

Mike Conklin Responses

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

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 welcome all citizens and business owners to contact me with any concerns or issues they may have. Town Councillors are representatives of the people of Bridgewater, so in turn we are accountable to them, and we must constantly stay in touch with the people. I have always maintained an empathetic approach in dealing with people, whether it was through my volunteer activities or my work experience. I am a proponent for asking questions, sharing ideas, and discussing concerns. Receiving feedback from the community you represent is a key to good governance. I am and will continue to be accessible by phone, email, social meeting and of course, in person.

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

I would want to see us change residential zoning, whereas we could get more creative and flexible in incentivizing developers to build more housing units. A focus on affordable housing for low-income families is imperative and this would involve zoning changes for Bridgewater to better meet the needs of this demographic.

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

Housing affordability is at a crisis point here in Bridgewater and is a major issue. With less than a 1% vacancy rate in Bridgewater, sale prices and monthly rents have increased due to simple supply and demand economics. Working with the South Shore Housing Action Coalition would be an avenue which would help us in addressing this challenge. In addition, Bridgewater needs to be more aggressive in marketing vacant land for residential development, while at the same time, we need to get more creative to entice these developers to build here.

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

For starters, I would continue to be an active volunteer in our community. Participating on one of the Town's committees would also be a focus. I would become more active in social media, sharing my thoughts and suggestions concerning our community (all with a positive spin).

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

The key issue for Bridgewater is infrastructure maintenance and repair. I would address the infrastructure issues by working with the provincial and federal governments to acquire funding for various major projects in our town. There are several other infrastructure challenges that will need to be addressed on a local level.

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

I have had the privilege to be a long-time volunteer for our community. I am a former Vice President of the Bridgewater and Area Chamber of Commerce and former Chair of their Business Advocacy Committee. I have also volunteered in various capacities with Bridgewater youth for over 20 years. I worked with the Big Brothers program, where I enjoyed being an In-School Mentor for a couple of years at Bridgewater Elementary School. I have been a minor hockey coach in Bridgewater for 9 years, as well as a hockey coach for Bridgewater Jr/Sr High School for 5 years. I was the President of South Shore Minor Hockey Association for 6 years, and I am currently in my 2nd year as President of the South Shore Mustangs U18 Major Hockey Club.

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

Bridgewater's growth and prosperity is at an all-time high. More and more people are recognizing the fact that Bridgewater is one of the best towns in the Maritimes in which to live and work. Our population growth has been consistently strong over the past 20 years, however we are reaching a critical juncture as Bridgewater is lacking in available housing. Unless we tackle this problem, continued growth and prosperity will be limited (Bridgewater needs to solve the issue of a lack of available housing for all).

- 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, I am not a member of any political party and never have been.

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

I would like to see the Town introduce some sort of business advisory council to replace our Business Development Commission that was recently disbanded. I feel that it is important for us to work with and support our new and existing businesses. We need to work with other local business groups such as the Bridgewater & Area Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses.

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

I see our most pressing infrastructure need being the wastewater system. It is operating at maximum capacity and as a result, needs major improvement. Other infrastructure issues that have my attention include traffic flow and overall road conditions.

- 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 would use the money to help pay down our long-term debt.

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

I feel that Bridgewater Transit is providing a needed service for our town. One way to capitalize on our investment would be to work with the local group, Citizens for Public Transit, who are lobbying for a public transit service to serve Lunenburg County. An expanded public transit service would be an huge benefit to our community, and as ridership increases, this could potentially lead to expanded transit routes within our town.

- 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?

If Cornwallis Street was named after Edward Cornwallis, then I would support changing the name of the street. History can not be erased, however we can move forward.