

James Bowler:

1. So I don't think there's a cut and dry answer here, it's not as simple as saying let's cut this or that and we'll save money. Municipal services are always connected by a complicated web of policies, employees and spending. So if we simply just cut something, we could be heavily impacting something else that is essential. So that being said, I don't think the answer is simply to cut services. The first question I would ask is whether we're getting the value we should be getting from the money we're already spending.

That means looking at administration, duplication between levels of government, procurement, contracts and programs that may have grown without us asking whether they're still delivering the results we originally intended. I'm particularly interested in making sure we're not creating additional layers of administration when the money could be better spent on frontline services and infrastructure.

I also think residents deserve a clearer understanding of where their tax dollars are going. Before asking taxpayers for more, we should be able to demonstrate that we've looked seriously at what we can do with the resources we already have. As a resident myself, I live within the clearly stated rules of a household budget so that I know where my money is going every month. If I need to go outside of that budget for something that has become an issue and needs to be addressed, I need to know how that will impact the rest of my budget and if that thing is a necessity right now. This sounds simplistic, but I think we need to make sure this is the kind of spending accountability we live under so the community knows we're not just spending without really looking at all the impacts first.

2. You will represent Huntsville at both the Town and District tables. What is one issue where you believe Huntsville needs to push the District harder, and why?

One area where I think Huntsville needs to push the District harder is making sure that growth and development are being matched with the infrastructure and services that growth requires. We've seen examples nearby of where growth has outpaced planning. One of the things I like to use as an example is Orillia. The majority of growth has moved across the highway towards where the Costco and other big box stores were built, leaving the downtown of Orillia in a very sad state. I don't want to see this happen to Huntsville, we need to make sure our downtown stays active and vibrant, while not losing the charm that is Huntsville.

The town is growing, and decisions made at the District level on things like water and wastewater, transportation, waste, housing and regional planning have very real consequences at the Town level. I don't think the answer is for Huntsville to simply push for more from the District. The Town and District need to be having those conversations early

enough that we're planning for the consequences of growth rather than trying to catch up afterward. This is actually something I've been campaigning on: Better communication not just within departments of the municipality, but between the municipality and the regional municipality. If something at the town level needs to be checked with the District, there had better be a clear timeline of when that response is coming back from the District and a reason given if it's taking longer than 48 hours.

As a District representative for Huntsville, I would want to make sure Huntsville's particular needs are being clearly represented at that table, while also recognizing that District decisions have to consider the broader needs of Muskoka. We are all part of Muskoka. And while we are six very unique communities within Muskoka and nothing should ever change that, I believe collaboration is at the heart of the decisions we need to make moving forward.

3. Huntsville has significant road, bridge and infrastructure needs. How would you decide what gets funded first when there isn't enough money to do everything?

When there isn't enough money to do everything, I think we have to take emotion out of the equation and prioritize based on need. Safety has to come first. From there, I would look at the actual condition of the infrastructure, how heavily it's used, the consequences if it fails, and whether delaying the work will ultimately make the repair more expensive.

I also think we need to be honest with residents about what is and isn't realistic. There will always be more roads, bridges and infrastructure projects than there is money available to do them all immediately. I think we need to have real conversations with residents as well. If Mr. Smith has lived all his life on Belleview for most of his life and knows where the pot holes form every year or when that culvert last failed and is likely to again, I think this is valuable information. We have roads crews that keep track of these things, but their knowledge isn't as deep as someone who has used that road every day. Conversations like these can lead to more proactive results and potentially money saved when we're fixing a small issue rather than having to dig up an entire road.

I'd also rather see a clear, transparent system for explaining why one project is being prioritized over another than simply funding whichever project has generated the most political pressure.