

# 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.

mike harper - ward 3 Wellington

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

Accommodation (to rent or buy) is the most pressing problem in this regard, as there are people who would like to locate here to work but can't. So this is number one. Longer term, high school students need to be persuaded that they can have a good career in the growing employment fields such as agritourism and healthcare (retirement/aging population). Teachers and parents need to provide the guidance and encouragement in this regard. We need to let go of dreams of returning to the glory days of manufacturing that employs lots of people. Our future is in playing to our competitive strengths and natural assets, and the above noted sectors are the path forward.

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**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?**

First, I would get behind and support the not for profit housing network which Council has approved. This is a complex issue, and we need to assemble a team with a variety of skills and experiences to properly articulate the problem, define terms (like affordable housing), prioritize, and generate solutions. In the short term, I would start with infill projects, garden suites, and development of municipal land and/or surplus buildings. The challenge is to nurture relationships with developers and providing the incentives to them to help us build affordable units for both purchase and to rent. Longer term, new development projects must include a minimum percentage of affordable units.

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**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 agree with the direction the County is taking. First, we want and need STAs, however as is the case all over the world, problems have developed. The most pressing problem is to stop the unchecked growth, as it is having an impact on several levels: in Wellington it is hollowing out the neighbourhoods. More broadly, there are nuisance factors relating to parking, garbage, noise. It's not right that residents have to endure the disruption to their lives. The problems are largely with non-owner occupied STAs. We also want to make sure guests can expect a standard of accommodation that is safe and comfortable.

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**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?**

Our planning department needs to be expanded. There seems to be a broad consensus on this point. Development charges can help pay for this. The other issue is recruiting the right talent. I would like to see us pursue senior, experienced people from bigger municipalities where the individual is comfortable and knowledgeable in dealing with rapid growth and change. We need leadership, not order takers....a person who can stand up to pressures from developers – and Council – to make the right recommendations.

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

Yes I would support that. Affordable housing does not get built without some kind of subsidy. Developers are in the business to make money, and the demand for their services is great, so unless we find a way to incentive them, we will lose their services to other municipalities

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

In Picton and Wellington where the most change is occurring, the goal has to be to manage the change in a way that reflects official plan and secondary plans. Maintain streetscapes and neighbourhoods. The historic feel of the village cores need to be preserved. This is what drives tourism and makes them livable communities. More metered parking is also a given in both towns. In summertime, we need to look at creating parking lots on the perimeter and provide shuttle service into the villages. Can we make better use vacate land/lots closer to downtown? (eg. school parking lots, old arena space and/or canning factory south of millennium trail in Wellington). With over 700k Sandbanks visitors, a bus service to and from the Park makes a lot of sense to alleviate congestion.

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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, our current tax base can't pay for all that needs doing. Infrastructure is what is holding us back...we've outgrown it, and with a million visitors a year, it's under great strain. We have to take the politics out of roads....prioritize those which have the greatest impact/contribution to the economy. Some will have to go back to gravel. In the short term, a tourist tax has to be seriously looked at. If we got just an extra \$5 from every visitor, we'd net \$6 million per year for infrastructure. Longer term, we need to grow our population if we are going to make a compelling case to higher levels of government for help. Maybe we need to get back to a plan from the 1990's when the idea was Lake Ontario becomes the primary source for the Quinte region. At a minimum, a unifying master plan is needed for the development corridor in the County (Wellington Bloomfield Picton).

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## 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?

No. Farm land taxes are rising because farm land values are rising--across the Ontario and beyond. Farm land owners already pay a significantly discounted tax rate compared to residential homeowners who, by the way, are also dealing with higher valuations and hence higher taxes. It is unfair and unreasonable to ask residential homeowners to pay more taxes to offset farmland tax. Furthermore the County has established a program to subsidize some of the tax increase for new and young farmers.

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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?

That's a tough one but my answer has to be no. Part of the stated rationale for paying discounted farmland taxes is that these folks place less demand on these services. Half-load restrictions are put in place because municipal roadways are vulnerable at specified times of the year. The County currently is strained to manage its deteriorating roads. It cannot begin to make exceptions when the roads are most vulnerable to decay.

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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?

911 signs on farmland... it would make sense to allow this, as it makes it easier for firefighters find farmland locations when a brush fire is reported. I don't see what problem there might be with allowing this, except for a modest cost to install the sign.

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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?

Again I'm afraid not. Development fees are used to fund the future capacity of our roads, bridges, fire services, land ambulance and such. More farm buildings implies added reliance on these services. Further more if we choose to exempt farm buildings, what about warehouses or industrial buildings? There is no sound rationale to exempt these buildings in my view.

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!



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