

SARNIA & DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL

2026 Municipal Election Candidate Questionnaire

Bill Dennis | Candidate for Mayor, City of Sarnia

In 75 words or fewer, tell us why you are running:

I am running for Mayor because Sarnia needs a stronger focus on the people who work, build, invest and raise families here. My priorities are good jobs, safer streets, responsible spending, better City Hall service and economic growth. I believe working people should come first. I will bring an unapologetically pro-jobs, pro-worker and pro-growth approach to City Hall and make sure Sarnia is competing every day for investment and opportunity.

1. Do you support keeping municipal services public and in-house rather than contracting them out or entering public-private partnerships? Identify any services you would protect or consider contracting out, and explain your reasoning.

Answer

Core municipal services should remain publicly accountable and focused on delivering excellent service and value to taxpayers.

I have also consistently opposed the routine hiring of out-of-town consultants when work can be done locally or in-house. Before sending public dollars elsewhere, we should first ask whether our own employees, local professionals or local businesses can do the job well.

Where specialized expertise or a genuine business case exists, I would consider outside services.

2. How will you ensure municipal jobs — and jobs funded by the municipality — remain stable, fairly paid, and unionized? Include your position on temporary/contract labour and subcontracting.

Answer

I strongly support stable, fairly paid municipal employment and the workers who deliver the services residents rely on.

Temporary or contract labour can have a legitimate role for seasonal, specialized or genuinely short-term needs, but it should not be used simply to replace permanent employees or drive down wages.

Good workers deserve good jobs, fair treatment and respect.

3. Will you support Community Benefits Agreements, fair-wage schedules, and local-hiring requirements on major municipal infrastructure and construction projects?

Answer

Yes, where lawful and appropriate. This is not a new position for me. I originated and fought for Sarnia's fair-wage initiative during my first term on Council.

I have also been very public in calling for the City to make better use of the discretion available within procurement law to recognize the value of hiring locally, creating local work and keeping public dollars circulating in our community.

When Sarnia spends public money, the impact on local workers and our local economy should be part of the calculation wherever the law permits. The lowest bid is not always the highest value to the community, and that needs to be recognized.

Despite my fair-wage initiative and strong record of supporting local workers, I did not receive the Labour Council's endorsement in the last election. I was nevertheless very pleased and grateful to receive strong support directly from many of its rank-and-file workers. My relationship with working people does not depend on an organizational endorsement.

4. Do you support a living-wage policy covering all municipal workers, contractors, and subcontractors, tied to the City's procurement policies?

Answer

I support fair wages, treating workers properly and always standing up for workers. Again, I was the one who advanced and advocated for Sarnia's fair-wage policy. My record is very public.

Any broader policy should be practical, legally sound and carefully designed so that it genuinely benefits workers without creating unintended consequences for taxpayers, competition or smaller local contractors.

5. Sarnia's economy depends on turnaround and maintenance work in Chemical Valley. How will you use municipal levers (procurement, permitting, training partnerships with local contractors) to prioritize local, unionized skilled-trades labour?

Answer

Chemical Valley and the skilled trades are fundamental to Sarnia's economy. These are highly skilled workers earning good wages and supporting families throughout our community.

There has been no bigger supporter of Chemical Valley than I have been, and I will continue to stand firmly behind it.

I strongly support local tradespeople, apprenticeships and local hiring. We need to think outside the box, within the boundaries of legislation, to recognize the value of local jobs and keep more of our public dollars circulating in Sarnia.

I have been very public in advocating for this approach but have received little to no support from the current Council.

6. Will you commit to meeting regularly with the Sarnia & District Labour Council and its affiliates, and to consulting workers before decisions that affect them, if elected?

Answer

I will be happy to meet on demand with the Labour Council, unions, tradespeople and workers. I have done this throughout the past eight years, and I continue to do so today. Tradespeople and workers know I have their back.

7. Lambton County's By-Name List identifies roughly 390 people experiencing homelessness in Sarnia-Lambton, including about 190 who are chronically homeless. What concrete actions will you take on homelessness and supportive housing?

Answer

I support helping people who are homeless with shelter, treatment, recovery and supportive housing. But I do not believe in helping people who are homeless by hurting people who already have a home.

Supportive housing has to be properly managed and appropriately located. Existing homeowners, families and businesses matter too.

Location is absolutely key.

8. A County report warned that prematurely closing the Out of the Cold overflow shelter could more than double the unsheltered population. Do you support maintaining overflow and low-barrier shelter options while permanent supportive housing is built?

Answer

People need somewhere lawful and safe to go while permanent solutions are developed.

I support appropriate temporary shelter where there is a demonstrated need. But temporary solutions cannot become permanent. The goal has to be getting people into appropriate housing, treatment and recovery where needed.

Location, proper security and protection of the public are critical. People who already have homes should not be made to suffer because of where a shelter is placed or how it is managed. Surrounding homeowners, families and businesses must also be protected.

9. Will you support zoning and parking reforms that make supportive and affordable housing easier to approve — rather than changes that stall projects like Indwell's proposed 353 George Street development in Mitton Village?

Answer

I support affordable and supportive housing, but I do not support everything simply because it is called “supportive.”

Projects have to be in the right location, properly managed and respectful of the people who already live and work in the neighbourhood. Location and the protection of surrounding homeowners, neighbourhoods and businesses are key.

We should help people who need housing without unfairly harming others. You do not help one group by hurting another. I will not support projects that are in the wrong location or that harm neighbouring residents or businesses.

10. With more than 900 households on the social-housing waitlist and demand for roughly 2,500 additional affordable units, how will you increase the supply of affordable and non-market housing?

Answer

The fastest sustainable way to improve affordability is to increase housing supply and increase good-paying jobs. I strongly support both new housing and new jobs.

I will support investments and policies that actually improve affordability: faster approvals, competitive development charges and fees, more serviced land and aggressive pursuit of senior-government housing funding.

No candidate will place a greater priority on creating and protecting good local jobs than I will. Good jobs give people greater stability, dignity and self-worth.

11. Do you support a humane, housing-focused Encampment Response Protocol that connects people to services and housing rather than relying primarily on displacement or policing?

Answer

I do not support encampments because they are not safe for the public or for the people living in them. People should be connected to shelter, housing, treatment and services, but public parks and public spaces cannot become permanent substitute housing.

We need compassion, accountability and clear rules that are applied consistently. Compassion must extend to everyone, and protecting the safety and security of the broader public is just as important as helping people who are homeless.

12. Major industrial investment (such as the proposed Northern Shield Energy Corridor pipeline) may add capacity while creating relatively few permanent jobs. How will you ensure new industrial investment translates into good, lasting local jobs?

Answer

I want Sarnia pursuing investments that provide real benefits to the people who live here, including good jobs, stronger local businesses, a broader tax base and improved affordability.

Jobs are one important measure of the value of an investment, but improvements to affordability are also important. I have consistently been a fighter for local jobs, and I will continue fighting to ensure that Sarnia workers, skilled trades and local businesses benefit from new investment.

As mayor, I will aggressively pursue investment that strengthens Sarnia's economy and improves the quality and affordability of life for our residents.

13. The closure of INEOS Styrolution affects local workers. What role should the City play in supporting displaced workers and ensuring a fair transition and retraining?

Answer

This is not hypothetical for me. I fought the closure while there was still something to fight for.

My first priority is to save good jobs before they are gone. I was the only member of Council publicly advocating to protect those jobs while there was still a chance to do so.

When a major employer is at risk, the City should act immediately and bring together all impacted parties, including the employer, workers, unions, senior governments and economic-development agencies, to do everything reasonably possible to preserve those jobs.

14. How will you attract and retain diversified jobs, commerce, and investment beyond petrochemicals — for example downtown, the port and waterfront, clean technology, and small business?

Answer

We need to value what we already have in Sarnia, not discount it or assume its demise.

Chemical Valley remains a major economic strength. It provides thousands of highly skilled, well-paying jobs and supports businesses and workers throughout our community. I will defend it, promote it and work to attract further investment.

We must promote and build upon our existing strengths while always striving to diversify our economy. I will fight for new investment while staunchly protecting the businesses, industries and jobs we already have.

I have 30 years of award-winning sales experience. As mayor, I will personally sell Sarnia. Jobs, investment and growth will be a central focus of my office.

15. Will you support apprenticeships, Red Seal skilled-trades training, and youth and local hiring through municipal projects and procurement — and if so, how?

Answer

Yes. I strongly support opportunities for young people to train, build skills and establish good careers here in Sarnia. I also believe experienced, established local workers deserve to see local opportunities protected and expanded.

I have already demonstrated my public support for local hiring, skilled trades and good jobs. My focus is simple: create more opportunities for Sarnia workers at every stage of their careers and make sure local people have a fair chance to benefit when our community grows.

16. How will you support revitalization of downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village and strengthen local small businesses?

Answer

I support revitalization across all of Sarnia, including downtown and Mitton Village.

I have been one of the strongest advocates for small business on Council and have publicly supported local businesses throughout the last eight years. Small businesses create jobs, strengthen neighbourhoods and keep money in our community.

My approach is simple: make Sarnia better, cut red tape, welcome investment, bring five-star service levels to City Hall and make it easier for local businesses to succeed.

17. Aamjiwnaang First Nation and nearby Sarnia neighbourhoods face benzene and cumulative air-pollution exposure. What actions within municipal jurisdiction will you take to protect residents' health?

Answer

Residents' health is critical. I believe environmental concerns must be taken seriously and assessed transparently and independently by experts, never coloured by ideology. I will never support characterizing a situation as a crisis unless the evidence supports that conclusion.

Testing and monitoring should be impartial, scientifically sound and based on facts. Where there is a genuine problem, I expect the appropriate authorities to act.

As Mayor, my primary responsibility will always be to act in the best interests of the people of Sarnia. That responsibility will guide every decision I make.

18. Will you advocate to provincial and federal governments for cumulative-effects air-pollution assessment and stronger monitoring and enforcement in Chemical Valley?

Answer

I support appropriate and reasonable environmental monitoring and enforcement that helps keep our community safe and is based on sound scientific evidence.

Chemical Valley is vital to Sarnia's economy and supports thousands of good local jobs. Decisions affecting it should be balanced, transparent and evidence-based. Where the evidence identifies a genuine, independently assessed concern, I will work with the appropriate provincial and federal authorities to ensure it is properly addressed.

19. What specific actions will you take to implement and accelerate Sarnia's climate and emissions-reduction plans?

Answer

I support a practical and reasonable approach to environmental improvements that produces measurable results without driving away jobs or making life less affordable for residents.

20. How will you protect and expand access to affordable public transit and safe active transportation?

Answer

I support reliable, affordable public transit and practical transportation options that people actually use.

Any expansion should be based on demonstrated need, ridership, safety, value for taxpayers and the best interests of Sarnia citizens.

21. Which public services (water and wastewater, waste, transit, libraries, recreation, emergency services) do you believe must always remain publicly delivered, and how will you strengthen them?

Answer

Core public services must remain reliable, accountable and focused on the people who pay for them.

My priorities are safety, accountability, transparency and value for money. Residents should be able to trust that essential services are well managed, responsibly funded and delivering the results they expect.

22. How will you advance meaningful reconciliation with Aamjiwnaang First Nation and the broader Indigenous community at the municipal level?

Answer

I believe in maintaining a constructive relationship with Aamjiwnaang.

I will listen and work with Aamjiwnaang on issues of mutual concern.

But I also believe municipal government must remain accountable to the citizens of Sarnia, and I do not support creating a general approval or veto role for another government over every City of Sarnia decision.

Cooperation cannot involve surrendering municipal accountability.

23. How will you ensure transparency, accessibility, and meaningful public engagement in municipal decision-making — and how will residents know whether you are delivering on your commitments?

Answer

Residents should be able to tell whether City Hall is actually delivering. The proof will be in the results.

I will make it easier for residents to speak to Council and improve the timing of meetings to encourage greater public participation.

Residents deserve answers from City Hall, not bureaucracy and endless delay.

I want a five-star service culture where citizens and businesses are treated as customers whose time and concerns matter.

24. What is one decision you would make that may be unpopular in the short term but necessary for the long-term well-being of working people in Sarnia?

Answer

I will be prepared to say no to spending that does not provide sufficient value, even when the proposal is popular with an organized group or politically fashionable. I will not sacrifice the interests of Sarnia's citizens or businesses to avoid making a difficult decision.

Every unnecessary dollar City Hall spends eventually comes from a taxpayer, renter, homeowner or business.

Working families are already under enormous pressure. Protecting their paycheques sometimes requires government to make difficult choices. I have demonstrated that I have the courage to stand alone when necessary and do what I believe is right for the people of Sarnia.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

I have been a strong supporter of workers throughout my time on Council.

I originated Sarnia's fair-wage initiative. I have pushed for municipal purchasing decisions to recognize local jobs and local economic impact. I support skilled trades, apprenticeships, good wages and strong local employers. I fought for INEOS workers while their jobs could still potentially be saved.

I will not agree with the Labour Council on every social or political issue, and I will not pretend otherwise simply to obtain an endorsement.

But when it comes to the people who build this city, maintain it, manufacture here, operate our industries, provide our services and earn their living through their own work, they will always have a strong advocate in me.

Workers come first.