

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.

Brian Sword. Running for council in South Marysburgh (ward 9)

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

This is a crucial issue for the County and I have already listened to Employment Ontario and local business leaders on this matter. One of the common concerns mentioned is that our younger, local generation lacks the appropriate skills to even get a job, with many unaware of how to even write a resume. I believe it is imperative that the County fund resume and job interview training programs in schools. We cannot have our young people finish high school and not have these basic skills, which impedes their entry into the local workforce.

I'd also like to partner businesses together when looking for part time help in similar jobs. If they work together to synch their schedules, they'd be able to find one person and essentially provide full-time hours. This will not replace the benefits of having a full-time job, but with a shortage in labour it will open up more candidates who couldn't accept a second part-time job due to scheduling.

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 County needs more development of affordable housing, primarily mixed use developments. We need developments that include standalone houses, townhouses and apartment buildings – preferably including some retail space (or amenities, such as a pool). A good example of this is Blue Mountain Inn in Collingwood, Ontario. That location has all of these options, including some units designated for short term accommodations – all managed by Blue Mountain Inn. One caveat is that any such development in the County must match look and feel of the local neighbourhood. For example, this kind of development would not work in a heritage area (like the proposed build on Barker St and Jasper does not work as it does not fit in with the neighbourhood).

In terms of enticing young residents to the County, that requires jobs to go along with the additional housing. On that front, I'd like to see the county further develop tourism in the winter so jobs are full-time instead of seasonal. The first two areas of growth I'd look at are snowmobile trails and ice-fishing. Both are world class in the County, but not developed or advertised.

We also need to develop an environment in the County that is more youth oriented to attract younger people. The skate park was a step in the right direction, but right now our area is most attractive to seniors, and if we want to attract younger people we need to create an environment in the county that is attractive to them.

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?

I do not believe the County's current plan is a proper long-term solution as I find that the idea of licensing only increases bureaucracy without adding much-needed money to the County. People who use their homes for short term accommodations are contractors who work for a business - Airbnb. This plan puts the burden on the contractors and not on the business. We should be negotiating directly with Airbnb and have them ensuring the rentals meet requirements. If we cannot negotiate a proper deal with Airbnb we need to be prepared to ban Airbnb in the County and take over the booking of short term accommodations. Blue Mountain Ontario is another area that is heavily invested in tourism and there are no Airbnb rentals there. They handle all the booking themselves and they keep all the fees it generates. That is a model we should be prepared to take.

I believe the main issues with STAs are: noise and bylaw violations, safety concerns for renters, "dark neighbourhoods", and money to the County to help fund things like roads which are used by the people staying in AirBnBs. The Council proposal aims to address the first three in the long-run, but does little to cover the last and I don't believe more bureaucracy is ever the most efficient use of finances. My platform is as follows (based on the concerns listed above):

- For noise and bylaw violations, we have rules on the books, the issue is why they aren't being enforced or why they are repeatedly violated. I believe a full review is in order and likely would support tougher fines for repeat offenders that would provide a real deterrent to renting to large groups that are often the source of such complains.
- While I appreciate safety concerns for renters, I believe this is an issue for insurance and to be handled by AirBnb and the individual renters. Part of the agreement of individuals using AirBnb is that they accept a level of risk or sue the individual renting. To this end, I would want to work with AirBnb to ensure all renters have Commercial Insurance if using the property as a rental for more than 10 or 12 weeks a year with high fines for anyone violating this.
- Dark neighbourhoods are a real problem in terms of luring new families, safety (with the increases of other petty crime taking place in dark homes over winter), and the general atmosphere of the County in the off-season. Homes that are only rentals also impact long-term housing as they take available homes off the market for those who want to live in the County. I believe that an additional "absentee owner" tax for those using properties for STAs is an appropriate response without legislating what people can do with their own property.
- Finally, licensing would provide money, but all funds would simply cover the act of licensing and review and not provide the County with much-needed funds.

We must also be clear that solving the short-term accommodation issue does not solve long-

term housing or affordable housing problems. These are different issues, with short-term accommodations contributing to the problems, but not being the sole cause or fix.

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?

We have great people in the department, and we need to be sure the environment they work in is a positive one. I have discussed this issue with real estate agents and heard their frustration with working with the planning department. I believe we need to start with a review of the culture at the department to see why we can't keep good people. Is it a salary issue? Is it low office morale because people are always angry at them? Is it a leadership issue? Real Estate agents have expressed their frustration with attitude and service, and we need to look closely at what changes we can make to improve morale of the people who work in the department.

I also believe we need a comprehensive review of the planning process to make it more efficient (and less costly). This is a process that needs to be streamlined to make it easier for people to navigate. We want to encourage development, assist real estate transactions and provide a service that our residents are happy with.

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

Yes, I support reducing development charges for affordable housing in the County. We have an affordable housing crisis in the county and we need to take any and all steps possible to improve the situation.

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

As nice as downtown revitalization sounds, we don't have the money for it right now. Our concern right now should be a balanced budget, with downtown revitalization funds being a goal we work towards. If we can work towards earmarking some future money, that would be great. Until then, the money should be spent on roads, infrastructure and snow removal.

I think it is unfortunate that the BIA's request for 2 free hours of parking was denied. These new meters are not a significant revenue generator for the county and I've personally witnessed the frustration they have caused for users.

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?

No, the County does not have the money to deal with the issue of our crumbling roads, and the cost of water is too high. That means we have some tough choices to make in order for us to find the funds to address the situation. I believe we need to look at adding a toll at all the bridges entering the County (with an exemption for residents). We also should look to add fees to all non-essential businesses with large trucks that use our roads – like Picton Terminals.

We also need to look at how we approach road repairs. In some smaller county roads, we need to look at going back to gravel with is much cheaper to maintain. That would free up some money to maintain our busier roads.

Here is a recent article on the subject: <https://www.wired.com/2016/07/cash-strapped-towns-un-paving-roads-cant-afford-fix/>

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?

Yes, I support freezing property tax rates for farmers. Prince Edward County MUST retain our current number of farms (and over taxing them puts them at risk). The entire economy and landscape would change if we lost them.

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 in favour of removing seasonal axle load restrictions for farmers and essential services, but not for all businesses.

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?

I fully support Farm 911 and commend them for their out-of-the-box thinking to address this issue. I don't believe any landowner should have to pay a fee to have their property registered to be located by emergency services. The County should be doing everything possible to have all locations, vacant or not, in a system so emergency services can locate people in need.

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?

Yes, I support the position that all new farm buildings should be exempt from development charges.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!



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