

“CHANGE” is just a slogan?

LEADERSHIP IS THE WORK.

A concise, non-partisan resource for Chamber members, candidates, citizens and media

Every election needs debate. New ideas matter. Accountability matters. Change can be healthy. But change becomes real only when candidates understand the system they are asking to lead.

The Chamber is not supporting or opposing any candidate. This piece is intended to raise the standard of public discussion and move the campaign conversation from slogans to practical, respectful, accountable leadership.

Campaign word	Leadership reality
Change is a promise.	Leadership names the legal authority, budget choice, policy tool, staff mandate and public metric.
Governance and accountability are an expectation.	Provincial law and the Municipal Act are the map. Credible candidates know what is municipal, what is provincial and what requires partnership.
Respect is not weakness. Elect Respect — A Pledge to Restore Civility in the Public Square	Elect Respect means tough debate can be factual, accountable and free from harassment or personal attacks.

THE GOVERNANCE REALITY: MUNICIPALITY, PROVINCE AND LAW

Municipal government is the order of government closest to daily life, but it is not sovereign. In Ontario, municipalities are created by the Province and can act only within powers assigned by provincial legislation. The Municipal Act governs the extent of municipal powers and duties, internal organization and structure. Other laws and provincial policy shape planning, elections, finance, labour relations, policing, public health, accessibility, privacy, procurement, development charges and more.

This is not a reason to avoid change. It is the reason serious change must be specific, lawful, funded and measurable. The strongest candidates will say what can be done by council now, what requires provincial or federal action, and what depends on staff, private investment, community partners or public process.

Reality	What serious leadership does
Council governs by decision, by-law and budget.	Build a majority, pass lawful motions, set policy, approve budgets and measure delivery.
Staff administer and the CAO manages.	Demand results through workplans, service standards and dashboards without bypassing administration.
Many promises sit outside municipal control.	Separate municipal levers from provincial/federal responsibilities and advocate with evidence.
Budgets and laws create trade-offs.	Name what is funded, delayed, stopped or redesigned, and explain the tax, fee, reserve, debt or service impact.

THE PRACTICAL TEST

When a candidate says “change,” the next question should be: change what, through which authority, with what funding, on what timeline, measured by what result?

A SIMPLE QUESTION GUIDE:

Slogan	Question that turns it into leadership
"I will cut red tape."	Which process will change, what timeline will improve, what budget or technology is required, and how will progress be reported?
"I will attract jobs."	Which lands, sectors, infrastructure, approvals, data and partners are ready for an investor to say yes?
"I will fix City Hall."	Which service standard, CAO workplan, delegation, by-law, policy or public dashboard will change?
"I will stand up to the Province."	Which provincial law, funding formula or approval is the barrier, and what coalition will you build to change it?
"They are the problem."	Leadership challenges decisions, records and policies without harassment, abuse or personal attacks.

THE REAL WORK: FROM SLOGAN TO GOVERNANCE

Council governs. Staff administer. The CAO manages. The mayor leads, represents and may use defined statutory powers. Individual councillors can ask questions, bring motions, vote and persuade, but durable change usually requires enough council support to pass a motion, budget amendment or by-law.

Leadership is not simply promising to "clean house," "cut red tape," "attract jobs," or "respect taxpayers." Those may be legitimate goals, but they are not yet a plan. A strong platform names the mechanism: a council motion, by-law, budget amendment, service standard, procurement policy, official-plan amendment, zoning change, Community Improvement Plan, CAO workplan, public dashboard, partnership agreement or intergovernmental advocacy strategy.

FIVE REALITIES EVERY "CHANGE" PLATFORM MUST FACE

One councillor is not council. Durable change usually requires enough votes to pass a motion, budget amendment or by-law.	Staff are the delivery system. Council sets direction; staff advise and implement. Bypassing that system creates risk.	Budgets turn slogans into choices. Faster approvals, better roads and lower taxes still require trade-offs.	Investment attraction is readiness. Serviced land, zoning, power, infrastructure, housing, talent, speed and certainty matter.	Direct incentives are constrained. Business assistance must be lawful, transparent and usually designed through tools such as CIPs.
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WHAT REAL CHANGE CAN ACTUALLY TOUCH

Area of change	Real municipal levers	Responsible leadership asks
Municipal management	Strategic plan, CAO workplan, service reviews, delegation review, public dashboards.	Who is accountable, and how will council measure progress without bypassing administration?
Budget, taxes and infrastructure	Operating and capital budgets, reserves, debt, fees, service levels, asset management.	What gets funded, delayed, stopped or redesigned, and what is the long-term risk?
Policy, by-laws and planning	Council motions, by-law amendments, Official Plan, zoning, procurement and service standards.	Which legal tool changes, and what public process, review or staff capacity is required?

Economic development and investment attraction	Serviced employment land, site readiness, lawful CIPs, one-window response, workforce and housing partnerships.	Which sites, sectors and talent pipelines are ready, and what is missing before investors can say yes?
Public trust and accountability	Clear priorities, open data, voting records, budget transparency, service metrics, integrity systems.	What will residents be able to see by the first budget, December 2027 and term-end?

THE CHAMBER'S CHANGE TEST

1. What are the first three specific council decisions you would seek in year one?	6. What would you stop, delay, redesign or reprioritize to make room for your promise?
2. Which mechanism would you use: motion, by-law, budget, service-level decision, official plan, zoning, procurement policy, CAO workplan, partnership or advocacy?	7. How would you work with the CAO and staff to demand results without interfering in administration?
3. What authority is municipal, and what depends on the province, federal government, private sector or other partners?	8. How would you build enough support across council, wards and communities to implement your plan?
4. What evidence defines the problem, and how will you know your proposed change is working?	9. How would your platform improve competitiveness for business, entrepreneurs, investment capital, workers and families?
5. What will your proposal cost, and how will it be paid for?	10. What public metrics should residents use to judge you by December 2027 and term-end?

THE PROSPERITY AND RESPECT LENS

For the Chamber, municipal leadership matters because it shapes the conditions for business confidence, entrepreneurship, capital investment, human capital attraction, community prosperity and quality of life. Chatham-Kent's potential depends on reliable infrastructure, predictable approvals, competitive costs, investment-ready land, housing for workers, workforce partnerships, public safety, downtown and community vitality, rural and urban quality of place, and a municipal culture that solves problems.

Elect Respect is part of that leadership standard: public debate should be firm, factual and accountable while rejecting harassment, abuse and personal attacks. Challenge decisions, not personal dignity. Test records, not identities. Debate evidence, costs and results, not rumours or intimidation.

Bottom line: Real change is not the word change. It is the discipline to understand municipal law, use authority properly, make budget choices, respect people, set measurable outcomes and remain accountable to every citizen, business, farm, family and community across Chatham-Kent. That is leadership. Ask: Is this real change — or just the word change?