

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.

Michael McLeod, Ward 4

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

These are not stand alone issues. They are part of a greater complex of issues that impact the County including the severe shortage of housing for seasonal workers in the agricultural and tourism sectors and the lack of an expanding job market that goes beyond traditional low-wage seasonal and transient work. I want to work to start attracting external investment in appropriate sectors that will result in better full-time employment opportunities and outcomes for our 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?

I want to do everything I can, within the rules laid out in the PEC Official Plan and implementing zoning bylaws to free-up development opportunities for developers to develop all types of housing suitable for all incomes - including starter homes, rent geared to income, assisted living, to retirement homes, etc. The County cannot afford to delay appropriate development with unnecessary hurdles and delays to development that currently appear to be in place. Delays in development delays tax revenue to the County which it desperately needs. I will work to eliminate unnecessary delays.

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?

While I don't have a particular problem with the concept of STA's per se, I do agree that registration and licensing is appropriate for dealing with STA's. The current County Council is at least dealing with the issue. I believe, the rules, practices and procedures to correctly regulate STA's will likely need to be refined and clarified as we go forward. I want to ensure that STA regulation and control is fair and reasonable.

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?

It appears to me that there is a "revolving door" of planners coming to work for the County, they stay for a short time then leave and it has been going on for a number of years. This is very concerning to me because it has a direct affect on the ability to get planning and related developments going and ultimately, impacts tax revenue as discussed in a previous question. Although this is an operational issue, it appears to me that there is a management/HR issue that has to be addressed and I am prepared to take this on and get this apparent problem solved.

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

Yes, if it makes sense and is prudent to do so.

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

I am a strong supporter of viable, interesting and healthy downtowns in our communities (I would also include Rossmore and Ameliasburgh). I believe Council must be a champion for downtown revitalization...and I will be. The communities that face parking issues, must be part of an overarching parking study to get a good handle on what those issues are, determine appropriate mitigation approaches and make recommendations to be implemented. It would be incumbent then on Council to implement the issue-solving solution(s).

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?

I believe that right now, the County does not have the resources (manpower, equipment and cash) necessary to tackle all of the roads and infrastructure issues facing us now and into the future. This is particularly concerning to me because it becomes increasingly difficult to attract investment to the County if our roads and infrastructure issues become harder to deal with as the County struggles for increased (tax) revenue to pay for these things. I believe, large scale (given the County's size - population and geography) capital works should be reviewed and considered by new standing committees of Council such as a "Public Works Committee" and/or a "Roads Committee". In my opinion, the current structure of County government cannot give the attention needed to address these critical concerns and it is resulting in confusing last minute decision-making which is not helpful.

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?

I am of two-minds on this issue and cannot provide a clear answer. If I own a business (it doesn't matter what the business is) and that business attracts tax, then I am obligated to pay that tax. I am completely against cross-subsidizing one class of tax/rate payers to another class. That, in my mind is completely unfair. This County, like any other municipality created under the Municipal Act generates most of revenue requirement through property tax. Property tax reduction harms the municipality's ability to deliver the services it provides its citizens.

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?

Half load restrictions can be a barrier to haulers, and that is understood. The issues raised in this question focus on the state and condition of County roads and the cost of operating and maintaining them. Road safety is the number one concern especially in spring when thawing ground, flooding and traffic can cause heavy road damage. It is important that the County knows which roads are subject to the heaviest farm traffic and has plans to ensure those roads are maintained to the highest quality so that half load restrictions are not required and impede the movement of produce/products to market. If the County has not got a plan to phase-out half load restrictions, I would be concerned.

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?

This is a question that has to be answered by incumbent candidates. I am familiar with the Farm 911 initiative, but I can not answer the last two questions, because I do not know the County's process and procedure for dealing with the sign initiative.

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, assuming the definition of "new farm building" is clear and as precise as possible in applicable planning, zoning and building permit requirements affecting farm properties.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!



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