All Candidates Response Form

District of Kent

Instructions

1. Complete the Candidate Information below, then answer all questions, including the Lightning Round. These questions apply to all Council candidates.
2. Type your answer in the response box under each question. Responses may be given in any order.
3. Each response must be no more than 500 words. Lightning Round answers are YES or NO.
4. Your file MUST be saved in PDF format and titled with your name, for example: Stephanie_Gallamore.pdf
5. Word documents will NOT be converted to PDF for the website. Files that are not PDFs cannot be posted.
6. Open this form in Adobe Acrobat Reader (free) so your answers are saved, then use File > Save As and name the file with your name. Return the completed PDF as directed by the event organizers.

Candidate Information

Candidate name: Stan Watchorn

File name to save as: Stan_Watchorn

Text boxes scroll if your response is longer than the visible space.

COUNCIL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

District of Kent

Question 1

There is almost no growth in the commercial sector in Agassiz. What specifically would you do to attract new businesses, retain existing ones, and increase pedestrian activity and economic activity downtown?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

The District of Kent is always willing to work with the Chamber on ideas to support and increase pedestrian and economic activity downtown. We have a Commercial Revitalization program where taxes are reduced for a defined period of time to support façade improvements of businesses/buildings. The District is always looking for ways to support new business opportunities and work with existing businesses and potential businesses. I think that the expansion and relocation of Rona downtown, the new Kent Vet Clinic are example of successful expansions recently. I think one of the issues we have is lack of awareness by visitors of what businesses exist here and what opportunities exist within our community. The challenge is how to increase awareness for visitors. As part of the promotion efforts of the Chamber and Tourism Harrison, increasing visitor awareness through promotions and appropriate/tasteful signage that creates awareness may be part of the answer. The fact that we have the provincial highway running through the middle of our town with very limited parking options is also a factor that affects visitors travelling through our community to other destinations.

Question 2

How should the District capitalize on visitors travelling through to Harrison Hot Springs and Sasquatch Resort to generate more economic activity for Agassiz businesses?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

This is a promotion challenge. It would be normal for businesses in Harrison Hot Springs and Sasquatch to try and keep visitor business in their locations. The challenge is to increase the options and activities that visitors may want to take part in and thereby increase the amount of time and money they spend in our area. A way that could increase awareness of activities and opportunities for visitors, is to have Agassiz host events that increase visitor exposure of what Agassiz has to offer. For example when the Swim Club has their annual meet we permit participants to camp here, they spend more time in our community rather than travelling home each day. Next year in addition to the annual swim meet in Agassiz, the region has agreed to host the Regional Qualification Swim Meet here also. This will double the exposure and should increase business. More events such as the Lions Car Show promoted by Harrison River Valley Tourism and the Agassiz Farmers Market in Pioneer Park from late June to September are also effective events in drawing visitors to our downtown area.

Question 3

Is there a need and opportunity to attract additional grocery or retail options to Agassiz?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Agassiz would benefit from a new/larger retail grocery store in our community. The increasing numbers of residents may justify this in the future. Our existing Grocery store has been working to spruce up their location… but a new larger facility requires a large capital investment. The business case that a major grocery retailer would need to assess will be one of the key determining factors regarding this decision. The district is and has been open to supporting such an initiative going forward. The second key factor will be establishing an appropriate location and investor willing to initiate this. Obviously this would keep more business in our community.

Question 4

With increasing pressure for housing and commercial development, will you commit to keeping development off Agricultural Land Reserve land? If not on ALR, where should future growth in the District occur?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I certainly support the Agricultural nature of our community. We will always be known for our agricultural nature. Our land base is approximately 90% agricultural. The need for additional residential capacity, currently a 475 shortfall of new homes with another 1700 homes needed by the year 2034 is a challenge. This along with the lack of Commercial and Light Industrial land in our community, may require some easing of the restrictions within the Agricultural Land Commission's decisions. This is a difficult and controversial issue in our community. Hillside infrastructure development is very costly. Harrison Highlands has now completed selling Phase 3 of the development. The average single-family home is typically over $1 million… this is not affordable housing for young families. The multi-family design options can reduce the cost somewhat. The District has been focused on increasing density within the town core for some time now in an effort to try and meet our housing needs. The District of Kent is collaborating with other agricultural communities in the province to try and encourage the Provincial Government to establish a Agricultural Tax initiative similar to the MRDT (hotel tax) that supports destination resort communities such as Harrison and Whistler. Communities such as District of Kent have limited taxation benefits from agricultural land while still having all the infrastructure requirements and costs. The Agricultural Land Commission was created to preserve agricultural land recognizing the need to retain sustainability of agriculture in our Province. So, the argument is the provincial benefits of have a sustainable agricultural land base is a benefit to the entire provincial population and maybe there could be an offset of funding to communities such as ours, to assist with the limited taxation benefits from agricultural land.

Question 5

Infrastructure maintenance on rural and side roads is an ongoing concern for many residents. How would you prioritize this within the District's overall budget?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

We have an existing Road and Culvert maintenance and replacement program. Over the last few years we have spent approximately $1 million dollars a year on road revitalization or replacement. This is a thoughtful plan taking account of the life expectancy of the existing roads. I would like to outline a recent example of the Chapman Road Culvert replacement to illustrate how effective the District has been in acquiring grant funding to support expenditures on our infrastructure needs. We had a collapsed culvert that was restricting the spawning salmon from passing through. In cooperation with Seabird Island Band we were able to secure a grant of over $1.3 million dollar to replace and restore this culvert and enhance the spawning channel. This project was fully grant funded and no Municipal tax dollars were needed. This is just one example of the focus of District Staff and Council. We are always looking for ways to secure grant funding to reduce the need for local taxation. Supportive grant opportunities to preserve and extend our infrastructure requirements is a major focus in the District of Kent.

Question 6

What concerns do you have about youth in this community, and what do you plan to do to support young people through their teenage years?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I believe we have gone a long way to increase the opportunities for youth in our community with the addition of the Lets’emo:t Aquatic Centre. Adding this facility onto our existing Recreation Centre has increased the options for youth in our community during the fall and winter months. Working with local organizations to create opportunities is something the community as a whole needs to focus on. There is very good cooperation with the School District for facility usage, the Recreation Department works to provide a variety of recreational opportunities, organizations such as the Agassiz-Harrison Aquanauts, Agassiz Baseball,
Community Services and others are some of the organizations that offer youth activities and opportunities. Increased public transport schedules may assist in access between the communities of Harrison Hot Springs, Agassiz and Chilliwack.

Question 7

What do you believe is the most important issue(s) facing the District of Kent over the next four years, and why?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I believe the critical issues for us going forward are affordability, infrastructure, housing and environmental issues. Nothing gets done if we can't afford it… both individually or as a community.

Affordability & Infrastructure – we have managed our reserve funds very effectively. We have saved and planned for future expenditures that will be needed to sustain and improve our infrastructure. Currently we have 2 long term debts. Cemetery Road will be paid off this year and the Community Recreation Centre has an existing debt of approximately $760,000 at an interest rate of 2.2% will run until 2035. The Pool project will cost approximately $26 Million I anticipate the debt financing on our pool will be a 20-year debt of approximately $3.6 million…this has not come to Council yet. The community and business donors have raised over $800,000 of the $1 Million Donations Goal. Water and sewer systems, roads, recreation operating costs are all being managed with affordability in mind. A big part of our success has been the ability to seek and be successful in grant opportunities. The Chapman Road Culvert replacement discussed above and the grants of nearly $14.5 million for our new pool are examples of how the district has effectively planned and managed costs in our community. I expect this responsible fiscal management strategy will continue.

Environment & Housing – Many of the environmental issues are bigger than just our community. Wildfire, flooding, heat domes, etc are issues that provincial and federal leadership are needed in.

Question 8

What do you see as Agassiz's greatest untapped tourism opportunity?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I need to acknowledge this is not an area of expertise for me. I think the focus could be on building onto our rural agricultural aesthetic. The "Farm Tour" events from the past may be something that could be promoted and supported. Families and individuals living in the Lower Mainland could take advantage of weekend "get aways" into our community. The Tulip Festival is an enormous success. What family does not want to have their kids experience the "petting zoo" nature of kid goats, feeding lambs or other young ones… also "corn maze" type of attraction may work here also. This initiative should be led by the Chamber and Tourism Harrison.

LIGHTNING ROUND (YES / NO)

All Council candidates: check YES or NO for each question

Lightning Question 1

Do you support the District exploring shared services with the Village of Harrison Hot Springs to reduce costs?

☑ YES ☐ NO

Lightning Question 2

Have you volunteered with a local organization in the last three years?

☐ YES ☑ NO

Lightning Question 3

Do you believe it is the municipality's role to attract new investors (such as grocery/retail) to the area

☑ YES ☐ NO

Lightning Question 4

Do we have enough affordable housing in Agassiz?

☐ YES ☑ NO

Lightning Question 5

Do you support increasing the municipal budget for tourism marketing such as the Agassiz Harrison Museum, municipal events and Agricultural businesses.

☐ YES ☑ NO

Lightning Question 6

Do you support housing density in the town core?

☑ YES ☐ NO