

THE INCUMBENT TEST

Josh Morgan: A Test Case for Power Already Held

Josh Morgan presents the opposite version of the Incumbent Test.

He isn't asking Londoners to imagine how he might govern.

He has already been mayor for four years.

He has prepared budgets.

He has exercised strong-mayor authority.

He has worked with Council.

He has appointed senior leadership.

And he has governed through a period of rapid population growth, severe housing pressures, rising homelessness and significant increases in municipal spending.

That gives voters something a challenger cannot offer:

A record.

So the Morgan test becomes:

What did you promise?

What authority did you possess?

What did you do?

What did government deliver?

What actually changed?

What did you learn?

And what would you do differently with another four years?

Again, where the evidence already answers one of those questions, I think we should provide the answer.

Housing: substantial activity, unfinished work

Morgan made one of his clearest commitments in 2022:

Enable 50,000 new homes over ten years, including 10,000 in London's core.

It's a ten-year commitment.

So it would make little sense to declare it either kept or broken after four years.

What we can examine is direction and progress.

London has substantially increased its housing pipeline during Morgan's term, including major numbers of approvals, permits and housing starts. The City has also expanded incentives designed to accelerate additional residential units and other housing construction.

That's real activity.

But the distinctions matter.

An approval isn't a completed home.

A permit isn't necessarily a housing start.

A housing start isn't necessarily an affordable home.

So Morgan can reasonably point to substantial progress in enabling housing.

The remaining tests are completions, affordability and the specific commitment to housing in the core.

And housing is an area where municipal authority is comparatively strong.

Which gives us a useful rule:

The greater the authority, the greater the accountability.

Homelessness: the crisis became worse

There is no way around this part of London's record.

Homelessness increased dramatically during Morgan's term.

That's a serious outcome.

But writing “**homelessness doubled under Josh Morgan**” and stopping there would imply causation that the evidence doesn't establish.

Homelessness has risen dramatically across Ontario and Canada.

And this exposes something much deeper about municipal accountability.

What keeps producing homelessness?

Even if London dramatically improves supportive housing, builds more affordable housing and creates an excellent homelessness-response system, we still haven't necessarily addressed the conditions continually producing homelessness.

Homelessness is often the visible end of a much longer chain.

Poverty. Economic inequality. Educational inequity. Mental illness. Inadequate health care. Addiction and insufficient treatment capacity. Disability and inadequate supports. Family violence. Trauma. Precarious employment. Rising housing costs. Inadequate income supports.

Municipal government can influence some of these things. But it doesn't control many of the most powerful levers.

Ontario largely controls health care, mental-health and addiction systems, education and major disability and income-support programs.

Ottawa controls other major components of taxation, income policy and national housing policy.

And some causes lie within economic and social systems that no government controls entirely.

That means:

A city can become much better at responding to homelessness while society continues producing more people at risk of becoming homeless.

In that sense, no Mayor of London can win this battle alone.

What we see isn't necessarily where the problem began

We tend to judge municipal government by what we can see.

A tent is visible.

A person sleeping in a doorway is visible.

An encampment is visible.

Open drug use is visible.

But the failures that may have preceded that moment are much less visible.

A child who didn't succeed in school.

A family trapped in poverty.

Someone unable to obtain adequate mental-health care.

A person leaving hospital without sufficient support.

Someone living with trauma or addiction.

A person with a disability whose income doesn't cover the rent.

A worker whose wages haven't kept pace with housing costs.

By the time those failures arrive on a sidewalk, **we ask City Hall to solve them.**

But City Hall didn't create all of them.

And City Hall doesn't possess all the tools required to fix them.

That doesn't absolve Morgan or Council of responsibility.

It defines that responsibility more accurately.

The appropriate questions become:

Did London use the municipal tools available to it?

Did its interventions help the people they reached?

Did the response grow quickly enough to meet the scale of the crisis?

Did the mayor effectively push Queen's Park and Ottawa for the resources and policy changes only they can provide?

London has expanded highly supportive housing and other homelessness interventions during Morgan's term. City Hall and Morgan have also continued pressing the province on housing, homelessness and public-safety supports.

So the record isn't simply “homelessness increased” or “the City acted.”

Both are true.

The harder question is whether municipal action has been adequate to the portion of the problem City Hall can actually influence.

That's the distinction between **responsibility and blame**.

Taxes: 8.7 per cent was a lot

Morgan's first multi-year budget under the strong-mayor system resulted in an 8.7 per cent property-tax increase in 2024.

Londoners felt that. It belongs squarely in any examination of his record.

But an accountability exercise shouldn't stop with the tax rate. We should ask what the money purchased.

One of the largest new expenditures was a historic investment in policing and public safety.

That was the **input**.

It paid for additional officers, technology, training and policing capacity.

Those were **outputs**.

Then we can ask what happened.

The policing investment produced measurable results

London Police subsequently reported improvements in response times and several crime measures. That doesn't prove every improvement was caused by additional spending.

Crime is affected by many factors. Policing outcomes also reflect deployment, technology, management, community partnerships and broader social conditions.

But it would be misleading to discuss the large police investment as though taxpayers spent considerably more and nothing changed.

Something changed.

Resources increased.

Capacity increased.

Response times improved.

Several crime indicators improved.

So the remaining question isn't whether the spending produced anything.

It did.

The harder question is whether the improvements are sustainable and proportionate to the substantial continuing cost.

That's a much more useful accountability question.

Now Morgan is promising roughly three per cent

Morgan's 2026 campaign says he will hold property-tax increases **“in the 3% range” over the next four years** through disciplined budgeting, responsible growth, better use of tax dollars and obtaining London's share of federal and provincial funding. [Re-Elect Mayor Josh Morgan](#)

That sounds much more attractive than 8.7 per cent. But what does three per cent actually mean?

This is where the same fiscal test we applied to Stevenson should apply to Morgan.

If municipal costs are increasing at roughly the rate of inflation, a three-per-cent tax increase doesn't necessarily buy three per cent more government.

Much of the additional revenue may simply maintain the purchasing power required to provide existing services.

Growth can add assessment revenue. Efficiencies can save money. Other revenues can increase. Queen's Park and Ottawa can contribute more.

Morgan explicitly says those outside dollars are part of his plan. [Re-Elect Mayor Josh Morgan](#)

But the arithmetic still matters.

If taxes roughly track the growth in municipal costs, where does the money come from for new services?

Morgan is simultaneously proposing continued investment in housing, infrastructure, downtown revitalization, public safety and other initiatives.

So he too must explain how the government he's promising fits inside the revenue he's promising to collect.

The City's current outlook provides some evidence that tax pressure has already moderated: the 2026 budget update reduced the 2027 forecast increase to **4.7 per cent** while the City reported maintaining core services and investments.

Getting from there to roughly three per cent is the next measurable test.

Every tax promise is also a service promise

This principle should apply identically to Morgan and Stevenson.

A politician proposing higher taxes should tell us what taxpayers will receive.

A politician proposing lower taxes should tell us what will cost less, what new revenue will be found, what will become more efficient or what government will stop doing.

The tax rate is only half the promise. The other half is the government it will purchase.

Morgan's three per cent deserves the same scrutiny as Stevenson's below one per cent.

The numbers are different.

The accountability principle isn't.

Strong-mayor powers: Morgan has a record

Unlike Stevenson, Morgan doesn't have to tell us hypothetically how he might exercise strong-mayor authority.

He has exercised it.

City records show mayoral decisions involving committee appointments and structure as well as the budget process. They also show Morgan repeatedly shortening the period during which he could veto Council's budget amendments rather than using that authority to overturn them.

His governing approach has generally emphasized collaboration with Council rather than maximum use of unilateral mayoral authority.

That's neither inherently good nor inherently bad. It's a governing choice.

And after four years, we can ask something we couldn't ask in 2022:

Did that approach work?

Did collaboration produce better decisions?

Were there occasions when London would have benefited from a stronger exercise of mayoral authority?

Did consensus sometimes slow action?

Those are legitimate questions precisely because Morgan now has a record against which his governing philosophy can be examined.

Transit: research changed my own assessment

I initially thought Morgan should be judged against the absence of north and west rapid-transit legs. But his 2022 position was more nuanced.

He argued that future higher-order transit decisions should emerge from London's comprehensive mobility planning process.

That process happened.

The Mobility Master Plan was approved in 2025.

So I don't think it's fair to call the absence of north and west BRT a broken Morgan promise.

The next test is implementation:

Will London build the transportation system envisioned in that plan quickly enough to keep pace with its growth?

That's the question the evidence leaves us with.

Climate and Green Bin: sometimes the answer is straightforward

Morgan's 2022 platform included implementation of London's Green Bin program.

It was implemented.

This is precisely why I don't want these articles to consist only of questions. When something happened, say so.

Promise: Green Bin.

Action: implementation.

Output: citywide collection.

Outcome: substantial organic waste diversion.

That particular commitment produced a measurable municipal result.

Broader climate outcomes are considerably more complicated, but we don't need to pretend this one is unresolved.

UNESCO City of Music: learning from being first

Morgan also campaigned in 2022 on using London's UNESCO City of Music designation to strengthen the music sector and contribute to economic development.

His 2026 platform again says:

“Make UNESCO work for London.”

At first glance, that can sound like the same promise being made again.

But context matters.

London became Canada's first UNESCO City of Music only in late 2021.

There was no Canadian municipal template.

The first years inevitably involved experimentation: developing an Action Plan, building international relationships, creating programming and figuring out what the designation could realistically mean for London.

Those are outputs.

Now the accountability test should evolve.

Are London musicians gaining international opportunities?

Is cultural tourism increasing?

Are festivals and venues benefiting?

Has the designation helped attract music businesses, employment or investment?

What did London learn from the first phase, and what will it do differently in the second?

A first term can legitimately include experimentation.

A second-term promise should increasingly explain what was learned from it.

So what does Morgan's record tell us?

It doesn't fit neatly into **success** or **failure**.

On housing, there has been substantial development activity while affordability remains difficult.

On homelessness, the crisis became substantially worse while the City also expanded interventions within its jurisdiction.

On policing, a very large investment was followed by measurable improvements.

On taxation, London experienced unusually large increases while some of that money purchased significant new capacity.

On transit, the planning process Morgan advocated was completed and the test is moving toward implementation.

On Green Bin, a specific commitment was delivered.

On UNESCO, institutional groundwork has been laid and the next question is measurable cultural and economic impact.

And on strong-mayor powers, Morgan has generally chosen collaboration rather than maximum unilateral authority.

Those aren't campaign slogans.

They're a record.

The Morgan Test

So Morgan's Incumbent Test becomes:

WHAT CAUSED THE PROBLEM?

WHO HAD THE POWER TO ADDRESS IT?

WHAT DID YOU PROMISE?

WHAT DID YOU DO?

WHAT DID WE SPEND?

WHAT DID GOVERNMENT DELIVER?

WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGED?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

HOW WILL YOU PAY FOR WHAT YOU'RE PROMISING NEXT?

And finally:

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY WITH ANOTHER FOUR YEARS?

That's the advantage and burden of incumbency. Morgan doesn't have to ask us to imagine what his leadership might look like. We have four years to examine.

One standard for both

These two candidates present very different choices about governing, taxation and the use of mayoral authority.

But I don't think we need different standards for evaluating them.

For Stevenson, don't blame a councillor for things she didn't have the authority to accomplish. But examine carefully how she exercised the authority she did have and how she proposes to handle much greater power.

For Morgan, don't blame a mayor for social problems whose fundamental causes lie beyond municipal jurisdiction. But hold him accountable for the considerable powers and resources he actually controlled.

For both, ask what their tax promises mean for services.

For both, distinguish spending from results.

For both, distinguish promises from aspirations.

For both, distinguish municipal responsibility from provincial and federal responsibility.

And for both:

Don't ask a question when the evidence already gives us an answer.

Give voters the evidence.

Explain what it does and doesn't establish.

Then ask what genuinely remains unanswered.

That's what I hoped the London Election Primer might encourage in the first place.

Because an election isn't simply a popularity contest.

It's a job interview.

The candidates are applying for the job.

We are the interviewers.