

Candidates square off at first debate hosted by King Chamber

By Mark Pavilons

Job creation and easing local traffic woes were top of the list at the first municipal all-candidates debate last week.

The King Chamber of Commerce brought together all 14 council candidates Oct. 3 at Nobleton Lakes. Candidates in Ward 5 received the most attention from residents, who put the would-be councilors in the hot seat with their questions.

MC and Chamber board member Jay Rider asked the candidates how best to address the jobs deficit in King, and foster economic development.

Ward 6 candidate Roman Dyriv said he's a big proponent of the small stores and shops that are common in villages.

Incumbent Avia Eek said King's Economic Development Strategy has set out tasks and goals and the council is proceeding with them. She is also keeping her eye on a business corridor in her ward, that runs up Highway 11 to Bradford.

Ward 5 candidate Sasha Mozaffari said when Magna International builds its headquarters on the parcel at the corner of King Road and Jane, it will bring jobs to the community. She's in favor of asking residents what they would like to see in terms of job creation.

Rob Payne said the bulk of King's industrial/commercial development is limited to Schomberg and it's not enough. Some 87% of the tax burden falls on residential homeowners and we have to consider enlarging commercial areas in all the hamlets. As well, the council should be cognizant of the 1,000-plus home-based businesses as well as the agricultural operations.

Incumbent Debbie Schaefer said our towns need to be attractive to investors and we have to leverage King's unique qualities.

Improving broadband is just one area that will make King more suited to businesses.

Ward 4 candidate Mary Asselstine said the revitalization of Schomberg's Main Street is underway and hopes are it will become more attractive to retailers and fill up. The industrial area near the Trisan Centre is still largely vacant and King needs to really look at light industrial uses that bring jobs.

Incumbent Bill Cober said over the past 10 years, there have been significant gains in job creation. Council has worked with Showa, a major company in Schomberg, to help them improve their efficiencies. He stressed the Township has to make sure we have the amenities in place to attract investment.

Ward 3 candidate Jakob Schneider said his ward is largely rural, so it's quite different than King's other urban centers. The Township, he said, needs to more fully promote agricultural and equestrian operations and cut some of the red tape to foster growth in those areas.

Geoff Simpson said he's on deck to do whatever is necessary to support King's farmers and equestrian operators. The ED study does have measures laid out, so King will have to concentrate on moving them along.

Ward 2 candidate Sherry Draisey said increasing transit connectivity in all areas of King will draw businesses.

Incumbent David Boyd said King's infrastructure improvements, transportation master plan, and improved Internet services all make King investment-ready. New and existing businesses need these in place. He also said the Township's CIP program makes our core areas more attractive to new businesses. It's working well in Nobleton and he's excited to embark on new measures, especially promoting eco-tourism.

Ward 1 candidate Kelly Colasanti said King has to increase its industrial/commercial inventory and expand boutique retail. Infrastructure and enhanced GO service will also help.

Jordan Cescolini, as a small business owner, said we have to take a step forward to attract industry. Tough decisions may have to be made and it's time to talk realistically about merging the old and new villages. Increasing the industrial/commercial ratio will help lower taxes.

Incumbent Cleve Mortelliti said King has helped foster the repurposing of older buildings for new businesses. As well, the municipality does have plenty of serviced industrial land, but it seems to be in areas no one wants. There's no consensus among residents as to the preferred solutions. He knows residents want tax relief and it's a constant balancing act. Some residents are already seeking [services for tax relief in Los Angeles, ca.](#)

The topic of a bypass for King City led to a lively debate but saw little in the way of concrete solutions.

Mortelliti said an Environmental Assessment was done on several options, pointing to the 15th Sideroad as the only viable option. But York halted studies and the 15th has been pulled off the table. He said we won't see any real solution or bypass options in the next three terms of the council.

Cescolini said traffic is a major concern in King City, and for residents along the 15th. King has to "get the ball rolling" to study traffic relief options.

Colasanti said he supports the 15th as a bypass route, noting it's the most logical. He added we have to get trucks off of King Road, too.

Payne said he was surprised to hear that support for the 15th, stressing it's not a viable option. He wouldn't waste taxpayers' dollars to reopen this debate.

Mozaffari said a new study is the best bet to look at traffic, especially as King City grows.

Schaefer said a bypass through Kingscross would carry an "astronomical cost," and it's not even clear it would solve the problem. The King-Vaughan Road is likely more of an alternative.

Ward 5 candidates were asked about the parking situation at the King City GO station, and what can be done to provide more spaces.

Schaefer said Metrolinx has said it will expand the parking but hasn't committed to a time frame. More YRT services to the station would help. There is ample parking in the village, and people need to know about the availability and just walk a couple of blocks.

Mozaffari said expanding the parking lots and extra bus service is needed in the village.

Payne noted the GO lot is at 100% capacity and will reach 160% over the next couple of years. King has to push Metrolinx to expand the parking. The Green P lot is underutilized so perhaps a shuttle bus from there would be a good idea.

Opening remarks

The candidates were given the opportunity to introduce themselves and their platforms in their opening remarks. For some, this was their very first public debate.

Chamber President Tom Allen said this debate is "democracy in action," and he said it's so very important that voters have options in every ward. He praised the candidates for "putting yourself in the public eye."

Mayor Steve Pellegrini, acclaimed for the second time in a row, thanked the Chamber for hosting the debate.

"I humbled by my acclamation," he said. "I'd like to say thanks to the amazing people of King who have shown confidence in my leadership over the last eight years.

"I promise to continue working hard for the next four years to encourage economic growth, increase broadband, improve our roads and improve the quality of life for our residents and businesses.

"We've accomplished a lot over the last four years. With all the positive changes that have been happening recently, it's nice to know King is starting to be recognized as one of the best places in Canada to live. MoneySense magazine recently released its annual survey of the best places to live in Canada and King ranked first in York Region, eighth in Ontario and 18th in Canada. The survey ranked cities based on criteria like wealth and economy, population growth and taxes."

Cescolini, 22, said the changes he's seen in the past few years make him want to build a better future. He's pushing for a lower tax rate, growing the tax base and improving infrastructure. He said he's big on listening to the people and making sure their voices are heard.

Colasanti, a five-year King City resident, wants to give back to his community. He'd like to see King City become a destination to shop and he's supporting improving the maintenance of vacant lands in the area. He's also pushing for lower taxes and dealing with traffic congestion in the village.

Mortelliti said he has 12 years of experience at the council table, which is both valuable and useful to residents. The self-professed problem-solver is well versed in municipal politics as well as civil engineering, giving him a thorough understanding of issues and the process.

Draisey said her focus is on pedestrian protection in Ward 2. She'd like to see improvements to pedestrian walkability in Laskay. She'd also like to see better-scheduled road construction to avoid drawn-out periods. Reducing traffic is key to maintaining King's property values.

Boyd noted he has long roots in the community and he's in office because he cares. He wants all King residents to feel "at home" in their own community. He's compelled to serve as councilor, ensuring the community remains the place to be for future generations.

Schneider, a 4th generation farmer, said he's attended 65% of the council meetings over the past term to acquaint himself with the process and issues. In listening to residents, he found road safety, cell phone service and infrastructure improvements are top of the list. We need to make King more business-friendly, he said, noting we must promote our agri-businesses. He's also a big supporter of accessible and affordable housing.

Simpson, a 12-year Schomberg resident, said he brings his business and some 50 years of cumulative volunteering to the table. He thrives on finding solutions. In his many leadership roles and committee involvement, he's developed great listening skills. The role of the councilor would be his top priority.

Asselstine, a Schomberg resident and volunteer since 1985, has learned the importance of "looking after each other." She's invested her time in her community, making many partnerships. Realizing the pressures on King, she said it's important we establish a collaborative approach to what's needed for the community. Her skills, energy, and passion will be ideal as a full-time counselor. Cober has enjoyed serving his constituents and as a "home-town product," he's happy to continue in this role. Fostering relationships with residents, groups and Township staff will help meet the challenges ahead. He supports promoting and cultivating King for future investment through economic development measures and working with other levels of government.

Tackling gridlock, improving infrastructure is top of the list for Mozaffari.

Helping residents with their day-to-day problems is important, and she believes these can be best resolved with "fresh thinking."

Payne cited three main issues in the coming term "speeding and traffic calming; controlled sustainable development; economic development, all of which will help residents in the end.

Schaefer said she's delivered value to her constituents since she was first elected in 2010. We're at a very exciting time in King's evolution and we're just now seeing the benefits of growth. Several projects on tap "King's new municipal building, the new library and seniors' center, and new recreation center" all increase the value to the community. The council needs to be respectful to its taxpayers and be frugal with spending. At the same time, we need to encourage a mix of housing options and deal with growth.

Dyriw said he's concerned with past mismanagement of road and canal projects in the Marsh. He questions whether residents are getting value for their tax dollars. He vows to improve work-related performance and accountability.

Eek has helped increase the profile of agriculture since being elected in 2010. She's become engaged in countless committees and organizations over the years. She's proud that York has its first agri-food strategy and of the trust, she has built with her constituents.

Working together as a team "your priorities are my priorities."