

**Responses from Matt Wren
To the Brockville & District Chamber of Commerce
All Candidates Questionnaire**

I would like to thank the Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, members and staff, for their continued efforts to ensure the community receives good information, and candidates in the municipal election have a forum in which to engage with the public. I am pleased to provide my answers to your questions.

1. If someone came to you with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in our city, how would you evaluate whether the project was worth implementing?

I am assuming your question relates to how, as a Councillor, I would determine whether proposal was worth putting political support behind and guiding it to the proper channels at City Hall (being an individual Councillor is not in a position to actually implement such a project).

I would begin with evaluating where the request was originating and asking how a need or opportunity was identified that would lead to such a proposal coming forward. It is clear we are in challenging times as a city and we may not be able to afford everything we want while at the same time providing everything we need. Some discretionary projects are best left to the private sector and, as such, it should be first explored if that was feasible. If it seemed worth pursuing for the city, or in partnership with the private sector, my business background would cause me to want to suggest that SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), cost-benefit and needs/risk analyses be considered and completed. I would also be interested in researching if it had been done elsewhere and, if so, how? What worked, what didn't? IF we decided to take it from proposal to project, then we would have to carefully integrate it among our existing capital projects and long-term plans and, of course, determine how to pay for it without creating an adverse impact on the rate payer or increasing our debt load.

2. Brockville needs to get on track financially while at the same time needs to move strategically to improve its offer to its citizens and tourists. What experience do you bring to the table that demonstrates your leadership in fiscal responsibility as well as strategic success?

I have said throughout this campaign that I want to bring the skills and abilities I have gained in small business to the council chamber. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the industry I have worked in for nearly 30 years is made up of thousands of multi-generational, decades old successful family companies across Canada. I had significant responsibility in the firms in which I have worked, leading a number of projects including an acquisition, new facility development and navigating a number of regulatory issues with the Provincial government. I hold a provincially issued license in my field, which is a highly regulated profession. I was the President of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals and a director on their board for several years. This is a province wide professional association with a diverse

membership. In such a role, one is responsible for a budget and financial operations that are reported to the overall membership base. I also served at a time we were modernizing the laws governing my industry and profession. I was a part of the legislation committee – a stakeholder group – which negotiated with, and provided ongoing comment to the Ministry involved. I was a part of a number of meetings with Ministers, leaders of opposition parties and high ranking government officials at Queens Park.

At the present time, I work as the Business Development Officer for a not-for-profit financial institution serving the bereavement sector with annual revenues in excess of \$100M, and assets under investment of nearly \$1B. We operate in a financially transparent environment, working under a strictly monitored budget, due to being owned by our approximately 600 member business entities. It is not unlike the structure of the municipality with a governing board, management and staff serving a constituency, in our case being our members. We are in the business of handling the investment of trust funds and providing insurance programs for our members to offer to their clientele for the purpose of funeral pre-arrangement. I am currently working on two new projects with my company: expansion of our operations outside of Ontario into the other provinces, and launching a new investment program for Ontario cemeteries which involves transactions in the millions of dollars.

I believe my work experience demonstrates that fiscal responsibility is not a “buzz term” for me, it is ingrained. However, our city can be fiscally responsible and invest in our future through planning - thoughtful, responsible long-term planning. Cities cannot act on whims. We also can't afford to allow a lack of planning or a breakdown in communication such as what resulted in the massive deficit situation that was the Tunnel.

While not directly asked, I will conclude this segment by mentioning that it is critical that Council very strategically and carefully selects whomever is to be the next Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Brockville. We need someone with solid experience, vision, new ideas, and a proven track record of success. We can't underscore how important this is. The CAO and other key management officials are the people who guide your City Council through massive and impactful financial, legal, planning and administrative challenges. In my opinion, and that of many I have spoken with in the business community, this is a critical decision and the most important one the next City Council will make. I hope my opinion on the matter speaks to my leadership in fiscal responsibility and strategic success.

3. How do we attract and retain Young Professional in Brockville?

I like to think of myself as a “young-ish” professional, and believe that we will only attract and retain young professionals through opportunity.

In some cases, they may see Brockville as the answer to their desire for a quality of life, and bring their job with them. In today's economy, people work differently. I am a prime example. My employer is in Oakville but technology allows me to work here. There are growing numbers of

telecommuters and we are so well positioned to attract this type of worker given our centrality to major cities, the 401 corridor, airports, etc.

Other young professionals will only be attracted if we present opportunities for them. The new St Lawrence Corridor Economic Development Commission is critical in this mission. We have made a great step in being involved in this initiative and I am confident that we will see results. After attending their bi-annual update this week I am very encouraged by the progress they have made only after a year since being established. When the Commission delivers interested parties, our city needs to be prepared to accommodate and make the entry into our community unchallenging and efficient.

With both of these potential streams we need to effectively market what we have to offer. In my opinion, Brockville is largely unknown. I am continually explaining where we are, and what we are, to people I meet out of town....and I don't mean all that very far away. The marketing emphasis needs to be focused on quality of family life, and the affordable way in which a young family can get established in our reasonably priced real estate market.

Our current hospital expansion is a positive factor, as families want to be assured of access to good health care and, if achieved, our Youth Friendly designation will be of assistance. While the twin pad comes with certain concerns, up to date recreation facilities and the proposed new school/campus approach will be a draw.

4. What are your 3 main priorities for Economic development and what key steps will you take to bring your vision to a reality.

I will preface this answer by suggesting that economic development is not an individual sport. There is no single candidate who will be able to deliver on, or have enough influence to convince council to necessarily deliver on turning any one person's vision into reality. The entire theme of economic development for our city is becoming regional and collaborative. That said, I will attempt to answer the question

Priority 1 would be our continued support and funding of the St Lawrence Corridor Economic Development Commission and ensuring there is a cohesive relationship between our own Economic Development Department, Council and the SLCEDC. Prior to attending their bi-annual update this week, I would have been calling on the commission and our internal EDO to be given targets and goals with an expectation of results being delivered. However, it is clear the Commission will be operating with full transparency for the stakeholders and, as stated above, I am encouraged by the work they are doing. I suspect their updates will become quarterly, rather than bi-annual. I will be remaining actively engaged in the ongoing work of the Commission and be a strong supporter of our continued involvement. We do have good things happening now such as the growth of companies like Northern Cables, and the revitalization of the 1000 Islands Mall among other things.

Priority 2 is improving the waterfront experience which will return benefits for Downtown and aid our anchor attractions. There are simple things that can be done to make Brockville a preferred destination to the boating community. A marina app which at your fingertips connects you to places to shop, dine and enjoy; electronic booking for the islands, a shuttle from the grocery store to the dock are examples of simple improvements. Larger projects, which will take some planning, include our docking accommodations. I will be promoting that we take steps to put a long-term plan in place including both short- and long-term initiatives to achieve an improved waterfront experience.

Priority 3 is making a meaningful investment in tourism promotion. I feel the funds generated by the accommodation tax must be deployed to building tourism for our city, not offsetting existing expenses or shoring up shortfalls. The current marketing spend, as I understand it, is approximately \$60,000. The small privately-owned business I worked in spent at least half that just here in the local market. \$60,000 is nothing more than a blip when we are marketing our city provincially and beyond. In order to make an impact and bring about results, the vast majority of the accommodation tax revenue should be spent – as intended - on tourism promotion. I will be taking a strong position on this matter to urge my colleagues to make an appropriate investment for this purpose. Otherwise, all we have done is create a new tax to solve old problems.

5. What actions would you take to improve public safety in Brockville?

I applaud fellow candidate Nathalie Lavergne for rejuvenating the Neighbourhood Watch program in Brockville, and all those community champions who have been calling for steps to be taken to ensure community safety. I know our Brockville Police Service is committed to our community and the finest in their field. But we must always be seeking ways to improve. I support the concept of a community safety closed circuit video system and feel we should investigate what a system may involve and how to pay for it. I would also support emergency beacons such as the type you see on university campuses along secluded areas of the waterfront trail. Our police service is working with youth, but could this be expanded? Building respect towards law and order at an early age is a long-term approach that works. I have full confidence in the Brockville Police Service and would commit to supporting the work they do in any feasible way. On another theme of safety, we have made extensive progress, thanks to the work of many community minded individuals, on our walking and biking trail and path system. To encourage people to more actively use alternative modes of transportation, we should look at our major employment areas and see if there are safety issues for those who would want to bike to work. California Avenue, in my opinion, is a dangerous stretch for cyclists and we should consider what we can do to make it safer.

6. Currently the city doesn't have Communication Policy – what are your thoughts to insure there is an effective external and internal communication policy in place.

The recent complications with the Tunnel project accentuate the serious consequences of the lack of an internal communication policy. I consider it a high priority that Brockville City Council engage in the creation of such a plan. Furthermore, many citizens perceive a lack of transparency in the operations of City Council and in the financial activities of the City. I am supportive of making improvements in this area. We can begin by looking at similar policies in other municipalities and then should move forward expeditiously with the creation of our plan.

7. What projects / policies would you champion to help small businesses grow?

I believe a city's role in small business growth is fostering an environment in which businesses can succeed. Therefore, we must survey the current environment and determine what we are doing right, and in what areas improvement can take place. It is anecdotal, but I have been told our city has a reputation of being difficult to do business with. Is this perception correct and can it be substantiated? If it is determined that we are putting up hurdles, we need to address this and modify the processes that may seem viable internally, but are creating challenges for prospective and existing businesses.

I have also had a conversation with the DBIA. I understand there is a need to look at our approach to bylaw enforcement and move away from a complaints-based system to an enforcement approach, and that the vacancy rebate program is not creating the intended outcomes. I would want to have a conversation on how we move forward to support the DBIA with appropriate policies and approaches.

Finally, we have a number of good programs in place in our city to support entrepreneurship. I support the continuation and feasible expansion of these programs in the hopes of continued business expansion in our city.

Respectfully submitted,

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