

## **Personal Statement of Experience and Qualifications**

*Application for City Councillor- Laura McQuillen*

### **Part 1: Introduction and Motivation**

My name is Laura McQuillen, and I am seeking to serve as our next city councillor because I believe local government is where real change begins. As a public school teacher for 15 years, a parent, a former foster parent, and a small housing provider, I've witnessed first-hand how municipal decisions shape our daily lives. I know how policies, good or bad, impact classrooms, families, and neighbourhoods. For years I've worked within systems that too often leave vulnerable people behind.

Until recently I believed politics was for "special people"; those with connections or wealth. That changed when I looked into my new federal riding and realized no progressive candidates had stepped forward. That moment opened my eyes: if I want a better world for my children, for my students, for my neighbours, then I need to step up and help shape it. My interest in this city council role comes from my belief that communities are strongest when everyone has a seat at the table and a voice. I've come to see municipal politics not as a realm reserved for career politicians, but as a space where regular people with lived experience and a commitment to justice and service are urgently needed.

### **Part 2: Professional Background in Education**

I hold an Honours Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Guelph and a Bachelor of Education from Western University. Over the past 15 years, I've taught every grade from kindergarten to grade 12, and I currently serve as a teacher-librarian at the elementary level. My teaching practice is grounded in equity, inquiry, and community. I've worked with students of all backgrounds and needs, including those navigating poverty, neurodivergence, and family upheaval. I've seen firsthand how infrastructure, transit, food security, and housing, all municipal matters, affect kids' ability to learn and thrive and their families' ability to participate in and contribute to their community.

As a teacher-librarian I foster critical thinking and civic literacy, helping students navigate media, develop empathy, and see themselves as active participants in their schools, homes, and the wider world. These same skills are crucial for city leadership.

### **Part 3: Community and Social Commitment**

As a young adult, before I became a foster parent to children I spent four years fostering dogs. I worked with local, grass-roots rescue organizations to provide care, stability, and socialization for dogs waiting to be adopted. It was a fulfilling way to contribute to the

community and connect with like-minded people who shared a belief that these animals deserved a second chance. It also opened my eyes to the ways that small-scale, private organizations often fill the gaps in city and provincial services and make our neighbourhoods and municipalities stronger through their commitment to a cause.

In addition to rescue dog fostering, I also raised a future guide dog through a formal training program. This process required consistency, structure, and community involvement. I feel strongly that the accessibility of civic life is a fundamental right and it was incredibly rewarding to play a role in preparing a service animal for someone living with a disability.

Over the course of six years, between 2014 and 2020 I opened my home to children in the foster system, many of whom had experienced trauma, instability, or loss. During this time I hosted 19 children and worked closely with their social workers, teachers, families, and other caring adults to navigate the supports available to them and advocate for others they desperately needed. I remain in contact with many of the kids who lived with me, offering them support and continuity even now that our formal relationship has ended.

One of the young people who came to my home is now my daughter. Even though we never formally completed an adoption, she is part of my family in every way that matters. When she and my cousin (both young adults navigating independence and trauma) needed a safe place to live, I purchased an apartment in Chatham so I could subsidize their rent and helped them navigate the services available to support them. I know the housing crisis from every angle: personally, professionally, and through my tenants.

Housing has always been part of how I show up for others. I believe everyone deserves a safe and stable place to live. Community is not just a value I hold; it's something I actively build. Whether it's staying in touch with former foster children, advocating for my students, or taking my kids on neighbourhood walks and drawing their attention to how lucky they are to have these green, welcoming spaces, I live with my eyes and ears open to what others need.

#### **Part 4: Entrepreneurship, Housing, and Local Insight**

Five years ago I earned my real estate license and have since developed a modest but meaningful portfolio of rental properties. My partner and I live in our home in South Guelph and I own four rental units: a 2-bedroom in Chatham (housing my daughter and cousin), a 3-bedroom in Kitchener rented through Starling Community Services (formerly Lutherwood) to individuals at risk of homelessness, a 3-bedroom family rental in Waterloo, and a triplex in Digby, Nova Scotia. I'm not a big landlord, I'm a working mom trying to use what I have to create security and opportunity for others.

I understand housing policy not just from a property owner's perspective, but from the lens of social responsibility. I know the cost of doing the right thing, and I also know the cost of inaction. Municipal government plays a crucial role in shaping zoning, development, affordability, and transit, all essential to housing equity and economic sustainability.

My work in real estate has deepened my understanding of urban planning, housing needs, and the real barriers faced by tenants and new homeowners alike. I've helped clients find homes they can afford, guided newcomers through leases, and watched too many families be pushed out of our city by rising costs.

### **Part 5: Vision for Municipal Leadership**

I believe municipal government should be accountable, accessible, and ambitious. I will advocate for:

- **Affordable, inclusive housing** that meets the needs of renters, buyers, and the unhoused.
- **Green space preservation and sustainable development** that respects Guelph's natural heritage.
- **Safe and connected communities**, including improved transit, active transportation, and walkable neighbourhoods.
- **Support for families, youth, and seniors**, ensuring that city services reflect the realities of our diverse population.
- **Transparent decision-making** that invites community input and builds public trust.

I'm not seeking this role because I think I have all the answers, I'm running because I bring a unique combination of lived experience, practical knowledge, and a deep commitment to service. I'm stepping forward because I know how to listen, learn, and lead with care. I've worked directly with youth, families, and community members across different walks of life. I've built relationships, listened to struggles, and tried to be part of solutions. My life has taught me that resilience, empathy, and practical problem-solving matter more than prestige. I believe strong councils are made stronger when a diversity of voices and life paths are at the table. I would be honoured to bring mine to this role.

I am ready to bring my experience, heart, and voice to city hall.

Sincerely,  
Laura McQuillen