



HALIFAX CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

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Questions for Mayoral Candidates Running in the 2012 Municipal Election

Over the summer the Halifax Chamber of Commerce distributed questionnaires to *all* mayoral candidates on issues and that matter to you, our members. Below are the responses from our newly elected Mayor Savage.

Questions and Responses:

Taxes

1. Do you believe municipal tax reform is necessary in Halifax? If yes, what reforms are you supportive of?

1. Yes I believe that tax reform is necessary. We need a more effective means of promoting growth. Taxes should help drive development and economic growth where it makes cost-effective sense. I would begin with reforming commercial tax. It is unfortunate that what began as a promising conversation a few years ago, with the creation of the Tax Reform Committee fell victim to a polarizing debate. We need to start talking to each other again and we need timely and accurate comparative data that will better inform the conversation. The mayor should take the lead in renewing that dialogue. I would support initiatives that help promote densification of the core as laid out in RP+5. Because it costs more to buy, build and pay taxes on a business in the core let's also examine the lifecycle benefits of development when it comes to permitting fees and other charges.

Development

2. HRMbyDesign is now five years old, do you feel it was successful? At this time what changes would you make moving forward?

I support HRM by Design. We've seen progress since its adoption in 2009. It has helped establish a clear, timely and transparent process for development while preserving the city's heritage.

That is important because, while we're good at planning, we're not so good at the execution. We missed our growth targets in the Regional Plan. Strong leadership, adherence to accepted plans and good benchmarking, as outlined in my governance policy, will ensure that doesn't happen again.

3. What are your views on development in the downtown core?

We need more development in the downtown core. We need more people, more businesses, more entrepreneurship, innovative use of spaces and more services.

Our city's core must be vibrant, an energetic and safe environment where people want to visit, live and where business gets done. As mayor I would work with council to bring all partners, both private and public, to the table to secure the \$50 million investment in the downtown proposed in the five year economic strategy. We can blend our city's historic waterfront charms with modern efficiencies like effective transportation systems. I want to bring the Bloomfield Master Plan to fruition, create tax and leasing incentives, and promote the creation of other such broadly supported community initiatives. I also want to engage the community in a discussion about the development of the Cogswell land, something that has the potential to serve as a model of excellence in the design of urban space.

Transportation

4. Do you think there is a need for a transportation authority which would combine Metro Transit, HRM transportation and the Bridge Commission?

Whether through a transportation authority or some other governance model, we need a fully integrated approach that gets people to where they need or want to be. We need to connect the dots, to find ways to move people that are efficient, cost effective, convenient and sustainable. This includes emphasis on active transportation and modern public transit.

Competitiveness/Open for Business

5. What is the most important thing that the next Mayor and Council can do to support economic growth in our city?

If elected Mayor, I will champion our community and all of its assets at home and on the road. We will get things done, and achieve our potential.

6. How are you going to ensure that Halifax is open for business?

I will take the message directly to business here and to those that might move here or do business here. We need to roll out the red carpet for new business and new people. I also intend to work toward a clear international brand for our community to show that we are open for business and have much to offer. There is a need for focused investment to build on our many assets that exist across HRM.

I want to support entrepreneurs and build on our strong entrepreneurial spirit to move our community forward. I want municipal staff to feel empowered to find better ways of serving citizens and customers. I would offer municipal resources such as buildings or land to support collaborative initiatives that benefit the whole community.

Effective Council/Leadership/Governance/Vision

7. As per Budget 2011-2012, council focus areas were: Maintain “flat” tax rates, reduce capital from operating and use \$3m of service efficiencies as needed. Other focus areas included: effect transportation strategies, the Multi-Year Financial Strategy, HRMbyDesign and infrastructure projects.

Specifically, what do you think should be Council's priority focus areas over the next council term?

1. Open municipal government through better use of technology, a stronger governance model, transparency and accountability.
2. Build a strong collaborative relationship with other levels of government, business, labour, not-for-profits, social enterprises, neighbourhoods and schools that will benefit the community as a whole.
3. Identify and follow through on priority areas such as the regional plan, the economic strategy or the many other plans we have, while providing clear performance measurement.
4. Reform the tax structure.
5. Reinvigorate the downtown core to make it a place where people want to be and business gets done while ensuring traditional industries in rural HRM, such as fishing, farming, tourism and agriculture remain sustainable and find new markets.
6. Make HRM the most livable community in Canada: safe streets, sustainable development and transportation, thriving arts and culture and a healthy environment.

8. What do you see as the key role of City Council?

Council should be more strategic and less operational. It must develop the long term vision and plan for HRM. It must enable and provide staff with the resources to execute on those plans.

9. A good Mayor must be a strong leader. How do you plan to lead the City, particularly given the new size and structure of council?

Strong leadership begins with listening and understanding. I believe that most people enter politics because they want to make things better. I know that people are going to have different opinions and perspectives but if we work together in an open, respectful and collaborative manner we can make good decisions, accomplish great things and move our community forward.