

PEC Chamber of Commerce Candidate's Questionnaire

The PEC Chamber of Commerce's Policy and Governmental Affairs Committee recently surveyed their members, asking them what their top priorities are for the next council. From those priorities we have created the following questions. As is our tradition, we have also asked the Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture to provide questions as well. If possible, we would like these questions to be answered and submitted by noon on Tuesday, September 25th. Please be aware that these answers may become available to the public.

Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce Questions

Please fill out your name and ward.

Bill McMahon Ward 4 Ameliasburgh

How will you tackle the Workforce Development and labour shortage issues in Prince Edward County?

Prince Edward County has become one of the oldest census districts in Ontario. Coupled with this is the declining population, which further reduces the relatively low participation rate in the work force. Therefore, when it comes to our local economy, we need to attract industry. Be it manufacturing, warehousing, technology, or agriculture advancement. The County needs to make itself more attractive to such endeavours to sustain its economy year round. Focus has been on tourism as it has been easily promoted through the wine industry. Our Community Development Department must develop a profile of the County recognizing existing infrastructure and the skill and education of our labour force. Along with the availability of nearby education and training centres, of residential properties, recreational options, and other incentives to motivate companies to set up a business here. Outlining our strengths and what industries currently exist that could complement or supply an incoming business. Consider our resources, be they natural, legal, or human, that could benefit a new business. Target companies that would complement our existing business climate by interviewing existing business owners, to find the types of companies that would make a great addition to our overall business mix. Develop a list of companies who are growing and expanding outside of their current locations and attract them to the County by offering them tax incentives and location scouting to find a fit that is beneficial to the company, the County, and most importantly, to our year round residents.

Affordable Housing is at a crisis point, what action will you take to address it to ensure current residents can afford to continue living here and new, young residents are enticed to move here?

The lack of housing stock and most importantly the lack of affordable housing in the County is on the verge becoming a catastrophe. Affordability as well as the availability of housing is an obstacle for young families looking to make the move here. We need more housing stock, we're in dire need of homes that people can afford to rent and or buy. Funding from upper levels of government is becoming less and less likely. I will challenge my fellow Council members to become more involved with and support not-for profit groups, by encouraging local enterprise partnerships allowing them to start their own house building programmes. Encourage Council to give financial incentives to those looking to build houses for both owner occupation and for rental. Look for ways that we can incentivize small builders. Encourage Council to rethink the Tiny Home possibility with respect to lot size and square footage Encourage Council to consider rezoning and the cleanup of existing sites for repurposing as land suitable for building residential accommodation. Relax planning laws and run an active campaign to discourage NIMBYism.

Short Term Accommodations licensing and registration - do you agree with the direction the County is currently taking? What is your plan for dealing with Short Term Accommodations in PEC?

At present, the Short Term Accommodations sector in PEC is wide open and out of control. I'm of the belief that it needs to be controlled. It is only fair that the County set rules and regulations to serve the community and implement guidelines over this sector. In some communities, Wellington in particular, STA's have transformed our "sense of place." Time is of the essence to put the brakes on the harmful burden that STA's have already placed on the attainable and/or affordable housing stock in the County. The Planning Department executed a thorough consultation process and have presented a workable plan to begin regulating STA's. While there are still some flaws in the preliminary document, my feeling is that the County should implement the proposed legislation as presented and make the necessary adjustments and fixes once the glitches become evident. Only by putting the bylaws into effect will the regulations that need to be revised and/or updated come to light.

Development Charges and Process Restructure – there is a severe staff shortage in the Planning Department and the planning process is considered by many to be onerous and costly. How do you propose to address it?

Based on the information I've received from developers and potential home builders in the County, the current process is cumbersome and not at all efficient. Many complain about the red tape and hurdles they have to go through with County staff to get from the process of application to getting shovels in the ground complicated and arduous. I would Encourage Council to consider hiring additional staff, take a genuine and honest rethink at rezoning and the cleanup of existing sites for repurposing as land suitable for building residential accommodation. Relax planning laws and run an active campaign to discourage NIMBYism.

Would you support the waiver or reduction of development charges and building permit fees for affordable housing development to encourage such development?

We need more housing stock, we're in dire need of homes that people can afford to rent and or buy. I would support and encourage Council to give financial incentives to those looking to build houses for both owner occupation and for rental. Look for ways that we can incentivize small builders. Encourage Council to rethink the Tiny Home possibility with respect to lot size and square footage Encourage Council to consider rezoning and the cleanup of existing sites for repurposing as land suitable for building residential accommodation. Once again relax planning laws.

What are your thoughts on Downtown Revitalization within Picton, Bloomfield, Wellington and Consecon as well as the parking issues faced by these towns?

As Chair of the Consecon Downtown Revitalization Sub-Committee, I fully support the Community Development Commission's efforts to see this project through to fruition. (Rossmore is also a member of this group) Serving as Chair for the past 4 years, I'm very aware of the amount of man hours spent by volunteers contacting both business and residents conducting surveys, holding downhill meetings, and the gathering of facts and figures pertaining to local infrastructure to move the project on to the next level of implementation of the findings. The residents and businesses in the 5 locales are excited and encouraged about the project and possibility of potential improvements their towns may yet bring about. With respect to parking at present at this point it is Picton, Bloomfield and Wellington that still face uncertain issues to resolve their existing and future predicaments. As it stands both Rossmore and Consecon are unchallenged with parking problems.

Roads and infrastructure (state of roads, drainage, water and sewage). Does the County have the means to deal with the true quality issues for roads in the County? What is your plan for addressing these major infrastructure projects?

Maintaining our road network is the most expensive and worrisome liability we face in The County. Council needs to conduct an impartial and straightforward analysis of the out of balance number of kilometres of roads in The County versus the amount of dollars available to resurface and rehabilitate them. Funding from upper levels of government is becoming more restrictive, and thus must be pursued with heightened diligence. Council needs to be honest with taxpayers and let them know that we can neither borrow nor tax enough money to squash the deterioration of County roads. Council must seriously question - Could any roads be returned back to a gravel surface? Which roads are we knowingly permitting to decay and just waste away? Water treatment, is a complex topic, as there are 6 separate water systems each different from the other. Costs to manage this system have increased time and time again over the past decade with no sign that it slowing down. There are no common water sources in The County, one is contracted from Quinte West, another from Belleville, one a groundwater well, one sourced from Roblin Lake and two systems Picton/Bloomfield and Wellington are sourced from Lake Ontario. Council to date has been unable to cope with managing the system, and as less than half of County residents are hooked up, what needs be done is to establish a permanent committee comprised of residents who are water system users, a committee that can institute a strategy that will benefit the end using consumer and renegotiate the contract with Belleville.

Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture (PEFA) Questions 

Farm land property taxes have increased by over 25% for the second year resulting in the farm tax class share of County expenses rising to 2.2% of County revenue from 1.6% in 2016. Are you willing to support reducing farm tax ratio to ensure the percentage of municipal tax revenue contributed by the farm property tax remains at the level of 2018?

Our farmers feel they're being asked to pay a higher portion of tax than in the past, when compared with residential and commercial property owners, while their land requires fewer municipal services than residential lots. The (MPAC) farm-property assessments soared by an average of 110% in 2016. This tax hike has increased the farms' costs of operations, meaning less money that farmers can invest in the business or use to support their families. I support reducing the farm tax ratio and would encourage Council to work together with the agricultural community to appeal their tax assessments to (MPAC), and continue to provide financial assistance to young and new farmers who have been negatively impacted by rising (MPAC) values for farmland.

There is an urgent need to relax the current half load restrictions which are a barrier to farmers who need to market beans and corn to fill contracts where the farmers do not control the scheduled delivery dates. These deliveries should be included with other essential services such as the transport of milk, potable water and prepared animal feeds as they are required to meet the market demands for animal and human consumption. The timely sale of these commodities are essential for farm viability and maintaining worker employment in the winter. Are you in favour of removing the seasonal axle load restrictions that can impede the movement of farmers' crops to markets as required?

I'm very much in favour of relaxing the current seasonal axle load restrictions. Farming and agriculture have played an important role in The County since the early 1800's. Farming in the County is an economic driver creating jobs and fostering strong communities. Council should work together with the agricultural community to ensure that they maximize their return on the investment they have put into their business. Agriculture and the next generation of farmers should be looked upon favourably and be given reassurance by Council of their importance to our continued economic growth.

There is a need for adequate emergency services in rural areas and improved response times. A Farm 911 Sign initiative has been created in The Quinte area. How does this municipality handle civic addresses on vacant properties? Is there a program in place for farmers to request a civic address for vacant farm land and what is the fee?

To the best of my knowledge is no such initiative in the County. Vital seconds can make all the difference, providing emergency responders with accurate information that can literally save lives, and I would wholeheartedly support this initiative in PEC. No one should have to watch helplessly as an ambulance drives by them.

Do you support the OFA position that all new farm buildings should be exempt from development charges as is currently the case in most Counties including Prince Edward County?

I do support this OFA position with respect to new farm buildings. The existing as well as the younger generation of farmers need to be supported and emboldened to find ultramodern and cutting edge methods of growing their businesses, and if the addition of new farm buildings assist in making their business more profitable the exemption should remain in effect. And as earlier stated, farming and agriculture as well as agri-tourism remain an important economic driver. I believe it is Council's duty to support and encourage diversity as it will have long-term benefits for other sectors of our local economy.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!



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