

Jennifer McDonald Responses

Questions submitted by the public; 6 drawn randomly for use during the recorded forum, all to be made available for comment to interested candidates for inclusion alongside forum video.

- How do you plan to involve residents in the decision-making process in our town?

I think it's important to meet people where they are. I know how busy life is and I don't expect that people have time to read Council agendas and minutes or come out to the meetings. If we can be in the places where they do their shopping and at events they attend with their families, I think it will allow more opportunity for conversation. We need to effectively communicate so that people are aware of what's happening in their community and actively ask for their input. We need to consider our approach to communication and think of things like the facilities we use for committees and consultations and ensure the people, surroundings and processes aren't inaccessible, intimidating and frustrating.

- If you could change one thing in our zoning code, what would it be and why?

I would change the zoning to add requirements for affordable and accessible housing. With under 1% vacancy in Bridgewater, rent is becoming unaffordable for far too many and even further limited for those with accessibility needs such as elevators or wider doors to live safely and comfortably. The high demand has resulted in new housing stock being developed but we've seen little to no affordable housing in those developments. If we can offer a streamlined process that allows builders to fill the demand faster, while requiring affordable and accessible units we can start to get people into the homes they deserve.

- Do you think housing affordability is an issue in our city? If yes, what do you plan on doing to improve housing affordability?

This has been a persistent issue for many years, and I believe we're currently at a tipping point. The cost of homeownership has also been rising, with unprecedented demand over the past two years. With the expectation of continued growth, more people working from home and choosing to live in beautiful communities like ours, the new interchange making our community a more attractive location to set up shop, drawing more workers to the area and also making it even more possible for commuters to live here, I expect the demand to increase and we'll see these issues

intensified. We need to work with the Province to come up with solutions built for our community. We'll also need to look at our zoning and land use bylaws to make sure everyone has access to housing.

- If you are not elected, what would you do to try to help work on ideas or issues that are important to you?

I would make myself available to the new Councilors if I could offer support as they transition into their new roles and I'd likely reach out to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities and get involved in some of their programs to support women in politics.

I would continue to volunteer and be an active member of the community. Not being elected allows you to approach some issues differently and through different channels. I would do my best to use that ability along with my experience in Municipal Politics to advance important issues for Bridgewater.

- What's the one major issue you plan to address?

While it's difficult to pick just one issue because they all intertwine, I think affordable housing is an issue that requires immediate attention. We typically look to the Province as the level of Government that handles housing, however, we've reached a point where we need to get creative on a local level and find a way to make sure everyone in our community has reasonable access to this basic need. No one in a community like ours should fear that homelessness is around the corner or worry about where they'll go tonight. No one should be wandering the streets at night worrying about their safety, that is not acceptable while we talk about the growth and prosperity that we've been enjoying.

- How have you already been volunteering or serving in the city?

I've served our community on Council for the past eight years during which time I have been appointment to Parks, Recreation and Culture, Active Transportation, South Shore Public Libraries, Canada Day, Growing Green Festival, Bridgewater Police Services, Bridgewater Fire Department, Youth Advisory Committee, the planning review committee, and Bridgewater Skate Park committee. I've participated in Walk the Walk for Autism for the past few years through my former employer. I also had the opportunity to facilitate free financial literacy sessions at Women's Unlimited, Freeman House, Career Rising and the Better Together Family Resource Centre. I volunteered with Junior Achievement to deliver the Economics of Success program for grade 9 students at Bridgewater and New Germany Schools. I've also organized fundraisers for the Bridgewater Skate Park.

Volunteers provide so many critical services and programs in our community and many of the events and programs that enhance our quality of life. We've very fortunate to have strong volunteerism in our community and I'm proud to be part of it.

- What do you think is going well right now in Bridgewater?

I think there are a lot of things going well in Bridgewater and I get really excited when I think about the future of our community! A new interchange will be built in the very near future, coupled with the highway twinning, it will reduce the commute to Halifax to about 45 min. That makes Bridgewater even more attractive to businesses looking to set up shop, it also allows more people to choose Bridgewater as their home with a reasonable commute Halifax and the communities in between. The interchange will also open significant vacant lands owned by the town, a fantastic opportunity for developers. We have seen a booming real estate market, both in residential properties and commercial. There are a number of commercial properties awaiting renovations and upgrades and a number of other new builds underway or in the works. I think that the development of an anti-racism task force is a big step in the right direction on an issue that needs to become part of our discussions. The Bridgewater Police Services has secured a number of contracts allowing them to generate income for services. Bridgewater Transit has been going really well with great ridership numbers and new buses arriving in the next few weeks. The Downtown Master Plan has created a fantastic space used for events and a number of properties nearby have been purchase and many others renovated. Some of the owners have taken part in the façade program, which has been in place for a couple of years. Staff have recognized areas for improvement in the program and I'm confident we'll continue to see it used to maintain the beauty of our downtown. The Bridgewater Skate park is a project that I've worked on for a number of years and is very well used and enjoyed by resident of all ages. The dog park and trails appear to be very well used and residents have openly shared how much they value those spaces. The trail at the Woodland Gardens was upgraded to make it accessible for wheelchairs, strollers, and people with mobility issues. A space that was always a gem is now a showcase for how parks should be built with everyone in mind.

There's a lot to look forward to in Bridgewater I'm very proud of the progress I've seen in my eight years on Council.

- Are you a member of a political party? If yes, what benefit or impact does your membership of a political party have for the local community?

I cast my vote in every election, however, I am not a member of a political party as I feel it's important as a Councillor to be able to work with our Federally and Provincially elected officials no matter their affiliations.

- How would you encourage employment and economic development in our area?

This is an interesting time to be looking at economic development and employment as we're watching drastic change before our eyes. The pandemic has made us all re-evaluate our work/life balance, changed the way we work, where and how. During the worst days of the pandemic, we saw local businesses get creative and find ways to continue serving their clients or finding new services and products to offer. Like them, we have to identify the opportunities that have and will come out of this "shift" and make sure that we're well equipped to provide exactly what people need to work the way they want to work in Bridgewater. The potential for economic development and job creation on the lands opened up by the new interchange is a big opportunity for Bridgewater. This is where I believe we need to be very strategic and the first step in doing was approving the funds in the 2020/2021 budget to hire an Economic Development Officer who is dedicated to this very goal and has the skills, knowledge and connections to move us in the right direction. I also think we need to use the Smart Cities project to encourage suppliers, and service providers that we connect with through the process to make Bridgewater their home base. This project has allowed us to connect with people in the energy and sustainability fields from all over the world and we need to use opportunities like this to sell Bridgewater.

- What do you see as the most pressing needs for infrastructure or capital projects in Bridgewater?

New regulations in wastewater will require significant upgrades to our current, ageing infrastructure, we're also limited in our ability to develop without increasing the capacity of our wastewater system. This is a major concern considering the very significant investment required and the huge impact this could have on our ability to meet the residential housing and commercial development needs in our community if it's not addressed.

- If you received a \$1 million grant to use for the town any way you wanted, what would you do with it and why?

As boring as it might be, I'd invest it in wastewater infrastructure. It's the foundation that communities are built on and without it we'll be unable to continue to grow. Without development, we can't address the housing needs in our

community, we can't expand our tax base taking some of the pressure of rising costs off current taxpayers, we can't welcome new businesses and employers and the positive momentum that we've seen in recent years could be halted.

- How do you feel about the bus service and what do you feel needs to be changed or improved?

I think the Bridgewater Transit pilot went better than expected. Following the service being made a permanent service of the Town, the numbers seem to have remained steady and it became very clear early on that this service was needed and wanted by residents. I'm proud that we were able to offer a service that impacts the residents and business community so significantly without increasing the tax rate. As of late, we've had issues with the busses generously donated by HRM and we've had days without service while the busses are repaired and serviced. We expect the new busses to arrive very soon, which will allow the service to be more reliable for those who are depending on it.

- What do you think of the idea to change the name of Cornwallis Street here in Bridgewater? Do you feel it is erasing part of our history or adding to the story of our history?

I believe it's important to acknowledge the good and bad in our history in an effort to learn from the past and be better today and in the future. Acknowledging events and historical figures and honoring them are two different things. These are different times where we feel differently about the acts of some of those historical figures and how we recognize those events and figures needs to evolve with us. I would support the change of the street name but would hope that truthful and honest conversations about those events continue so that we can grow and be better. I feel we need to change the street naming policy to avoid naming streets after individuals. What is acceptable and celebrated today may be recognized as a hurtful or tragic act in the future and we can avoid the same mistake in the future by making that change now.