



Canadian Mental
Health Association



Borderland
Pride

2022 FORT FRANCES MUNICIPAL ELECTION MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Housing affordability and homelessness, mental health, reconciliation, diversity and inclusion are some of the biggest challenges facing small communities in Northwestern Ontario.

That's why the Canadian Mental Health Association (Fort Frances), the Northwest Community Legal Clinic, and Borderland Pride surveyed the 2022 mayoral candidates in the Town of Fort Frances to canvass their views on these important issues. Their responses are below.



Fort Frances mayoral candidates Andrew Hallikas (left) and Ken Perry (right).

Survey Process: There are two mayoral candidates in the 2022 election: Andrew Hallikas and Ken Perry. The [questionnaire](#) was [issued](#) to both of them on October 4. Responses received by October 14 are printed below and at borderlandpride.org/FFelection.

The responses appear in the order they were submitted to us and were not edited by us in any way. The candidates were invited to write as much or as little as they wanted in response to each question. The questions are presented under the following headings:

- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)
- [Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [Mental Health](#)
- [Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Addiction](#)

Contact the Candidates: If you would like to follow up with either candidate, their [contact information](#) is printed at the end of this document.

How to Vote: You can find information about how to vote in the 2022 municipal election in the Town of Fort Frances [here](#), including information about how to vote by phone and online, and where voters can get help. We encourage all members of the community to vote in this year's election.

Voting is open from October 17 to 24, 2022. Don't miss out!

Candidate Responses

1. What is your name?

Hallikas:

Andrew Hallikas

Perry:

Ken Perry

2. What are your pronouns?

Hallikas:

He/Him/His

Perry:

.....

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

3. How do you define equity and inclusiveness? How would you apply this definition in your leadership role at council?

Hallikas:

Equity is about fairness and about justice. It means recognizing that each person has different circumstances and needs. Therefore, different groups of people may require or need different resources and opportunities to be successful and thrive.

Inclusiveness means ensuring that everyone has a voice. It means providing an environment within which everyone feels welcome and included. It means getting rid of discrimination and intolerance.

My goal as a leader is to ensure that all segments of our community are given representation and are given a voice through their elected representatives.

I want to ensure that everyone in our community feels that they can be heard by Mayor and council.

I want to create an environment in our community that is civil, tolerant, and non-discriminatory. I prefer to lead by example, and I will use the concepts of equity, inclusiveness, diversity, fairness, and social justice to govern my actions as Head of Council, should I be elected.

As a former Union Leader, these are concepts that I have believed in and fought for, for decades.

Perry:

Equity: Access to equal opportunity.

Inclusiveness: the quality of including different types of people, and treating them fairly and most importantly equally.

Applied; there are no special interest groups in my vocabulary.

- 4. Recently the topic of the lack of voices for young families and Indigenous citizens at council has been discussed in the community. If elected, how will you ensure that council can better represent the diversity of our community? What will you do, specifically and formally, to improve engagement between council and different populations in the community?**

Hallikas:

I have always tried to solicit candidates to run for council who reflect the demographics of our community. I will continue to do this.

The absolute best way to have the voices of all demographics heard is to have representatives of those voices at the council table.

Council also needs to remove barriers that prevent working people of any demographic from serving on council.

One way to do this is to allow working people who are elected to council to attend meetings virtually when necessary and to provide the technical supports to make this happen.

I am heartened to see that we do have two younger candidates for council both of whom have ties to our indigenous citizens, and I support them in their campaign to get elected.

In order to better represent the diversity of the community it is important to listen to members of those diverse groups and to ensure that they have access to the mayor and councillors.

If I'm elected, I intend to hold regular office hours, publicize my contact information, and encourage members of the community to contact me, if they have an issue they wish to discuss. I will also reach out to various community institutions for permission to meet people on their premises.

Not everyone wants to go to the civic centre.

For example, with the permission of the Library Board and Library CEO, I would book a seminar room at regular times and days, advertise my presence and be available to any members of the community who might wish to speak to the mayor.

I will look into doing this at other locations as well.

I also believe that council should hold town hall meetings to allow members of the community to voice their views on certain issues that come up. Again, these town hall meetings should not just be held at the civic centre.

I think that it is important to reach out to minority groups and attend places and activities where they are.

Activities such as the Truth and Reconciliation Walk, Gay Pride events during Pride month, various festivals, and concerts, among other activities, to name but a few should be attended by elected municipal officials. I do this now and will continue to do this.

It is my intent to attend as many community events as possible so as to be available to community residents.

I also think that it is important to reach out to schools and be available to speak to students and teachers on the concepts of diversity and inclusion.

One of my goals is to facilitate and encourage an on-going dialogue between Mayor and various groups, who may feel underrepresented.

Perry:

This is not a new (recent) topic in our community. We cannot treat select populations differently. We must treat them through equity and be inclusive. Actions trump hollow words.

Housing and Homelessness

5. **Fort Frances is not immune to the challenges of housing and homelessness that are being experienced across Canada. How would you, as a successful candidate, mobilize municipal resources to achieve the goals outlined in the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario's March 1, 2022 "Blueprint for Action"](#) to increase housing availability in Fort Frances?**

Hallikas:

The Blueprint for Action contains some 89 recommendations. These recommendations are separated into recommendations for each level of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) and the development sector (private, non-profit, and co-operative). They are then grouped into six categories.

As well AMO lists 12 Housing Principles.

It's an excellent document with much good information and many useful suggestions.

However no single municipality is going to be able to implement all of them by itself, especially smaller Northern municipalities.

I completely agree with the "whole of government" approach that is suggested. The issue of cost and availability of housing is complicated, and funding and leadership must start with the senior levels of governments.

They control most of the applicable legislation and financing.

I think the approach that smaller municipalities must take, is to lobby senior levels of government through municipal organizations such as the RRDMA, NOMA, and AMO, as well as through their elected, MPs and MPPs.

The number one thing that government could do to assist with housing in smaller communities is to provide proper funding. Smaller municipalities do not have the benefit of scale that large ones have.

There are unique challenges facing small rural northern municipalities, although all Ontario municipalities share in the experience of a housing crisis.

Municipal Governments can and must support their local non-profits who assist in housing people.

This can be done by lobbying on their behalf when the Municipality has meetings with Ministers at conferences such as Good Roads and AMO.

The municipality can also host meetings with all housing stakeholders and senior government representatives, to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

The Rainy River DSSAB must be supported in its efforts to provide affordable housing to district residents.

It is the organization locally, that has the most responsibility to provide housing.

Presently the funding formula for most DSSAB projects is a one size fits all, this may work for larger urban centres, but it does not work for small, Northern, rural communities.

Again, political action is required to get the funding formula changed.

Our local DSSAB does an excellent job with the resources that they have, but they simply do not have adequate funding to accomplish all that they would wish.

Municipal politicians must lobby the government for the appropriate change.

Municipalities can and should work with indigenous bands and organizations to co-develop indigenous-led housing that meet the needs of indigenous people.



Recently Grand Council Treaty #3, Kenora DSSAB, and Rainy River DSSAB signed an MOU to work together to improve affordable housing and early years childcare throughout the Treaty #3 territory.

This is an example of the type of partnership that Mayor and Council should advocate for and support.

At the Municipal level, municipal government must be flexible and work with a variety of partners to develop affordable housing.

The Shevlin Woodyard project is an opportunity for partnership, to develop housing.

As well the town has retained WSP to create a new official plan and zoning by-law for the town. Part of the development will be an in-depth consultation strategy with the public, stakeholders, and local indigenous communities.

A technical advisory committee will be set up with a variety of members. This is an opportunity to fulfill several recommendations set out in the Blueprint. Advocating for the province to provide necessary and appropriate funding fulfills another recommendation and has been suggested above.

We presently have a vacancy for a Chief Building Official, it is a high priority to recruit a building official for Fort Frances, asap, recognizing that demand for said officials is very high across the province.

It is important for the mayor, councillors, and administration to keep the AMO document in mind when making many decisions related to housing, the official plan, the zoning by-law and a new strategic plan.

Advocacy for the principles contained in the document with senior levels of government needs to be on-going.

It is also essential to form partnerships with housing providers, much the way the DSSAB has with Treaty Three Grand Council.

I also believe in reaching out to local non-profits and other groups that are involved in housing people, to compare best practices.

Perry:

We have already mobilized municipal resources, through DSSAB and NWHU and the OPP facing challenges. Resources are not what is missing. The lack of direction is the foremost problem. We need better results throughout, with programs that will better address the current situations.

6. What do you believe is the best solution to addressing the needs of the homeless and underhoused populations in Fort Frances? What strategies and partnerships would you pursue?

Hallikas:

This is a very complex problem and there is no one person or one solution that will solve it. It certainly will not be solved overnight.

I will only be able to touch on the problem here.

There are things being done now that are helping, although not solving the problem.

It is important to be aware of what is presently being done, and by whom. This allows for examination of best practices and avoids duplication of services.

The Homelessness committee which consists of 16 not for profit groups is doing much good work collectively, as are the partners individually.

They conduct the Point in Time Count and the By Name list of the homeless in our district.

These provide important data as to the number and demographics of the homeless as well as gathering information on them individually, which can be very helpful in housing them.

This is part of the Ontario strategy for dealing with homelessness.

It is important to see homeless individuals as people with names, needs and loved ones, much the same as the rest of the housed.

This committee along with the DSSAB also works to keep the Out of the Cold Shelter running during the winter.

The UNFC has a foodbank open to all, from which no one is turned away.

They also have a homelessness prevention program and provide a lounge open to all.

Riverside provides some transitional housing, and it also operates an innovative program called a RAAM clinic.

RAAM stands for rapid access addiction medicine, at the RAAM clinic efforts are made to book people with an appointment as quickly as possible, so their needs can be assessed, and appropriate supports or referrals made.

One of the most encouraging and innovative programs is a partnership between the DSSAB and the CMHA to refurbish and operate the former Presbyterian church as a step-by-step program to house the homeless.

This former church not only houses the Out of the Cold Shelter, but it offers Safe Beds for up to a thirty day stay, with supports in place for homeless people who want help. Upon graduation from the Safe Beds program, there are transitional beds that can be accessed for up to two years, again with supports in place.

There is then, a continuum of care for those who want help to go from safe beds to transitional beds and then to permanent housing provided by the DSSAB. Although this is a slow process it is a sure and innovative one. We need more programs such as this with the funding to initiate them provided by the province.

The family centre fills in some of the gaps by providing food, a safe place to gather, showers, recreation, as well as a safe and comfortable place for the homeless to meet with workers from various social organizations.

I have mentioned just a few of the local organizations that are constantly working on the problem of homelessness.

However, programs such as these require proper funding.

The problem of homelessness can only be addressed by partnerships between non profit organizations and a whole of government approach.

Education of the public is also required when trying to deal with homelessness, many of these individuals suffer from mental illness, drug addiction or both. They come from a variety of demographics and have a variety of reasons for becoming homeless. No one wants to be homeless.

Municipalities must show leadership in educating their residents on the nature of homelessness.

Elected municipal officials need to sit on the various committees that are attempting to work on the problem of homelessness.

This is something that I am presently doing and will continue to do.

It is not enough just to house people, proper supports need to be in place to assist them with the traumas that may have caused homelessness in the first place, and their emergence back into society.

A significant number of the homeless are indigenous, and local First Nation organizations must be part of the solution.

Municipal leaders can reach out to Indigenous leaders to form partnerships in dealing with this problem that affects us all. This is something that I would do.

The local DSSAB is hindered by insufficient funding due to a faulty funding formula put in place by the province.

Funding for projects is often based on population, which may work for densely populated urban areas but does not work for sparsely populated Northern rural areas.

A one size formula generated in Toronto does not fit all. This formula must be changed to reflect the realities of large Northern, sparsely populated districts.

Municipal governments can help to change this formula with lobbying efforts.

Homelessness is a problem across the province and leadership must be shown by the provincial government in putting together an overarching plan and providing proper funding.

This is something that I would lobby for.

I would also advocate with senior levels of government for a Housing First Model of dealing with homelessness.

When homeless people are surveyed and asked what sort of assistance would help them, the response is assistance with rent, assistance with getting started and getting treatment.

Senior government must put in place a province wide housing strategy, much like that advocated by AMO in their Blueprint for Action.

My goal is to be active in any and all attempts to lobby the provincial government for proper funding for our local organization.

Homelessness did not occur overnight, and the solution to the problem will also take time, coordination and cooperation between all stakeholders.

Perry:

There are various organization and resources dedicated to homelessness and the under housed. These are two different unfortunate circumstances. There is vacant housing stock that takes too long between vacant and ready for next occupancy. This is a question better asked of DSSAB The system needs to change.

Mental Health

7. The pandemic has placed an increased strain on peoples' mental health and wellbeing. From isolation and worker burnout to the increased cost of living, a multitude of factors are contributing to higher number of Canadians reporting worsening mental health. What role do you believe municipalities have in addressing these issues that are challenging their citizens and voters? What specific investments by the municipality do you believe will help improve mental health and wellness in our community?

Hallikas:

Good mental health and a feeling of well being are essential to the residents of any community.

The pandemic and events that follow from the pandemic have put a strain on all members of our community.

We can see this across Ontario in the number of jobs that are going unfilled, in the decrease in community volunteers, in empty supermarket shelves, in the high cost of products, and in bouts of incivility cropping up.

These things affect all of us.

Fortunately, we have community organizations whose mandate is to help lead and guide us during these difficult times.

The CMHA, the Northwestern Health Unit, Riverside Community Counselling, the UNFC, The Fort Frances Family Health Team, Fort Frances Tribal Health and others do outstanding work in this area, providing a wide variety of services to those suffering from mental health and other issues.

The Municipality must support organizations like these wherever possible locally, and also with senior governments.

Many of these organizations are underfunded, especially in the North, and Municipalities and Municipal organizations like the RRDMA and NOMA can lobby senior government to adequately fund them.

Municipalities can also help with and invest in, the mental health of residents by providing adequate recreational and cultural activities.

Libraries, Museums, Art and Music, concerts, festivals, fireworks, organized sport, walking and biking trails and much more can provide much needed outlets and, activities that promote good health, both mental and physical in people.

I have always supported the municipality investing in and providing these types of services to residents.

I will continue to do so if elected.

I also support our Community Services Division providing a variety of healthy activities for youth.

The Library and the Museum also provide valuable programming for all ages that are conducive to socializing and good mental health, I will continue to support them and their programming.

Not only do they promote good mental health and physical well being, but they make the community a more attractive place to live, work, and play. These are the types of services that are attractive to young families and immigrants looking to move to a community.



Perry:

Mental health is a medical (health) problem. Medical intervention is necessary. The council of the municipality is not equipped to to deal with health. Public health(NWHU, CMHA, ONTARIO Ministry of HEALTH) needs to step to the plate.

Reconciliation

8. On May 1, 2019, the Town of Fort Frances signed a [Joint Declaration of Intent and Friendship with the Agency One First Nations](#). Has the Town of Fort Frances done enough to live up to the commitments in this document and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada? What more should be done by the municipality to improve its relationship with local Indigenous people and to better reflect Indigenous identity in our community? If elected, what would you do, specifically, to improve this relationship?

Hallikas:

I was present when the Joint Declaration of Intent and Friendship was signed at the Point Park, to me it was a very important moment and is a very important document.

I don't feel that enough has been done to live up to the commitments in this document.

In fairness, the pandemic intervened, making it difficult to fulfill some of the commitments by both parties.

One of the most important commitments is to meet regularly to discuss shared priorities and concerns and transitioning to a longer-term relationship of mutual support and strategic alignment on various matters.

This is more important today than ever.

I believe that the Municipality needs to reach out and follow up on meeting regularly with Agency One First Nations.

Another important commitment is to strike a committee or working group to make recommendations on matters related to reconciliation.

This is also an important commitment that the Municipality must move forward on.

Presently the town staff are working to put together a policy on reconciliation.

A policy such as this must have input from Indigenous people and organizations. Having a committee or working group dealing with Truth and Reconciliation, would be of great value.

Much more work must be done on living up to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada not only by our municipality by all municipalities and the various governments of Ontario and Canada.

There are 94 Calls to Action and many of them have not been addressed.

Locally we need to work to fulfil the commitments made in the Joint Declaration of Intent and friendship.

The Municipality must take concrete steps towards reconciliation, creating a working policy on reconciliation with input from local Indigenous people is a start.

Implementing that policy a must.

The Municipality needs to reach out to local First Nations and show support and appreciation for their cultural and economic accomplishments and seek to partner with them on matters that affect the community and the Rainy River District.

Mayor and Council must recognize that many First Nations people are residents of Fort Frances and that Mayor and Council also represent them and must give them a voice.

Fort Frances must become and be seen to become a more welcoming community to our First Nations residents, friends, and neighbours.

If elected, I would reach out to local Chiefs in order to begin a conversation on how to better go about the process of reconciliation and what steps should be taken to make Fort Frances a more welcoming place for Indigenous people.



Perry:

In your mentioning of the declaration document indicates that it must be ineffective to say the least. In speaking to one of the Agency One Chiefs, he/she states the same feelings. His/her exact words, "not worth the paper it is written on. You continue to be the judge!"

Substance Abuse and Addiction

9. **Substance abuse and drug addiction is a growing concern in Fort Frances, with overdoses on the rise. What actions can our municipality take to combat this crisis? What are your thoughts about opening a safe consumption site in Fort Frances?**

Hallikas:

The Northwestern Health Unit is currently studying the possibility of safe consumption sites. Presently there are about 40 of these sites in Canada. Overdose deaths in Ontario are increasing.

We currently have a number of deaths due to overdoses occurring in our community each year. These sites have been shown to prevent overdose deaths and the spread of infectious disease.

They also decrease the outdoor use of opioids and reduce the number of discarded needles outdoors.

I support the use of safe consumption sites and other Harm Reduction strategies.

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario along with the Ontario and Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police are recommending decriminalizing simple possession of drugs.

This is another way of preventing overdose deaths.

Criminalization creates barriers to health care and forces people to use drugs alone.

Harm reduction policies and decriminalization increase entry into other social services such as housing, mental health programs and counselling.

These programs increase access to social supports and decrease outdoor use of drugs.

I strongly support evidence based public health policy and strategies to reduce harms associated with drug use.

Municipalities are limited in what they can do directly to combat substance abuse and drug addiction, but they can support front line organizations whose mandate is to deal with these issues.

Perry:

Call it what it is: a safe injection site. Bring it on. Enroll every user of the site in a drug reduction program. Help these people to get off of the illicit drugs and work to get them clean. Introducing another facility with no direction or guidance is not what is needed.

Further Information

If you would like to contact the candidates directly, they can be reached at the following email addresses:

- **Andrew Hallikas:** hallikas@tbaytel.net
- **Ken Perry:** lakracer@yahoo.ca

Questions about this questionnaire can be directed to borderlandpride@gmail.com.