

Stacey Colwell Response

Bridgewater Town Council Candidates Forum
hosted by South Shore Public Libraries
September 30, 2020

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

Citizen engagement is crucial to our municipal democracy.

Number one, I'm doing everything I can to get people to vote.

The town can also do a better job of public consultation, not just formally with broad invitations to meetings, but informally by contacting stakeholders who may be affected by council decisions. For example, sports organizations which use the town's playing fields were not consulted prior to the town implementing user fees.

Social media activity is important, too, in order to encourage residents to get engaged. I'll be doing that regularly to let people know what's happening with their local government, not just good news but potentially controversial issues and challenges. I plan to basically use my journalism background to report news from council.

In addition, I'll be talking to citizens and listening to how they feel. I'm often out in the community at events and businesses, or simply walking my dog.

Finally, I'll promise to respond to every public inquiry.

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

Inclusionary zoning, in coordination with the provincial government, could provide much more flexibility in allowing the town to deal with the affordable housing crisis.

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

Absolutely. Although affordable housing is technically not a responsibility of municipal government, the town can take action to help. If elected, I'll propose the development of a comprehensive working plan to address the issue. It's something I understand well from growing up in a low income home in the town and having to move annually to find a more affordable place to live.

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

I'm confident council will be in good hands regardless of the outcome of this election. There are many good candidates. That said, if I'm not elected, I'd continue what I've done for years, and that's volunteer with community groups, serve on committees of council, and share my opinions with the decision makers.

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

I have five major issues I'd like to address, in no particular order:

1. An affordable housing action plan
2. Implementing recommendations in the 2013 downtown master plan
3. Redevelopment of the old arena
4. A debt management strategy
5. Thoughtful infrastructure investment to support our growth

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

I've served on committees of council and volunteered with numerous community groups, some of which include our schools, sports teams, the United Way and others. I also consider my journalism work a service to the town, by keeping citizens informed, and our public institutions and officials accountable.

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

There's a lot going well right now. The current council has overall moved the town in a progressive direction. One would be our growth at a time when most municipalities in the province are challenged by declining populations. Another would be the town's Energize Bridgewater initiatives.

- 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?

No, and I never have been.

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

I'd like to continue efforts to implement the 2013 Downtown Master Plan. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We have a comprehensive plan already, we just need to use that as a roadmap for things such as completing a downtown parking study, lobbying the province for a new bridge, creating a North street roundabout, actively pursuing land acquisition, founding a business improvement district, and improving signage regulations.

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

Waste water. That's a sexy topic but a critical one facing the town. First, there's a landslide of tens of millions of dollars due to be spent on wastewater infrastructure in the coming years. Second, it'll address the health of our river. Third, it'll allow the residential and commercial growth necessary to keep tax rates down.

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

I have deep concerns about our debts. The current debt of close to \$5 million is forecast to be nearly \$15 million by end of this next term, and debt servicing costs will more than double to over \$2 million. That's money that rightly should be going to lower taxes, address infrastructure needs or provide more services, not pay for debt.

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

I attended the 2020 annual general meeting of Citizens for Public Transit and fully support their regional transit concept, which could improve service through expanded routes and get more busses on the road.

- 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?

The town's heritage advisory committee, in consultation with the anti-racism task force, is studying the issue of potentially renaming Cornwallis Street. I'd like to be open-minded and hear from them before making a decision.