

Resident Priorities in Ward 5

A Door-to-Door Canvass Analysis

Guelph Municipal Election, 2026

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Abstract

This report presents an analysis of resident priorities gathered through door-to-door canvassing in Ward 5, Guelph, during the summer of 2026. In total I documented 1,360 conversations with residents. Each was coded against eleven concern categories and seven positive themes, derived from themes identified in my first 75 conversations while collecting nomination signatures required to get my name on the ballot. Of the 1,360 conversations, 735 included at least one codeable concern or positive theme and formed the analytic sample. Housing affordability was the dominant concern, raised in 58.8 percent of coded conversations, followed by safety and homelessness (33.5 percent) and roads, snow and basic services (28.7 percent). Among positive themes, appreciation for community and the people of the ward was most common (49.1 percent), followed by green space and the natural environment (29.8 percent). Conversations took place at ground-level doors only and over the months of June-August when most students were away from the ward, so the sample reflects resident homeowners and long-term residents more closely than it reflects renters or students (at around 10% of total conversations). The findings are presented as a ground-level account of what residents raised, not as a probability sample of ward opinion.

1. Introduction

Ward 5 is among the fastest-changing wards in the City of Guelph. It contains the University of Guelph, a mix of long-established residential streets, and newer subdivisions in the south end, and it has absorbed a substantial share of the city's recent growth. Understanding what residents of the ward actually prioritise, in their own words rather than through a pre-set survey instrument, is directly relevant to candidates seeking to represent the ward.

More than any other question, a person asking to represent a community needs to understand what the people there are actually worried about. That understanding is difficult to obtain from administrative data alone. This report summarises what was observed across an extensive door-to-door canvass of Ward 5 over the summer of 2026. Rather than starting from a fixed list of issues, I asked residents an open question about what they valued and what they felt needed attention, and left them free to raise whatever mattered most to them. What they raised was then documented within an application, and then into a structured dataset and analysed using a

standard content-analytic approach. Each conversation was coded for the presence of a set of recurring themes, and the resulting frequencies are reported below.

The remainder of this report is organised as follows. Section 2 describes how the conversations were collected and coded. Section 3 reports frequencies for both areas of concern and positive themes, with accompanying figures. Section 4 discusses the substantive findings. Section 5 sets out the limitations of the approach, which are significant and should be read alongside the results. Section 6 concludes and suggests areas for further research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

I canvassed across Ward 5 over the summer of 2026, covering neighbourhoods around the University of Guelph, established residential streets, and newer subdivisions in the south end of the ward. Where a resident was available and willing to speak beyond a brief introduction, I documented the conversation. In total I documented 1,360 conversations.

Conversations were not structured around a fixed questionnaire, but the opening was deliberately standardised so that the same prompt was put to every household. I introduced myself and then asked an open, non-leading question in substantially the following terms:

“Hey, how's it going? My name is Michael, I'm a University of Guelph student just finishing my degree in Government Economics and am running for city council to represent this area come October. I'm just going door to door trying to talk to as many people as I can to see what they like about the city that they want to see more of, anything they think needs improvement or just more attention in general. Are there any thoughts you'd like to share about the city?”

The wording matters to the interpretation of the results. It invites praise and criticism in the same breath, in that order, and it names no issue, no policy and no level of government. It does not prompt residents toward housing, taxes, transit or any other subject. Whatever a resident raised after that prompt was therefore raised on their own initiative. Answers were categorized by best fit in an application immediately afterward by memory.

2.2 Category Scheme

The category scheme grew out of 75 conversations I had earlier in May, while collecting the nomination signatures required to get my name on the ballot. That period came before the campaign proper and served, in effect, as a first round of research. The same subjects surfaced door after door, and from them I derived a set of eighteen categories: eleven capturing areas of concern and seven capturing positive themes. The scheme therefore reflects what residents themselves raised rather than a pre-set list of campaign issues. Full operational definitions appear in Appendix A.

Categories were not designed to be mutually exclusive, and a single conversation could be recorded under several of them. The scheme also does not include a residual “other” category. Subjects that fell outside the eighteen categories were not recorded, and in practice most of these concerned matters outside municipal jurisdiction or matters on which a city councillor could take no direct action. The frequencies reported below therefore describe the coded categories rather than the full content of every conversation.

2.3 Coding Procedure

Each conversation was coded for the presence or absence of each category, based on what the resident raised. Only subjects a resident raised of their own accord were recorded. A conversation entered the analytic sample if at least one category was recorded for it.

Coding was carried out by me alone, applying the same definitions throughout. There was no second coder and no formal assessment of inter-rater reliability. Because I was both the canvasser and the person coding, every entry in this dataset reflects my own interpretation of what a resident meant. Appendix B gives examples of the kinds of statements that led me to record each category.

2.4 Analytic Sample

Of the 1,360 conversations I documented, 735 included at least one codeable concern or positive theme and constitute the analytic sample. The remainder of 625 were brief exchanges in which no substantive opinion about the city was expressed and left out of the analytic sample. Within the analytic sample, 609 conversations (82.9 percent) included at least one area of concern, 539 (73.3 percent) included at least one positive theme, and 413 (56.2 percent) included both. A further 196 conversations (26.7 percent) raised concerns but no positive theme, and 126 (17.1 percent) raised a positive theme but no concern. Unless otherwise stated, all percentages in Section 3 are calculated against the base of 735 coded conversations.

3. Results

3.1 Areas of Concern

Table 1 and Figure 1 report the frequency with which each of the eleven concern categories was raised across the 735 coded conversations. Housing affordability was, by a substantial margin, the most frequently raised concern, appearing in close to three in five coded conversations. Safety and homelessness, and roads, snow and basic services, followed as the second and third most common concerns. Beyond the leading three, no single category approached the same frequency.

Category	n	% of coded conversations	% of all mentions
Housing Affordability	432	58.8%	31.2%
Safety & Homelessness	246	33.5%	17.8%

Category	n	% of coded conversations	% of all mentions
Roads & Snow	211	28.7%	15.2%
Public Transit	118	16.1%	8.5%
Downtown & Business	76	10.3%	5.5%
Green Space Loss	74	10.1%	5.3%
Bike Infrastructure	59	8.0%	4.3%
Neighbourhood Change	53	7.2%	3.8%
Traffic & Road Safety	47	6.4%	3.4%
Utilities & Healthcare	46	6.3%	3.3%
Growth & Sprawl	22	3.0%	1.6%

Table 1. Frequency of concern categories across 735 coded conversations. The third column reports the share of coded conversations in which the category was raised. The fourth reports the category's share of all 1,384 concern mentions. Because categories are not mutually exclusive, the third column does not sum to 100 percent.

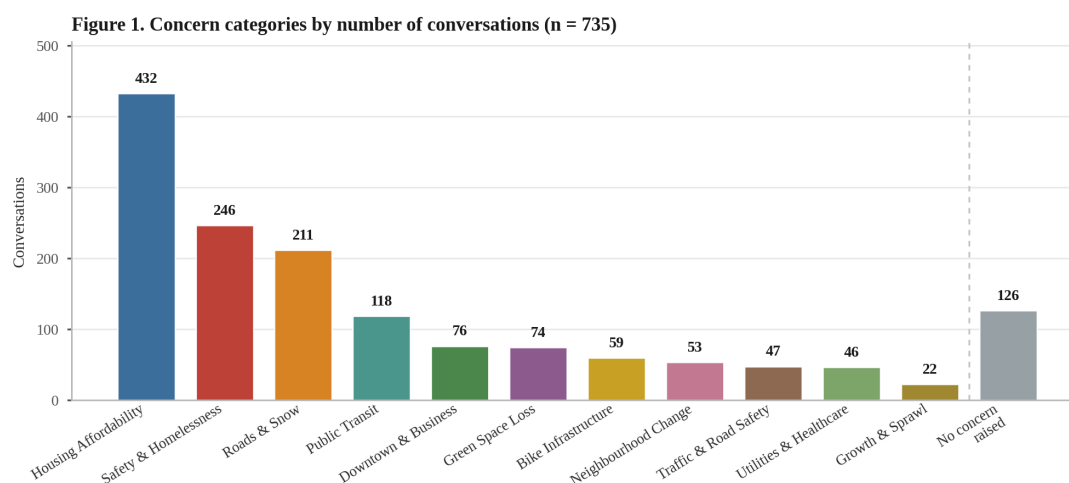


Figure 1. Concern categories by number of conversations. The final bar, shown in grey and separated by a dashed rule, reports the 126 conversations in which a resident raised a positive theme but no concern.

3.2 Positive Themes

Table 2 and Figure 2 report the frequency of the seven positive themes. Appreciation for community and the people of the ward was the most frequently raised positive theme, named in close to half of all coded conversations, followed by appreciation for green space and the natural environment. Positive themes were raised somewhat less often than areas of concern, a pattern consistent with the problem-oriented direction most doorstep conversations take once a resident begins to speak at length.

Category	n	% of coded conversations	% of all mentions
Community & People	361	49.1%	35.0%
Green Space & Nature	219	29.8%	21.3%

Category	n	% of coded conversations	% of all mentions
Downtown, Business & Events	143	19.5%	13.9%
Walkability & Location	139	18.9%	13.5%
Small-town Feel, Quiet & Safe	79	10.7%	7.7%
Amenities & Recreation	78	10.6%	7.6%
City Energy & Vibrancy	11	1.5%	1.1%

Table 2. Frequency of positive themes across 735 coded conversations. The fourth column reports each theme's share of all 1,030 positive mentions.

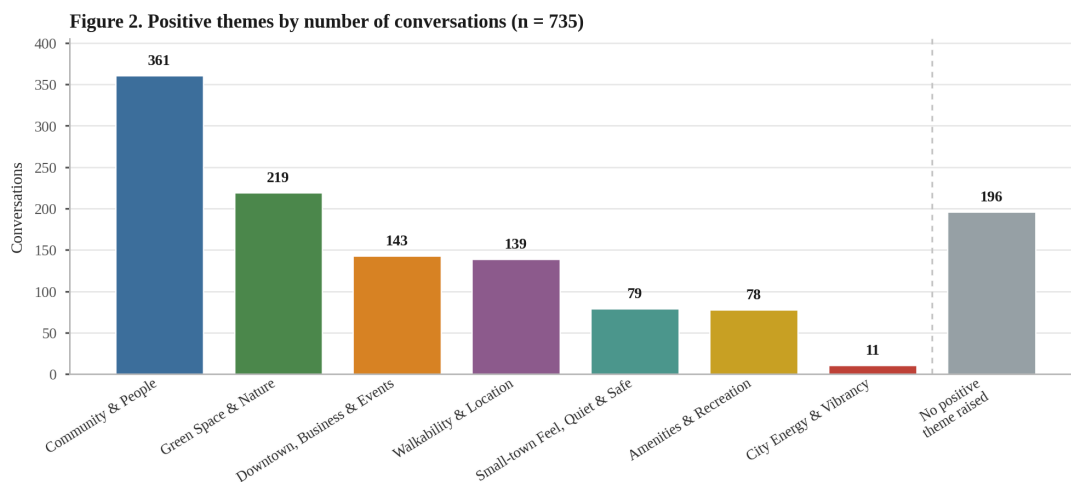
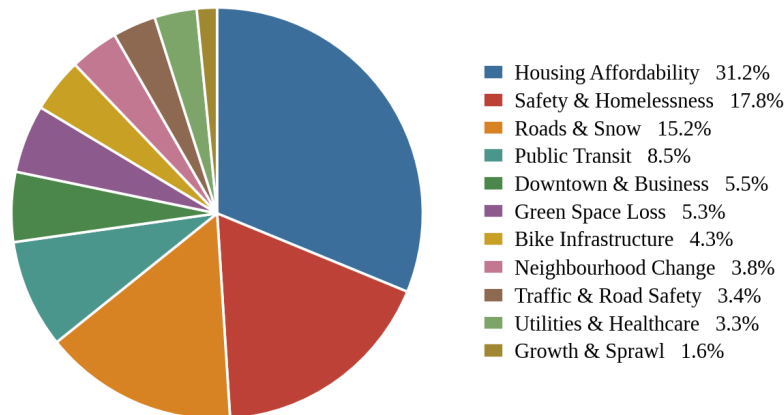


Figure 2. Positive themes by number of conversations. The final bar, shown in grey, reports the 196 conversations in which a resident raised concerns but no positive theme.

3.3 Composition of Topics Raised

Figures 1 and 2 report how many conversations raised each topic. Figure 3 presents the same data differently, showing each category as a share of all the points raised on its side of the ledger. Because a single conversation may contribute to several categories, these shares describe the composition of what was said rather than the proportion of residents who said it.

Concerns (1,384 mentions)



Positive themes (1,030 mentions)

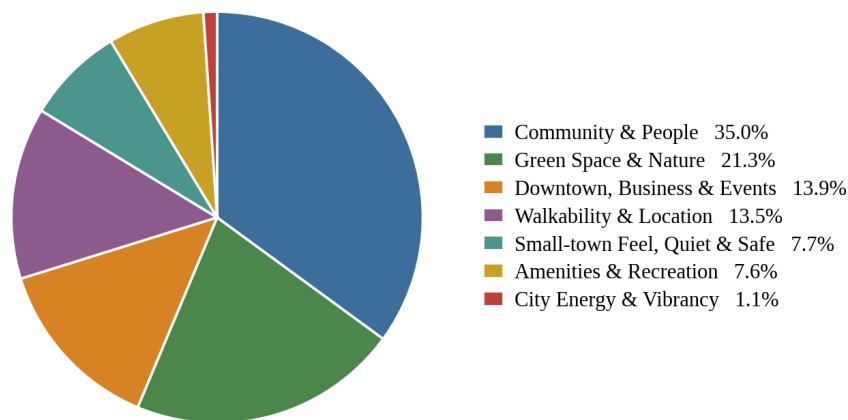


Figure 3. Each concern category as a share of all 1,384 concern mentions (top), and each positive theme as a share of all 1,030 positive mentions (bottom).

4. Discussion

4.1 Housing as the Dominant Concern

Housing affordability was raised in close to three in five coded conversations, roughly twice as often as the next most common concern. It was expressed in consistent terms across otherwise very different households. Renters described rent rising beyond what their income could absorb. Homeowners raised the scale of recent property tax increases and questioned the value returned for them. Parents and grandparents raised the prospect that their children would not be able to buy in the city they grew up in. Older residents on fixed incomes raised the cost of remaining in a home they already owned. The common element was not a single policy grievance but a shared sense that the cost of staying in Guelph is becoming difficult to sustain.

4.2 Safety, Homelessness and the Downtown Core

Safety and homelessness was the second most frequently raised concern, and it took two distinct forms. On residential streets it appeared as property crime, including break-ins and thefts of vehicles and bicycles. Closer to the core it appeared as a change in how it feels to move around downtown, with the visible rise in homelessness leaving some residents reluctant to go there, particularly after dark. Residents frequently distinguished between sympathy for the causes of homelessness and concern about its visible effects on daily life. The tone ranged from compassion to frustration, but the underlying message was consistent across both: residents want to see the situation improve rather than continue as it is.

4.3 Roads, Snow and Basic Services

The third most frequently raised concern was the everyday business of municipal service delivery: potholes and streets that residents said had not been resurfaced in years, winter plowing described as incomplete on residential side streets, and disruption from summer construction and detours. These concerns were often raised alongside property taxes, and the pairing is itself informative. The frustration expressed was less about any individual pothole than about the relationship between what residents pay and what they observe being delivered.

4.4 What Residents Value

Positive themes were substantively important even where they were less frequent than concerns. Appreciation for community and the people of the ward was the single most common positive theme and was frequently raised in the same conversations that were otherwise dominated by concerns about cost or change. Appreciation for green space and the natural environment followed. This suggests that residents' attachment to the ward is not contingent on the absence of problems, and that the things residents most value are social and environmental rather than transactional.

4.5 A Cross-Cutting Narrative

Taken together, the concerns and the positive themes tell a single story. Residents named community and green space as what they value most, and the problems they raised are largely the pressures acting on those things. The underlying request is for growth that protects what already exists here rather than displacing it. The leading concerns also appear linked. Housing that is scarce and expensive leaves more people without it, pushes others to live further from work, and sends them back through the city by car, adding to the road and transit strain residents raised as a separate issue. This study records what residents brought up rather than why, so the connection is one the findings are consistent with rather than one they prove.

5. Limitations

The limitations below are substantial and should be read alongside the results rather than treated as a formality. This report describes what residents raised at the door during one canvass. It is not a perfectly standardized survey of the ward.

5.1 Sample Composition and Demographic Skew

The sample is a convenience sample, not a probability sample. It consists of residents who were home, answered the door, and were willing to hold an extended conversation with a candidate. Three features of the canvass skew it in a consistent and predictable direction.

Ground-level doors only. All conversations took place at ground-level entrances. I canvassed no apartment buildings, so residents of apartment buildings are absent from the sample entirely rather than merely underrepresented. Given that apartment residents in Ward 5 are disproportionately renters, students and lower-income households, this omission removes from the sample precisely those residents most exposed to the housing costs that dominate the findings.

Timing relative to the academic year. I canvassed over the summer, when most students were away from the ward. Ward 5 contains the University of Guelph and a substantial student population during the academic year, and that population is heavily underrepresented here.

Availability during canvassing hours. Residents who were at home and available to speak are overrepresented relative to those who were at work, away, unable to come to the door, or unwilling to speak with a candidate. The practical effect of the three features together is a sample weighted toward homeowners, long-term residents, families and older residents, and away from students, renters and apartment residents. Any reading of these results should account for that weighting.

5.2 Reliance on Recall

Coding took place after each conversation rather than during it, so what was recorded depends on my recollection of what a resident had just said. Recall is imperfect, and its errors are not neutral. Points made forcefully, points made late in a conversation, and points that touched on subjects already prominent in my own thinking are more likely to have been retained than passing remarks. Short conversations are more likely to have been captured in full than long ones, simply because there was less to hold onto. On a long canvassing day the risk compounds. The counts reported here should therefore be read as a record of what I registered and recorded shortly after each conversation, which is not identical to everything that was said.

5.3 Single Coder and Self-Coding

All coding was done by one person, with no second coder and no formal inter-rater reliability assessment, so a degree of subjective judgment is unavoidable. That judgment matters most where a resident touched on a subject only briefly or indirectly, since whether such a remark

crossed the threshold for recording was my call alone. I was also the candidate, which introduces a further risk that my expectations influenced what I recorded. The categories were derived from my own earlier conversations rather than adapted from an externally validated instrument, so comparison with studies using different schemes should be made with caution. Some categories also sit close to one another, most notably housing affordability and neighbourhood change, and roads and snow and traffic and road safety. A remark could reasonably have been recorded under either, which adds noise to the smaller categories in particular.

5.4 Frequency Rather Than Intensity

The analysis records whether a topic was raised, not how strongly a resident felt about it. A concern mentioned in passing is counted identically to one that dominated a long conversation. The figures therefore measure how widely a topic was raised, not how much weight residents themselves would place on it.

6. Conclusion

This analysis of 735 coded door-to-door conversations across Ward 5 finds housing affordability to be the dominant concern among residents, raised in close to three in five coded conversations and roughly twice as often as any other issue. Safety and homelessness, and the delivery of basic municipal services, follow as the next most common concerns. At the same time, residents consistently expressed genuine attachment to the ward, to its community and to its green space, which suggests that the underlying request is not for a different ward but for one that remains affordable and liveable as it continues to grow. Subject to the limitations set out in Section 5, these findings offer a direct, ground-level account of resident priorities in Ward 5 heading into the 2026 municipal election. Further research should focus on including data collection throughout the year (given the University of Guelph's seasonality) as well as in apartment buildings to help account for underrepresented groups such as students and renters.

Data Availability

The de-identified dataset underlying this report is published alongside it. It contains one row per coded conversation, identified by number only, showing the categories recorded for each, together with a tally sheet that reproduces every count and percentage reported above. No names, addresses or contact details appear in it, and the row order has been randomised so that a conversation number cannot be linked to a household or to a canvassing route. Link:

[Ward5 Canvass dataset](#)

Appendix A. Category Definitions

A.1 Concern Categories

Category	Operational definition
Housing Affordability	References to housing costs, rent levels, property taxes, mortgage burden, or the affordability of homeownership generally.
Safety & Homelessness	References to homelessness, encampments, substance use, crime, break-ins, or personal safety.
Roads & Snow	References to road maintenance, potholes, road construction, or snow and ice clearing.
Public Transit	References to bus service, route coverage, or transit reliability.
Downtown & Business	References to downtown decline, vacancy, construction disruption, or difficulty for local businesses.
Green Space Loss	References to the loss of trees, parkland, or natural areas to development.
Bike Infrastructure	References to the design, cost, placement, or usability of bike lanes.
Neighbourhood Change	References to rezoning, infill development, density, or changing neighbourhood character.
Traffic & Road Safety	References to traffic congestion, speeding, or intersection and pedestrian safety.
Utilities & Healthcare	References to water or hydro service, or access to hospitals and family physicians.
Growth & Sprawl	References to the pace, scale, or management of the city's overall growth.

A.2 Positive Themes

Category	Operational definition
Community & People	Appreciation for neighbours, friendliness, or community spirit.
Green Space & Nature	Appreciation for parks, trails, trees, or the natural environment.
Downtown, Business & Events	Appreciation for downtown, local businesses, or civic events.
Walkability & Location	Appreciation for the convenience or walkability of a location.
Small-town Feel, Quiet & Safe	Appreciation for quiet, safety, or a small-town atmosphere.
Amenities & Recreation	Appreciation for recreational facilities or municipal amenities.
City Energy & Vibrancy	Appreciation for the city's overall growth or vibrancy.

Appendix B. Illustrative Coding Examples

The examples below describe the kinds of statements that led me to record each category. They are generalised descriptions of recurring patterns rather than accounts of any particular household, and no resident is identified. They are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and are

offered so that a reader can judge for themselves where I drew the line between one category and another.

Housing Affordability. A resident describing rent in the area as having risen beyond what their household could manage. A homeowner raising the size of recent property tax increases and questioning what was being delivered in return. A parent saying their adult children would not be able to afford to buy in the city they grew up in.

Safety & Homelessness. A resident saying they had become reluctant to go downtown in the evening. A household describing a break-in or a stolen bicycle on their street.

Roads & Snow. A resident saying their street had not been resurfaced in many years. A resident describing winter plowing on their street as routinely left unfinished.

Public Transit. A resident saying bus service in their area was too infrequent to rely on for commuting.

Neighbourhood Change. A resident raising concern about infill development nearby, or about the conversion of neighbouring homes into student rentals.

Community & People. A resident saying their neighbours were the main reason they had stayed in the area.

Green Space & Nature. A resident describing regular use of the trails or river paths as something they valued about living in the ward.