based programs. In this role, I worked with Elders, local councillors, harvesters, and cooks, further reinforcing my belief that research, like policy, must be rooted in the realities of the people it serves.

Alongside these interpersonal strengths, I bring strong critical thinking and communication skills. I've secured nearly half a million dollars in grant funding for grassroots organizations and social enterprises and have designed dozens of events for diverse audiences. As Vice President of Public Administration during my undergraduate studies, I led a 14-member team and helped organize our annual Public Policy Conference and a Model Parliament held at Parliament Hill.

Now, I'm ready to bring all of these experiences: academic, professional, and personal, to serve Ward 6. I want to work alongside council and community members to create a Guelph where families thrive, where housing is affordable, where green infrastructure is prioritized, and where all residents, especially those who have historically been left behind—are heard and represented. I want to help build a city where, four years from now, we can proudly say Guelph is one of the best places in Ontario to raise children.

Guelph's tomorrow starts today. Thank you for considering my application.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'D' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that tapers off to the right.

Dakota E. Cherry