Voting for a Council Candidate Who Does Not Live in Thorold?

Residence, independence and the questions voters should ask

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Should the people governing Thorold also make their home here? In my opinion, residence deserves serious weight when voters choose their council. A business connection can be meaningful, but living in a community brings a different relationship with its services, neighbourhoods and daily problems.

Chantal McCollum's municipal campaign website presents her as a lawyer and small business owner who grew up in Thorold. Her published NDP biography identifies her as a Welland resident and describes a Thorold-based law practice. In my discussions with the City, staff told me she does not live in Thorold but has met the criteria to run. This is my account of their verbal confirmation. Her campaign should explain why she is seeking to govern a city where she does not reside. [1, 2]

Eligibility is the starting point, not the whole argument

Ontario allows eligible non-resident owners or tenants of municipal property, and their spouses, to vote and run for council. Candidates must also satisfy citizenship, age and other legal requirements. Corporate ownership alone does not give a shareholder the personal property connection needed to qualify as a non-resident elector. [3, 4]

Calling that route a technicality expresses my discomfort with the policy; it does not establish that a candidate has evaded the law. The legislation deliberately recognizes these connections. Voters can nevertheless ask whether a legally qualified candidate offers the kind of representation they want.

From my inquiries at City Hall, I understand that McCollum's qualification involves a corporation-owned Front Street property and a tenancy held personally by her husband at that same address. From my in-person discussions with City staff, I understood that the arrangement meets the eligibility requirements even though the parties are related. This is my account of their explanation, not an independent legal determination; I have not reproduced the title, lease or written clerk confirmation here.

Was the lease to her husband an arm's-length transaction? If not, how did City staff assess that tenancy as the basis for her eligibility? I ask for clarification of the arrangement and the applicable criteria, not because a family transaction alone establishes ineligibility.

A family connection between landlord and tenant does not, by itself, prove that a tenancy is invalid or that it was created to manipulate an election. My question is about the strength and transparency of the community connection, rather than an allegation of unlawful candidacy.

What living here can add

Residents experience their city after business hours as well as during the working day. They encounter neighbourhood traffic, local recreation, noise, road conditions and access to services as part of ordinary life. That can expose problems a commuter might encounter less often or in a narrower part of the city.

This is a potential disadvantage of non-resident representation, not proof that every non-resident is uninformed. A business owner may understand downtown issues exceptionally well. The question is whether that understanding extends to Port Robinson, Allanburg, Thorold South and the rest of the city.

If you live elsewhere, how will you maintain regular contact across Thorold? How often will residents be able to meet you outside working hours? Which local problems have you investigated personally? What commitments will demonstrate that your interest extends beyond your workplace or property?

Anthony Longo: a personal comparison

Anthony Longo topped the city councillor poll in 2018 with 2,326 votes. In 2022, he placed fourth with 1,900 votes, winning one of eight seats. He is completing his third term: the September 2022 profile described him as finishing his second, before his subsequent re-election. [5, 6, 11]

I regard Anthony as a respected representative from a family with a long history of community service. When I called to ask why he was not running again, I recall him saying he had moved to Welland. When I raised the possibility of qualifying through another connection, I recall his exact words as: “I don’t think it’s right.” This quotation is from my recollection of our private conversation; I have no recording or written confirmation.

I respect that choice. It sharpens my question: why should voters prefer a non-resident applicant over a capable resident? Others may reach a different conclusion from Anthony's, and his decision does not make their candidacies improper. But it illustrates the distinction between meeting a legal threshold and setting a personal standard.

Apply the residence question consistently

My understanding is that first-term councillor Mike De Divitiis also lives outside Thorold; I have not independently verified where outside Thorold he currently resides, or independently confirmed his non-resident status. Residents I have spoken with dislike being represented by someone who lives elsewhere. Those conversations leave me questioning his re-election prospects, but they are not a representative survey or an election forecast. To me, decisions for Thorold made by people living outside it raise a concern about shared interests and accountability. Some residents share that perception; non-residence alone does not establish a legal conflict. The same residence standard should apply to everyone.

Could outside organizations recruit local candidates?

The non-resident route raises a broader question: could an outside political organization recruit legally eligible candidates to advance its preferred policies here? That possibility is worth discussing, but I have no evidence that McCollum was placed in this race by a party. Voters should ask who shaped the platform and whether any commitments accompany campaign support.

What McCollum's website still leaves to explain

Her campaign identifies housing affordability, infrastructure and accountable leadership as priorities. It supports zoning and development incentives, maintenance, and opposition to water-system privatization and forced amalgamation. The published page does not provide cost estimates, a delivery timetable, ranked first-year commitments or a detailed conflict-management plan. [1]

For housing, what specific change would she seek, which households would benefit, and how would affordability be measured? If incentives are proposed, what would taxpayers contribute or forgo? What safeguards would secure the promised benefit?

For infrastructure, which projects come first and which would wait? What is the funding plan? How would she distinguish necessary maintenance from expansion that brings new operating costs? Opposing privatization is a position; voters also need an affordable alternative.

For preserving Thorold's identity, what practical proposal would she advance, and what lies within municipal control? A strong campaign connects its principles to actions that residents can later check.

A lawyer brings skills, and boundaries matter

Her professional biography lists science, environmental-engineering and law degrees, environmental consulting and a law-association treasurer role. These are substantive qualifications. Her practice includes civil litigation, family law and other services, including residential real estate. [7]

Legal training can help assess complex documents and ask precise questions. It does not automatically demonstrate budgeting, service delivery or collaborative leadership. My concern would be a councillor who treats every disagreement as an adversarial contest, overwhelms discussion with technical language or mistakes professional expertise for authority over colleagues. Those risks concern conduct; they are not inevitable consequences of being a lawyer.

It would be unfair to assert that everyone would fear McCollum or that staff would find her unapproachable without evidence. Instead, ask for examples of listening, accepting criticism and changing her mind. Can she explain a complicated issue plainly and work constructively with people who lack legal training?

A councillor with a law licence should also distinguish her elected role from the municipality's legal advice. Ontario's councillor guide directs councils to seek appropriate advice from staff and the municipal solicitor. [8] Professional status should strengthen scrutiny, not discourage it.

Party history and labour support deserve questions

Elections Canada identifies McCollum as the NDP candidate in Niagara South in the 2025 federal election; she was not elected. Her municipal website says she is the only Thorold candidate endorsed by the Niagara Regional Labour Council. That is her campaign's claim about exclusivity, not an independently checked comparison with every candidate. [1, 9]

I prefer municipal representatives whose decisions begin with Thorold's needs rather than party loyalty. A previous party candidacy does not prove that someone will take instructions from a party. Nor does an endorsement establish an unlawful conflict. But voters can ask what commitments were requested, what was promised and how independence would be maintained.

In a labour negotiation, would she scrutinize both the affordability of a proposal and the fairness of employees' treatment? Would she explain a decision that disappointed an endorsing organization? A labour council endorsement should not be confused with membership in, employment by or representation of the particular union bargaining with the city.

Conflict risk requires facts, not occupational bans

The Municipal Conflict of Interest Act addresses financial interests in particular matters, including certain indirect interests and known interests of a spouse, parent or child. Subject to its exceptions, affected members must disclose the interest and refrain from discussion and voting; restrictions also apply to influencing decisions. [10]

Voters should ask how property holdings, family interests and professional work would be screened for conflicts, and whether frequent recusals could limit a councillor's participation. Request a clear process and appropriate independent advice. Client confidentiality may limit public detail, but it does not answer the need for a credible conflict-management process.

If a councillor's legal clients include developers or builders with matters before the City, overlapping duties could create financial or professional conflicts requiring assessment. I have not established that McCollum has such clients. The public may not know every client relationship, so voters should ask how relevant interests would be identified and disclosed as required, with independent advice and recusals where necessary.

A lawyer may also hold confidential client information relevant to a City matter that cannot lawfully be shared with council. Ontario's professional rules protect client confidentiality, subject to specified exceptions. [12] That can create a difficult situation if the client's interests oppose the City's. Would she decline or withdraw from an incompatible retainer, refrain from participating in the municipal matter where required, or seek independent advice? These are potential governance risks worth addressing before election, not evidence that she has concealed a conflict. Confidentiality does not remove applicable municipal disclosure and abstention duties.

I would not exempt a realtor I admire while proposing automatic exclusion of another realtor, property manager or lawyer. Residence does not eliminate a financial conflict, and an occupation alone does not establish one. Anthony's character and service inform my opinion of him; the same rules must apply to everyone.

My preference, and the case I would hear

I favour councillors who live here and share residents' daily experience. A non-resident can answer that concern through sustained local service, accessibility, competence and transparent interests. McCollum has genuine local connections; she should explain why those connections make her the best choice now. I welcome her answers and the strongest argument from voters who disagree with me.

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Disclaimer: This article expresses my opinions about municipal representation and raises questions based on the cited public sources and my own accounts of conversations. I do not allege unlawful candidacy, professional misconduct, concealed client interests or an undisclosed financial conflict by Chantal McCollum or any other named person. References to developer or builder clients and confidential information describe hypothetical risks, not established facts about her practice. Recalled quotations and verbal City explanations have not been independently documented here. I welcome factual corrections and a response at nbozza@go2cai.ca.

Source notes and verification limits

Sources reviewed October 9, 2026. The campaign Home page and its linked Our Vision and Get Involved links returned the same published page. This is a review of retrieved public material, not all campaign activity. Residence descriptions may become outdated. No precise home address is published here.

The City staff residence and eligibility confirmation, property account, Longo quotation are Nicholas Bozza's accounts, not independently documented findings. The quotation is recalled by the author and is not supported here by a recording or written confirmation. Mike De Divitiis' residence is the author's understanding; residents' views are anecdotal. No title, lease or written clerk determination was supplied for this review. No finding of ineligibility, manipulation, misconduct, partisan direction or an undisclosed financial conflict is made. Questions and evaluations are the author's opinions.

The suggestion that outside political organizations could recruit candidates is a policy concern, not evidence that this happened here. Wealth or corporate ownership cannot bypass citizenship and other eligibility requirements. No allegation involving a named international businessperson is made.

[1] Chantal McCollum municipal campaign: priorities and labour endorsement.
https://www.chantalforthorold.com/

[2] Published NDP biography: Welland residence and Thorold law practice.
https://chantalmccollum.ndp.ca/

[3] Ontario, 2026 voters' guide: eligibility to vote, including non-resident electors.
Ontario voters' guide - eligibility to vote

[4] Ontario, 2026 candidates' guide: eligibility to run.
Ontario candidates' guide - eligibility to run

[5] ThoroldToday, September 8, 2022: Longo finishing his second term.
Meet your candidate: Councillor wants to get the little things right

[6] City of Thorold: 2022 official poll-by-poll results, Longo fourth, 1,900 votes.
2022 Municipal & School Board Election results

[7] McCollum professional biography: qualifications, experience and services.
https://www.mccollumlawyer.com/about

[8] Ontario municipal councillor's guide, section 7: appropriate legal advice.
Councillors as lawmakers

[9] Elections Canada, Niagara South, 2025 official results.
Niagara South - 2025 poll-by-poll results

[10] Ontario, Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, especially sections 2-5.2.
https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m50

[11] ThoroldToday, January 10, 2019: 2018 results, Longo first with 2,326 votes.
Year in review: Part 12

Before publication, confirm current residence statements and retain the supporting City Hall documents if the property and tenancy account is to remain. A private transaction's purpose or legal effect should not be inferred from an unexplained arrangement.

[12] Law Society of Ontario, Rules of Professional Conduct, sections 3.3 (confidentiality), 3.4 (conflicts) and 7.4 (public office).
Rules of Professional Conduct - Chapter 3