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Manikantan Nair
Mayor of Kitchener

What is your motivation for running for election?

I am running for Mayor because I believe Kitchener has enormous potential and we should be more ambitious about our future.

After living in Canada for 25 years and being a long-time resident of Kitchener, I have seen our city grow and change. I have also travelled and experienced communities outside Canada, and those experiences have made me ask an important question:

Why can't Kitchener aspire to be one of the best cities in the world?

I am running because I believe we need fresh ideas, practical solutions, stronger accountability, and leadership that is willing to challenge the status quo.

My professional career in IT and network/cybersecurity has taught me to look at complex problems, understand risks, find practical solutions, and think about the future, not just the next election cycle.

But this campaign is not about my career. It is about our community.

I want a Kitchener where:

- Housing is more attainable
- Downtown is vibrant, safe and economically strong
- Infrastructure keeps pace with growth
- Taxpayers receive better value for their money
- Businesses are encouraged to invest and create jobs
- Public safety is taken seriously
- We embrace innovation and technology
- Council is accountable and transparent
- Every neighborhood has a voice
- We plan for the Kitchener our children will inherit, not just the Kitchener we have today

I am not running because I believe I have all the answers. I am running because I am willing to listen, ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and work with people to find better answers. Kitchener deserves leadership that is honest about what the City can control, realistic about what requires partnership with the Region, Queen's Park and Ottawa, and ambitious about what we can accomplish together.

A brighter future doesn't happen by itself. We have to build it. That is why I am running for Mayor of Kitchener.

What are your top three priority issues you want to address at Regional Council?

Stagnant Job Creation, Housing Affordability Crisis, Downtown Safety & Homelessness

What is your vision for each of the issues you identified above?

1. Stagnant Job Creation

Kitchener's economic strategy hasn't evolved since the early tech boom. The city relies heavily on:

- Startups (high failure rate)
- Small tech firms (limited hiring)
- Service jobs (low wage)

Symptoms residents feel:

- Fewer mid-career opportunities
- Young people leaving for Toronto
- Wage stagnation

Municipal-level solutions

- Create a Kitchener Industrial Innovation Zone with tax incentives for advanced manufacturing, robotics, clean tech, and food processing.
- Fast-track permits for companies committing to local hiring.
- Launch a City-backed Talent Pipeline Program with Conestoga College for skilled trades, automation, and AI-related manufacturing.

2. Housing Affordability Crisis

Housing costs have outpaced wages dramatically.

Municipal level we can actually control:

- Zoning
- Density approvals
- Development charges
- Incentives for attainable units

Solutions

- Approve mid-rise (6–12 storey) buildings along all major corridors.
- Require inclusionary zoning (affordable units in every new development).
- Convert underused city-owned land into mixed-income housing.

3. Downtown Safety & Homelessness

Residents and businesses consistently raise concerns about:

- Drug use
- Encampments
- Mental health crises
- Retail decline

Solutions

- Expand the Integrated Crisis Response Team (mental health + paramedic).
- Create a Downtown Business Recovery Zone with tax relief and grants.
- Build a 24/7 supportive housing facility with wraparound services.

What tangible steps would you take to increase the supply of affordable housing across the Region?

Kindly refer to my Housing Policy platform policy for details:

<https://www.voteformair.ca/post/kitchener-housing-policy-paper-draft> . Kitchener needs more housing options, including multi-unit housing in established neighborhoods. But intensification should be planned responsibly, considering infrastructure, roads, transit, parking, schools and neighborhood character. We need more homes and more housing choices, while ensuring our infrastructure keeps pace with growth.

What is your plan to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and create additional child care spaces?

Child care is primarily a provincial and regional responsibility, but the City has an important role to play in making it easier to create more spaces. As Mayor, I would work with the Region, the Province, school boards, developers and child-care providers to identify where the greatest shortages exist and remove unnecessary municipal barriers to creating new spaces. I would also be clear about what the Mayor can and cannot do. I cannot promise to create child-care spaces that depend on provincial or regional funding. The goal should not simply be to announce more spaces. The goal is accessible, affordable, high-quality child care located where families actually need it.

What is your position on the Provincial government's efforts to increase private sector involvement in drinking water and wastewater services?

My position is that essential drinking water and wastewater services should remain primarily publicly delivered and accountable. As far as City is concerned, I believe the City should prioritize hiring and retaining its own staff to deliver municipal services. Direct city employees provide accountability, continuity, local expertise, and a long-term investment in our community. **Private contractors can have a role where they provide a clear and demonstrable benefit, but outsourcing should not be the default.** I have spent more than a decade working in the public sector. I understand that public institutions have a responsibility to be accountable for the resources entrusted to them, manage risk carefully, retain institutional knowledge and deliver reliable services. I want to bring that experience to City Hall.

What role should the Region play in protecting publicly owned water services?

The Region should protect public ownership and public control of our drinking water and wastewater systems. Water is an essential public service and a long-term community asset. The Region should ensure that the infrastructure, expertise and operational capacity needed to provide safe and reliable water remain under strong public oversight

What forms of inequity do you believe are the most significant challenges in our community? How would you address them?

The most significant inequities in our community are often connected to access basically access to affordable housing, good jobs, transportation, safe public spaces and the services people need to participate fully in community life.

What organizations, initiatives, or movements have you supported that work to address systemic discrimination or oppression? Please describe your involvement.

Throughout my years living in Canada, I have been involved in community service, civic discussions and initiatives that bring people together across different backgrounds. My approach has been to focus on participation, equal opportunity, respect and practical problem-solving rather than dividing people into groups. I have supported community initiatives through volunteering, community engagement and public-policy discussions, and I believe that everyone should have an equal opportunity to participate in civic, economic and community life. I also believe that addressing discrimination requires more than statements. It requires listening to people who experience barriers, understanding the facts, identifying where systems are not working, and taking practical steps to improve them. As a Mayor candidate, I would bring that same approach to City Hall: treat people with dignity, listen to different perspectives, apply rules fairly, and address barriers wherever the City has the authority and ability to do so.

Can you commit to publicly speaking up in favour of these demands, including at Council meetings?

Yes