

Alnwick-Haldimand Township

2026 Municipal Election

Community Candidate Questionnaire

Prepared by AHRPA

Purpose

This questionnaire has been developed to provide residents of Alnwick-Haldimand Township with an opportunity to better understand the views, priorities and leadership approach of each municipal candidate.

Every candidate has been asked the same questions and will have the same opportunity to respond. Responses will be published as submitted (subject only to formatting and the 2,000- character limit per question) to help residents make informed decisions at the ballot box.

Candidate Information

Name	Mary Catherine O'Neill
Office Sought	Deputy Mayor
Email	MaryCatherineforCouncil@gmail.com
Website / Facebook (optional)	MaryCatherineforCouncil.ca

Section 1 – About You

1. Why are you running for municipal office?

What motivated you to seek election, and what do you hope to accomplish if elected? *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

Becoming part of Council is a natural extension of my many years of involvement in the community. I enjoy being part of the community and taking an active role in making things happen. The encouragement of many residents has been instrumental in my decision to run. I believe that municipal government plays an important role in people's lives and that when politicians do our jobs well, people's lives are better.

My campaign slogan is **Responsible, Respectful Representation**. The core driver for me is to bring these three things into every meeting and interaction.

2. What experience has prepared you for this role?

Describe the skills, education, professional experience, volunteer work or community involvement that you believe will help you serve residents effectively.

Maximum 2,000 characters.

My preparation to be a leader began young through 4-H. This organization for rural youth has learning leadership built into every meeting and experience. I value the lessons I learned as a young person so much that I continue to lead 4-H today.

Professionally, I utilized my university degree in mathematics to inspire children in elementary school. The “Aha” moments in the classroom were my favourite. I also enjoyed working with adults in my roles as a Math Consultant teaching teachers and as an Instructor in the Academic Upgrading Program at Fleming College. My nine years working at the Centreton Branch of the Alnwick Haldimand Library were wonderful! As Project Manager at the Cathedral, I was able to use my skills while working with a committed team, and expand my capacity to see things successfully completed.

My community involvement in Alnwick Haldimand over the past 34 years encompasses many wonderful years participating and leading the Grafton Play Group, 10 years on the Executive of the Colborne, Cramahe, Haldimand Soccer Association where I also coached for some of those years, 10 years on the Centreton Community Centre Committee and 5 years on the Haldimand Court Apartments Board. Currently, I am in my 15th year as a 4-H leader and my 8th year in the Northumberland 4-H Association where I am currently the Secretary. I am in my 7th year on The Help and Legal Centre of Northumberland Board where I am currently the Vice President. Through the Recreation Committee I have been instrumental in our celebrations of community and country with our Canada Day event in Grafton and our Christmas gathering in Roseneath. I enjoy being part of the Centreton Connections group and volunteering at the Roseneath Fair.

Being on Council for this term has given me a strong understanding of what is required of a member of Council. I am very proud that my Motion: Tracking Report for Outstanding Motions passed this spring and is being implemented. This Report provides an overview of the many and varied items dealt with by Council. Being part of The Intermunicipal Task Force on Housing and Homelessness, Physicians Recruitment and attending various municipal conferences has given me a strong understanding and appreciation of my role on Council.

3. What are your top three priorities?

Please identify the three most important issues you would focus on during your first term and explain why.

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Responsible, Respectful Representation

Key roles of Council include Policy Development, Ensuring Accountability, and Asset Management based Budgeting. I take these roles seriously. Long-term thinking and being well informed are key to making **Responsible Decisions** in a way that best serves all of our community including future residents.

In my leadership role as Deputy Mayor, I will contribute to building a **Culture of Respect**. This means a shoulder-to-shoulder approach with my fellow members of Council, our Advisory Committees, our Staff, and our Volunteers. Together we can and will accomplish great things! This culture of respect includes respect for good governance, the role of Council as set out in the *Municipal Act* and the cooperative role local government plays within the community and with other levels of government.

As a member of the Council, I am your **Representative**. I am the Representative of 7,400 voices. I prioritize building positive relationships, being present to discuss issues and making people feel comfortable so that I can understand what matters to the people I represent. My experience is that we share many common values and goals.

My campaign slogan is **Responsible, Respectful Representation**. The core driver for me is to bring these three things into every meeting and interaction.

Section 2 – Transparency, Governance & Public Trust

4. Restoring Public Confidence / Engagement

Many residents have expressed a desire for greater openness, accountability and public engagement. What specific actions would you take to improve transparency and rebuild public trust in Township government?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

This begins with having a representative who is open and trustworthy. During my Focus Group, the eclectic group of people in the room said these were the key reasons they supported my candidacy for Deputy Mayor.

It continues with opportunities for meaningful contributions. Advisory Committees incorporate the skills and knowledge of residents to “carry out the work of council and then report back to council with recommendations”. That way what is brought to the Council table is ready for a decision. A key part of my job as your Deputy Mayor is to develop and implement policies and procedures that support volunteer involvement. This can be done through Adopt a Park and Friends of a Facility working groups that support their local community halls and parks. I will continue to be a trusted voice in our community.

5. Council Meeting Accessibility

Would you support returning regular Council meetings to evening hours to improve accessibility for working residents, families and business owners? Why or why not?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

It is important to acknowledge that having the meetings recorded and available online has been very successful in increasing resident participation. Far more people watch at their convenience rather than attend meetings.

During the past term of Council, we did have evening meetings for a year. Some were well attended while others had no members of the public in attendance. Attendance in both evening and daytime meetings were primarily related to what items were being discussed. There are some meetings that I believe should definitely be held in evenings because the nature of the items warrants holding them at a time that permits the widest range of participation.

I will work to improve accessibility to Council meetings by calling for a review of the Procedural Bylaw to permit increased opportunity for correspondence, delegations and questions to be included in Council meetings. During this past term of Council too many items came forward for decision without the people impacted by a decision being able to share their insights and concerns. People must have an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process.

6. Closed (In-Camera) Meetings

Ontario law permits Council to meet in closed session only under specific circumstances. What principles would guide your decision to move a matter into an in-camera meeting, and how would you ensure those meetings are used only when necessary?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

This question does have a legal component to it but it also has a cultural aspect to it. The decision to move an item into Closed Session needs to comply with the *Municipal Act*. Acting within a respectful, open Council, as your Deputy Mayor I will work to ensure that as much as possible discussions occur in an Open Session. For example, items should be brought to Open Session with only sensitive pieces that are legally required being taken into Closed. The default position is that Councils operate in Open Session.

7. Council Culture

Healthy councils rely on respectful discussion and differing viewpoints. How would you contribute to a culture of collaboration, respectful debate and professional conduct around the Council table?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

I have been a valued member in numerous organizations over many years in a wide variety of governance positions. I love being at tables where other viewpoints are argued because that helps me improve my understanding. I actively seek out voices that are missing at the table. A huge thank you to the many residents who take my phone calls and answer my questions and help me understand my community better.

As your Deputy Mayor, I will continue to bring forward informed and well-prepared discussions. I will provide leadership that is built on respectful consideration of other

viewpoints. I will seek the connections between ideas and people, that will result in good decisions for our community.

Section 3 – Financial Responsibility

8. Financial Stewardship/Efficiency

Property taxes continue to rise while municipalities face growing infrastructure demands. How would you balance maintaining essential services, investing in infrastructure and keeping property taxes affordable?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

During this term of Council I have consistently advocated for Asset Management based budgets. Asset management-based budgeting links municipal funds directly to the long-term condition, risk, and lifecycle costs of public infrastructure like roads and water systems. This strategy stops emergency breakdowns, lowers total repair costs, and proves to taxpayers and senior levels of government that public money is spent wisely. Having asset management-based budgets prevents emergency breakdowns which cut into the Township's emergency resources. Impulse fixing without proper oversight has strained the Township's Reserves, leaving critical infrastructure in need of repair with no money to do it. Stronger planning for asset repairs is needed. As your Deputy Mayor, I will collaborate with my colleagues on Council and our treasurer to ensure that the Township is better prepared from year to year to deal with issues that face us. Through the use of an asset-based budget, each year's budget is aligned with the strategic needs to be considered and to be accomplished. That way major capital projects would be funded using both taxpayers' money and grants from federal and provincial sources.

Given the current affordability crisis that is especially challenging for seniors on fixed incomes and young people, where 28% of our population has had to access a food bank in the past year, I acknowledge and understand the potential impact of my decisions at the Council table on all of our residents. The incoming Council challenge is to figure out how to address the infrastructure deficit while minimizing tax increases. I will be very careful and considerate of taxpayers' money.

9. Independent Financial Accountability

Public confidence in municipal finances is essential to good governance. If elected, would you support commissioning an independent external financial review—or, where justified, a forensic audit—of the Township's finances to provide residents with an objective assessment of the municipality's financial position and financial practices? Why or why not?

Would you commit to implementing appropriate recommendations arising from the review, whether they identify strengths, weaknesses or opportunities for improvement? *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

I am supportive of professional analysis of our financial situation. I am very supportive of implementing the recommendations of the *Township of Alnwick Haldimand – Finance Department Review* completed by MNP and brought to Council on January 28, 2026.

Given my concerns with the 2026 budget, I did not support it and voted against its passage. My chief concerns were that the budget did not address the asset management needs for road and facility maintenance, and included solely funding the ice replacement with \$3.5 million of unrealized fundraising. Further, three months later I voted against spending \$2,332,000 + interest above the approved budget in 2026.

The township failed to complete its Asset Management Plan by the July 1, 2025 deadline. Fortunately, the township is now completing its Asset Management Plan and has a treasurer in place who has indicated that the 2027 budget will be Asset Management based.

As a member of Council, I commit to basing budget decisions on professional reports. I commit to protecting the independence of the treasurer to ensure Council is provided the information we need rather than the information we want. I will continue to be a strong voice on the Council for the implementation of needed financial review recommendations.

I take my role as a member of Council under the *Municipal Act* seriously including my financial duties.

“d) to ensure that administrative policies, practices and procedures and controllership policies, practices and procedures are in place to implement the decisions of council;

d.1) to ensure the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality, including the activities of the senior management of the municipality;

e) to maintain the financial integrity of the municipality;” sec. 224

10. Infrastructure Priorities

Roads, bridges, water treatment facilities, libraries, recreation facilities, municipal buildings and local halls (i.e. – Fenella) and other infrastructure all compete for limited funding. How would you prioritize infrastructure investments over the next four years?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Asset management-based budgeting links municipal funds directly to the long-term condition, risk, and lifecycle costs of public infrastructure like roads and water systems. This strategy stops emergency breakdowns, lowers total repair costs, and proves to taxpayers and senior levels of government that public money is spent wisely. Our largest assets are our roads, bridges, culverts and ditches. Deferred infrastructure maintenance results in roads requiring more expensive replacement vs less expensive resurfaced. I will be advocating for increasing funding to our largest asset, roads, bridges, culverts etc. to minimize the long-term costs for these assets.

Past generations have provided our municipality with a wealth of beautiful municipal facilities including our municipal office and community centres. Moving forward community members will play a pivotal role in the future of these facilities. The condition and needs assessments currently underway will provide much needed information to guide our work. I will advocate for a funding structure that balances the desires and requirements fairly to the Roseneath, Centreton and Grafton communities. This will help to ensure the needs of people at different

stages of life are met and a strong community connection is built.

Section 4 – Growth & Economic Development

11. Responsible Growth

What does responsible growth look like for Alnwick-Haldimand Township over the next decade? *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

Alnwick Haldimand plays a vital role in the agriculture industry and the protection of land. Thus, growth needs to respect this important reality and be focused in our hamlets. I will continue to advocate for options such as Shared Communal Services that facilitate smaller, more affordable units within our hamlets, and four-season land leases that allow year-round living within existing parks.

Community Development and Economic Development are intertwined and inseparable. I will work to build strong relationships between businesses, residents and organizations to facilitate achieving a community that works for all of us.

12. Supporting Business & Agriculture

How would you support local businesses, agriculture, tourism and economic development while preserving the Township's rural character?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

I believe in working with local farmers and farm organizations to help the largest industry in Alnwick Haldimand thrive. The agricultural community is the backbone of our township. Their needs need to be considered for our survival and incorporated into planning decisions.

I believe that tourism is an important part of our township's makeup. We need to strengthen links to get more tourists connected to local businesses which in turn increases the revenues in our township. For example, signage could link trail users to information on local places to eat or stay.

Community Development and Economic Development are intertwined and inseparable. I will connect with other levels of government, neighbouring municipalities, local businesses and service groups to build and strengthen opportunities in our communities.

13. Housing

What role should the Township play in encouraging appropriate housing opportunities for seniors, young families and first-time homebuyers?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

With 300+ residents of Alnwick Haldimand living in inadequate homes, and with rural and senior homelessness growing rapidly, this issue must be a priority. I am part of the Intermunicipal Task Force on Housing, as well being on the Board of the Help and Legal Centre, and have a strong interest in increasing the housing available. I will continue working to ensure that the Township's plans and policies meet the desire for affordable, suitable housing for seniors and for young workers seeking their first home. In order to do this, we need a detailed plan as to how we can achieve these goals through working with community partners including developers and apply for government grants. I am pleased to let residents know that through my efforts this term of Council, these goals are incorporated into the background documents for the upcoming Official Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw.

In 2025, I organized an Information Session attended by 75 politicians, municipal staff and builders from local and neighbouring municipalities to learn about Communal Service Agreements. I am a strong advocate for this option since it will permit gentle intensification, that allows smaller, more affordable units, to be built in rural hamlets.

Section 5 – Community Services & Quality of Life

14. Recreation & Community Facilities

What improvements would you like to see in Township parks, recreation facilities, trails, libraries and community spaces?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

We are blessed to have exceptional parks, libraries, boat launches, and community centres! With its wonderful selection of programs for children and adults, as well as reading materials, our library branches serve over 1500 active card holders. Locals and tourists enjoy the beautiful trails at Nauwatin, the beach at Sandy Bay and the boat launch in Wicklow. Community members gather to share food and friendship at the Alnwick, Fenella, Vernonville and Centreton Community Centres. Members of the community walk, play ball, skate and enjoy the play equipment in Grafton. I will protect what we already have and seek creative, collaborative ways to do more.

The Parks Master Plan is a solid guiding document that established a ten-year pathway. During this coming term, the Council needs to look at what has been accomplished, what still needs to be done, and prepare for the next Master Plan. The ongoing *Alnwick Haldimand Community Centres Needs Assessment and Facility Review* will provide the incoming Council with essential information about all of our community centres for strategic planning. Funding for Recreation needs to be adjusted to reflect the community geographically and fairly support the different community needs. Young families are seeking affordable activities for their children. Seniors want fitness and social activities close to home. We all want to be part of a strong community.

I will strongly advocate for a strong role for volunteers. This is outlined in Sec. 8 of *The Parks Master Plan* and aligns with the Recommendations from the Recreation Committee. It is what I hear from many wonderful residents who wish to share their time and talents.

I will strongly advocate for a recreation funding plan that equitably serves the municipality. In

the 2025 Budget Survey, residents responded that they were most pleased with fire and the library. Both of these departments operate with three hubs. I believe this successful structure should apply to the Parks and Recreation department too.

15. Volunteers & Community Organizations

Volunteers contribute significantly to our community. How can Council better support local volunteers, service clubs and community organizations?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Thank you! Thank you to every person who generously shares their time, talents or treasures to make this a better community. Volunteers provide joy, passion and institutional knowledge. As a very active volunteer for over 30 years in Alnwick Haldimand, I know first hand how much you have and can contribute to our community. You are a valuable resource.

We are fortunate to have many volunteers who want to contribute time and energy to caring for our recreation assets and to organizing fun activities for our community. Creating and implementing a framework to allow these volunteers to participate through Adopt a Park/Facility and Working Groups for various events would align with *The Parks Master Plan* and build a stronger, more beautiful community. Working with service clubs, churches, and community organizations is an opportunity for us to accomplish together more than we can accomplish individually.

This is an area where we can do better.

16. Healthcare Recruitment

Access to family physicians and other healthcare professionals remains a challenge across Ontario. What role, if any, should the Township play in attracting healthcare professionals and supporting local healthcare initiatives?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

The township should continue to support the work of Northumberland County Physician Recruitment and health care providers such as the OHT-N.

Section 6 – Communication & Leadership

17. Communication

If elected, how will residents hear from you between elections? Please describe how you intend

to communicate regularly with the community.

Maximum 2,000 characters.

I will keep showing up. I am a community-oriented councillor who can be found at functions held within the Township, listening to residents' concerns and discussing their thoughts to understand more fully what the needs of the residents are in their areas of concern. Whether you live in Grafton, Roseneath, or in between I am eager to listen to all our residents. I will continue to reach out to residents affected by items being discussed to ensure that I know their perspective. I will continue to strive to be worthy of the trust you have placed in me.

I will work to update our *Procedural Bylaw* and the Terms of Reference for Advisory Committees to ensure that the public has had an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way before a decision is being made at the Council table. Specifically, timelines need to be reviewed and some opportunity for questions needs to be introduced. Advisory Committees need to have meaningful participation in developing and refining policies and budgets.

18. Listening to Residents

Describe a time when listening to another perspective changed your opinion or improved a decision.

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Listening is my preferred way of learning. I constantly seek out other people's perspectives. I am very conscientious about seeking out voices who are not at the table. I routinely ask questions. Every conversation expands my understanding and improves my decision making.

I started preparing for this campaign with a Focus Group. I invited an eclectic group of individuals into my home for a facilitated conversation. The group included people of various ages, from all parts of the municipality, at different stages in life and in assorted financial positions. They were people who I met through being on Council or a committee of Council who had an evident love of their community but who are not part of my regular circle for comment. I heard that trust and connection to all of the community matters most. I heard that lack of leadership and irresponsible decision making were the greatest concerns.

Listening improves every decision I make.

19. Difficult Decisions

Tell residents about one difficult decision you expect Council will face during the next four years and how you would approach it.

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Alnwick Haldimand is a township with lots of geography and a small number of taxpayers. We have a growing infrastructure deficit. Difficult decisions will need to be made about which infrastructure gets attention. Completing the Asset Management Plan will provide a long-term plan for infrastructure repair and replacement.

An operations audit would demonstrate to the Council where to should focus their energies. Council would learn how to get things done more efficiently given limits on staff and budget. It would show how to effectively use staff time and energies to focus on what is most important within the township. It would show Council where savings could be met, freeing up money for other projects therefore providing the wise use of taxpayers' money.

20. Working with Others

How would you work with fellow councillors whose opinions differ significantly from your own? *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

As many of you know this past term of Council was challenging for me. I did my job coming prepared for meetings, making strong arguments, and getting Motions passed. At times, I was on the losing side of votes but always maintained a professional demeanor that respected the work of a Council and my responsibilities as a Councillor. I struggled most when decisions of the Council were selectively implemented, when the decision of what would happen was made outside of the Council table.

Fortunately, this situation is an anomaly for me. I have a very extensive track record of being a valued member, and when needed leader, with numerous organizations.

I have confidence that I will have a productive working relationship with the people elected to the incoming Council. The community expects us to bring differing opinions to the table that are argued on their merits, then refined and improved through questions and discussion. I look forward to hearing the perspectives of my fellow members of Council and incorporating them into my decision making.

There should be the give and take of negotiating with each other through serious discussion focused on getting the best for our community. Our tax base is limited and our money only goes so far. How do we use it wisely to provide what is best for the residents? How do we encourage growth while respecting our rural roots? What areas should we be focused on to create more opportunities for growth within the township? I look forward to addressing these challenging questions with the other people on Council.

21. Measuring Success

At the end of your term, what accomplishments would you hope residents use to judge your performance?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Have we provided good public service to our residents and laid the foundation for long term success? For me, this is about how we make decisions. A member of Council is not a lobbyist for some project but rather a public servant working diligently with the rest of Council to provide good governance.

Success will be that residents are happy with the services we provide and satisfied with the decisions we have made.

22. Why Should Residents Vote for You?

In 250 words or less, tell residents why you are the best person to represent them. *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

I have provided consistent, straightforward representation during my time on Council. I work to understand positions that the community takes. Residents comment on how well I listen to understand positions, not just of them but of everyone, and that I balance those positions to make informed decisions.

I am prepared for every meeting I attend, whether it is council meetings, committee meetings or public gatherings. I read the appropriate documents, research background information, and attempt to see all sides of any discussion that may ensue. I develop thoughtful, respectful, questions to be asked based on what I have heard and read. Being prepared is being knowledgeable. I work with the community's best interests at heart in all matters related to the Township.

Optional Closing Statement

AHRPA 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections | Page 7
Alnwick-Haldimand Township 2026 Municipal Election — Community Candidate Questionnaire

Is there anything else you would like residents to know that was not covered in this questionnaire?

Maximum 2,000 characters.

Thank you for taking the time to read my answers. It reflects a sincere commitment to doing your job as a voter well.

Please reach out to clarify any answers, to provide me with information or to get involved at 289-251-4304 or MaryCatherineforCouncil@gmail.com.

- Responses will be published without endorsement or editorial comment.

