Kirsty Koop:

2. I understand why so many of us are concerned about municipal taxes. The Town's tax-rate increase reached 10.68% in 2024, followed by increases of approximately 4.8% in both 2025 and 2026. For seniors on fixed incomes, working families and small businesses, those increases add up.

In a typical year, I believe the Town should aim to keep its tax-rate increase close to inflation—generally within a range of approximately 2% to 4%. That is the range I would work toward under normal circumstances. I would not support treating the maximum increase allowed under the Town's budget policy as an automatic target.

At the same time, I do not want to promise an absolute cap before seeing the financial pressures in each budget. An emergency, a serious infrastructure failure or a provincially mandated cost could require a different decision. If an increase above that range were proposed, residents would deserve a clear explanation of why it was necessary, what alternatives were examined and exactly how the additional money would be used.

Before asking taxpayers for more, I would expect every department to review its budget carefully. I would begin by looking at new non-essential initiatives, discretionary spending, outside consulting and professional services contracts, travel and conferences, duplication between departments, and new administrative positions that are not directly tied to essential services. I would also consider phasing or deferring non-urgent facility improvements and other capital projects that do not affect public safety or prevent greater costs later.

I would not support balancing the budget by neglecting roads, bridges, culverts, drainage, fire protection or other essential infrastructure. Delaying necessary maintenance may lower taxes temporarily, but it often leaves taxpayers with a much larger bill later. I would also avoid using reserves to cover ongoing operating expenses because that only postpones the problem.

We should make greater use of grants, shared services, cooperative purchasing, development charges for eligible growth-related costs and careful multi-year planning. New growth should contribute fairly toward the infrastructure and services it requires.

My approach would be straightforward: protect essential services, question spending carefully, defer what is not urgent and keep tax increases as close to inflation as reasonably possible. Residents deserve both good services and respect for the money they work hard to earn.

3. Huntsville needs more housing, and I believe Brunel should accommodate a reasonable share of that growth. However, growth must fit the character and capacity of the area. Brunel should not become an extension of the urban centre one subdivision at a time.

The greatest amount of new housing should be directed to areas with municipal water and sewer services and convenient access to employment, healthcare, shopping and other services. Those are the places where townhouses, apartments, seniors' housing and purpose-built rentals can be added most efficiently and affordably.

Within the rural areas of Brunel, I support measured, low-density growth that respects the landscape. This could include homes on appropriately sized lots, secondary or accessory dwelling units, smaller homes and carefully planned infill along existing roads that are maintained year-round. These options can create housing for families, seniors and younger people without introducing urban-scale development into the countryside.

For me, the line should be drawn when a proposal would overwhelm the rural character or place unreasonable costs and pressure on existing residents. I would be concerned about developments that require the expensive extension of municipal services, significantly increase traffic on roads that cannot support it, fragment forests or wildlife habitat, threaten wetlands and shorelines, or create drainage and flooding problems for neighbouring properties.

Every proposal should demonstrate that there is safe road and emergency access, a reliable water supply, sufficient septic capacity and appropriate stormwater management. Growth-related infrastructure costs should be paid fairly by the development through the tools available to the municipality, rather than being passed entirely to existing taxpayers.

Protecting rural character does not mean saying no to every new home. It means considering where development belongs, how much the land and infrastructure can reasonably support, and whether it will still feel like Brunel afterward.

I support growth that provides homes our community genuinely needs and strengthens the tax base. At the same time, I will stand up for Brunel's forests, lakes, wetlands, open spaces and rural roads. We can welcome new neighbours without sacrificing the qualities that made people want to live here in the first place.

4. Nearby residents should have a strong voice in traffic-calming decisions because they experience the road every day. They see the speeding, dangerous passing, hidden driveways, pedestrians, cyclists and near misses that may not appear in a collision report. Their concerns should be taken seriously and should be enough to trigger a proper review.

However, the final decision should be based on both residents' experiences and clear safety evidence. The Town should examine actual vehicle speeds, traffic volumes, collision history, road width and condition, sightlines, intersections, driveways, pedestrian and cycling activity, and whether children, seniors or other vulnerable road users are frequently present.

Sidewalks and safe walking routes should also be part of the discussion. In new residential developments, pedestrian safety must be planned from the beginning, and developers

should be responsible for providing or contributing fairly toward the sidewalks, trails, crossings and other infrastructure their development requires. We should not approve new neighbourhoods and then ask existing taxpayers to pay later to correct foreseeable safety problems.

In established residential areas, sidewalk gaps should be prioritized according to traffic speeds, the number of families and seniors in the area, connections to schools and community services, and the safety risks faced by pedestrians. Sidewalks may not be practical on every rural road, but alternatives such as safe shoulders, multi-use paths, improved crossings or other pedestrian connections should be considered.

The type of road also matters. A measure that works on a low-speed residential street may not be safe or effective on a rural collector road. Speed humps, for example, can be helpful in the right location, but they can also affect ambulances, fire vehicles, snow removal, noise and traffic flow. Barriers or road restrictions can unintentionally divert traffic onto neighbouring roads. Simply lowering a posted speed limit may have little effect if the design of the road continues to encourage higher speeds.

The Town should consider the least disruptive measure that is likely to solve the problem. That could begin with improved signage, radar speed displays, pavement markings, targeted enforcement or changes that make drivers more aware of entering a residential area. Reduced speed limits, speed humps, barriers or other physical measures should be considered when the evidence shows they are justified.

Emergency services, road-maintenance staff and affected residents should all be consulted before permanent physical measures are installed. Where practical, the Town should use a pilot project, collect before-and-after speed data and review the results after six to twelve months. If the measure is not working or is creating new problems, it should be adjusted.

Residents should not have to wait for a serious collision before their concerns receive attention. At the same time, decisions should not be made by the loudest voices alone. Nearby residents' input should carry substantial weight, but it must be considered alongside technical evidence and the safety of everyone who uses the road.

If the Town decides that a requested measure is not appropriate, residents deserve a clear explanation and practical alternatives—not silence. Good traffic-calming decisions should combine local knowledge, reliable evidence, professional advice and follow-through.