2026 Mayoral Debate Recap

SEPTEMBER 22, 2026 • CARMEN'S EVENT CENTRE

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, West End Home Builders' Association, Cornerstone Association of REALTORS and Hamilton Halton Construction Association welcomed mayoral candidates Rob Cooper, Andrea Horwath and Keanin Loomis for a business-focused debate moderated by Steve Paikin. The discussion examined the priorities that matter to Hamilton's employers, workers and residents, including municipal leadership, investment, public safety, taxation, housing, talent and economic growth.

The following recap summarizes the positions presented by each candidate during the debate. It is intended to provide members with a clear, candidate-neutral overview and does not represent an endorsement by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce.

1 City Hall Leadership and Accountability

ANDREA HORWATH

Continue the organizational transformation already underway at City Hall. She called for a city manager who can modernize service delivery, strengthen accountability and transparency, understand Hamilton's economic opportunities, and work collaboratively with Council and community partners. She proposed using a professional search firm and a selection panel that includes councillors and representatives from the business and broader community.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Use the next city manager appointment as the starting point for a City Hall reset. He said the successful candidate should be an experienced executive who knows Hamilton, can lead a large and complex organization, improve workplace culture, attract and retain strong staff, and implement his SMART plan through an open and accountable hiring process.

ROB COOPER

Recruit a transformational leader with financial, organizational and multi-union experience who can shift City Hall toward measurable outcomes. He emphasized completing outstanding financial statements, improving service standards and changing workplace culture. He also identified the chief human resources officer as another critical hire, with a focus on recruitment, retention and succession planning.

2 Investment and AI Data Centres

ANDREA HORWATH

Support a Canadian, research-oriented data centre model tied to data sovereignty, health research and innovation. She argued that Hamilton can capture investment and research opportunities if projects use existing infrastructure responsibly, address environmental considerations and are developed with the necessary information from other orders of government.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Assess each proposal against clear public-benefit conditions before making a decision. He said proponents should disclose infrastructure, electricity and water requirements, permanent employment, related economic activity, tax-base benefits and community impacts. Developers should pay their fair share, while Hamilton should participate directly in provincial and federal discussions concerning the future of the Steelport lands.

ROB COOPER

Prepare Hamilton to act more quickly when major investment opportunities emerge. He supported evaluating the business case, environmental impacts and community benefits in advance, with greater transparency for Council and residents. His central argument was that clearer rules and earlier planning would help Hamilton make timely decisions rather than reacting after proposals arrive.

3 Downtown and Public Safety

ANDREA HORWATH

Build on current downtown initiatives, including increased police patrols, a more visible police presence, clean teams, integrated care and response teams, and housing with wraparound supports. She also proposed clearer public-space rules, a faster response channel for businesses and BIAs, and continued conversion of vacant office space into housing. She pointed to recent major downtown investments and reported reductions in several crime categories as signs of progress.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Create a coordinated downtown safety and economic plan with one accountable team and a first 100-day work program. His priorities included safe and welcoming public spaces, reliable municipal services, stronger support for businesses, increased investment and better coordination between downtown initiatives and major projects such as LRT. He also committed to serving on the Police Services Board.

ROB COOPER

Make Hamilton the safest city in Ontario through prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation. He proposed stronger police engagement with schools, investments in recreation and leadership programs, targeted action on guns, gangs and drugs, and would actively participate on the Police Services Board. On homelessness, he called for funding to be tied more directly to measurable outcomes that move people from the street into treatment, support and housing.

4 Property Taxes and Municipal Spending

ANDREA HORWATH

Keep property-tax increases below inflation over the next term while adjusting the pace of some infrastructure funding to reflect affordability pressures and the City’s capacity to deliver projects. She defended recent tax-supported investments in roads, infrastructure, housing and public safety, and emphasized that the final municipal budget is shaped and approved by Council.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Introduce zero-based budgeting so municipal departments must justify spending from the ground up. He proposed a corporation-wide service review, stronger follow-through on Auditor General recommendations, productivity gains through workplace culture improvements, restraint on wasteful spending and growth in the assessment base to reduce pressure on taxpayers.

ROB COOPER

Target tax increases at the rate of inflation and evaluate spending according to results rather than dollars committed. He called for current financial statements, service benchmarks and performance data, as well as better coordination of infrastructure work to avoid duplication. He also emphasized expanding the commercial and industrial tax base to ease the burden on residential taxpayers.

5 Housing Supply and Approvals

ANDREA HORWATH

Continue accelerating approvals and expanding affordable housing partnerships. She highlighted increased housing starts, progress against provincial targets, federal Housing Accelerator Fund support, more than 2,000 affordable units built or underway with partners, online processing for routine applications, and a coordinated review model that brings relevant departments together. She said the City has reduced site-plan approval times and must continue intensification, including when projects face local opposition.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Make the mayor the chief advocate for faster housing delivery and measure success by homes completed. He called for lower approval and carrying costs, coordinated reviews involving all relevant departments, private and non-profit investment, senior-government partnership, and housing supported by appropriate services and infrastructure. He described his position as pro-housing and said housing is closely connected to health, while also stressing that communities should be heard.

ROB COOPER

Overhaul planning processes, timelines and organizational culture so the City becomes a partner in development. He proposed greater use of technology, published service standards and public reporting on performance, lower delays and carrying costs, and a review of development-related costs. He also emphasized working through ward councillors and residents to accommodate growth while addressing neighbourhood impacts.

6 Talent Attraction and Retention

ANDREA HORWATH

Retain talent by connecting education, research and employment opportunities while improving affordability and quality of life. She highlighted life sciences, radiopharmaceuticals, advanced manufacturing, agribusiness and logistics, alongside transit, attainable housing, parks, trails and waterfront amenities as important ingredients in keeping graduates and young families in Hamilton.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Create a city where people can find good jobs, afford a home, raise a family and see continuous improvement in their community. He linked talent retention to safe neighbourhoods, a vibrant downtown, stronger civic confidence and an economic strategy that gives graduates and residents a reason to build their future in Hamilton.

ROB COOPER

Improve affordability and family-oriented infrastructure so Hamilton remains attractive across generations. He connected talent retention to competitive taxes, attainable housing, community safety, recreation, parks and strong employment opportunities, with a larger business tax base helping to reduce pressure on households.

7 Economic Vision for Hamilton

ANDREA HORWATH

Build on a cluster-based strategy focused on the port, airport, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, logistics, agriculture, arts and culture. She highlighted expanding the Port of Hamilton's container capacity and pursuing first-port-of-entry capability, commercializing research from McMaster and local health institutions, supporting radiopharmaceutical growth, expanding airport activity and identifying additional employment lands for future investment.

KEANIN LOOMIS

Position the mayor as Hamilton's chief advocate for investment and bring business, labour, institutions, City Hall and other governments together. He identified steel, advanced manufacturing, the port, airport, health and research, agriculture and innovation as core strengths. His emphasis was on clear municipal rules, timely decisions and converting Hamilton's assets into investment and good jobs.

ROB COOPER

Develop an economic transformation and growth strategy centred on a more business-friendly City Hall, public safety and infrastructure. He highlighted the port, airport, McMaster University, health care, advanced manufacturing and transportation connections as competitive advantages. His objective was to remove unnecessary barriers, create good jobs, grow the commercial tax base and reduce pressure on homeowners.