

Chamber Lets Mayoral Candidates Speak for Themselves

October 9, 2000

The Chamber held a Mayoralty Forum on October 4 at the Westin Nova Scotian Hotel, providing the four candidates with an opportunity to speak to our members on their vision for the future of HRM, and to answer members' questions on issues affecting our business community.

The event was extremely well received, with more than 200 people in attendance. The audience heard each candidate -- Walter Fitzgerald, Peter Kelly, Ken Ozmon and Aaron Peters -- give a five-minute presentation and answer questions that had been submitted by the audience. The Q&A session was moderated by Chamber President Ian Thompson.

In answering our members' questions, the candidates touched on a variety of topics, including fiscal reporting, Council/HRM staff relations, transportation, business taxes, and downtown development.

As a service to those members who were unable to attend the event, the Chamber has posted on its website a transcript of the 25-minute Q&A session that followed the formal presentations.

To read or download this transcript, simply go to www.halifaxchamber.com and click on the Policy Update section;

it will be the first entry listed on the page. You will need Adobe Acrobat to view the PDF file. If you cannot access the document, you can request it to be faxed or emailed to you by contacting the Chamber at info@halifaxchamber.com or calling 468-7111.

GET OUT AND VOTE

Municipal Election Day is Saturday, October 21st. Voting hours are from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Advance polls will be taking place in your area on Saturday, October 14th and Tuesday, October 17th, each from 12 noon to 8 p.m.

For general election information or polling locations, you should contact the Election Office at 490-4401, or 490-4398, or by emailing election@region.halifax.ns.ca.

Halifax Regional Municipality also has more detailed election information on its website at www.region.halifax.ns.ca.

Editor's note: With so many municipal issues affecting the business community, our ability to compete, and the quality of life in Metro Halifax, the Chamber urges you to get out and vote on October 21st. Exercise your right to have your voice heard!

Any comments on the Chamber providing the transcript on the Mayoralty Forum are welcome; email them to info@halifaxchamber.com or contact the Chamber office at 468-7111.

POLICY UPDATE



**METROPOLITAN HALIFAX
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**
Strong Business. Strong Community. Since 1750.

P.O. Box 8990, Halifax,
Nova Scotia B3K 5M6
Telephone (902) 468-7111
Fax (902) 468-7333
www.halifaxchamber.com

METROPOLITAN HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

MAYORALTY FORUM

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

Mayoral Candidates: Walter Fitzgerald

Peter Kelly

Ken Ozmon

Aaron Peters

Moderator: Ian Thompson, Chamber President

October 4, 2000

CHAMBER PRESIDENT IAN THOMPSON (moderator) The first question to Ken Ozmon. In the event you're elected Mayor, how would you ensure that downtown Halifax receives the economic infrastructure that's needed for rejuvenation?

KEN OZMON I think certainly it's a burning question and one I was just talking about at the table here.

First of all, I think that we all have a stake in downtown Halifax. It's the centre -- the capital of our area and the capital of our province. A lot of people visit Halifax with certain expectations.

I think we, as citizens of Halifax, have to have certain expectations as well. I think we have to see that those expectations are brought into reality. I think the attitude has to precede the action because unless we value and unless we decide that we want a first-class downtown we're not going to have it. Practically I think we have to work with the downtown business association and see what we can do together in order to obtain the funding and to develop a plan that is workable.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Mr. Kelly, you've indicated that you want to make a fundamental change in the manner in which HRM is administered and in a way that would provide individual councillors the power to direct the activities of individual members of staff. How will that be beneficial for HRM?

PETER KELLY First of all, I don't ever recall, as you say, to give any staff or any council member any such response. So I don't know where the question is coming from.

My approach has been is that we need to work with staff more better. We have to become more cooperative. We have to be more communicative. At times we don't know what's going on and it's time that we worked together more openly so it is.

So the question that was posed is incorrect. The question -- the issue I brought forward is that we need better cooperation between staff and council to make things work better.

IAN THOMPSON Maybe I could use my discretion and ask you what's the nature of the legislative change that you propose?

PETER KELLY The legislative change right now, the current MGA give the ultimate authority to CEO in terms of administration. I believe we need to become more involved with that so that \$284,000 expenditures do not get done until council has a chance for input.

IAN THOMPSON Mr. Peters, what's your position on the size of the HRM council?

AARON PETERS Well, the size of council I think is an interesting issue. In all levels of government I think it's always important to try to find the optimal size for a council based on a number of factors. But I think the size of the HRM council at this point in time is probably fair but I would say that it could use some re-examination to see whether it could be adjusted in size.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Mr. Fitzgerald, amalgamation happened five years ago and yet we're still dealing with different by-laws, different regulations affecting construction activity, taxi operations, et cetera. What do you plan to do about consolidating the regulations that are not now consolidated between the four previous municipalities?

WALTER FITZGERALD Whenever you bring together four large municipal units there's a lot of areas that have to be gathered together. You have to regulate them. Staff has worked very hard on this. They've brought it before council. Council has consolidated most of them. There's still a few we want to change, there's a few we want to improve on and we're just working on it. I can't think of any that are really drastically affecting the operation of the Halifax Regional Municipality. But there are a number we want to review and a number we want to change and that will be done in the next year or two.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. To Ken Ozmon: every elected politician likes to leave a legacy, what do you wish your legacy will be in the event that you're elected after a first term or after your time in council has ended?

KEN OZMON Well, first and foremost, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to leave a legacy of unity to this municipality.

I think if there's any single thing that needs to be dealt with and dealt with effectively and immediately it has to be the whole unity issue. The people I've talked to - and you don't have to go far from the downtown core - suggest to me that they're not being heard, that they are being ignored, that their problems are being ignored and, people in Halifax do as well, but certainly outside of the downtown core you hear that as a predominant theme. I think, rightly or wrongly,

whether that's right or wrong, people have to do something about it. I think it's up to the Mayor, particularly, to take the lead because the Mayor is elected by all the people in the Municipality. I think the Mayor has to get out and talk to people in the communities. I think council has to get out and listen to people in the communities as well. I think that will create the kind of atmosphere that will allow us, as a group who are living and working together, to move ahead.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. To Peter Kelly: in the event that you're elected Mayor can we expect that the Greater Halifax Partnership will have more or less support?

PETER KELLY Very good question. Right now we need to redefine what the roles of the partnership is going to be as well as the RDA and other business groups. We seem to have a bit of duplication but most importantly we seem to be forgetting the rural areas, who feel they're being left out of even business development, and they want to be made part of the family. I think if we can bring the RDA and the Greater Halifax Partnership and other groups together to make it work then it will be to all advantage. But the Greater Halifax Partnership has done a good job. But are there issues that must be dealt with? The answer is "yes", and hopefully with the cooperation of all we can make it work better.

IAN THOMPSON To Aaron Peters: in the event you're elected Mayor, what would be your three priorities for your first year in office?

AARON PETERS I think probably the biggest three priorities that I would have would be, as I've said quite often, number one is to restore democracy. I think that's a fairly broad sort of statement to make but I believe coming back to people-centred government. That includes all people from the standard community to the business community. So it's to restore democracy.

I think to promote economic development, which includes working with and investing in, if possible, in the high-tech and bio-tech sectors and creating jobs for all citizens.

I guess the third goal or accomplishment that I would like to make is -- I guess it would probably be to strengthen -- at least do what I could do with the provincial downloading for education or from the provincial department down to the municipalities, do everything I could to ensure that every child has, you know, has textbooks and that sort of thing. Or if we have to go technological solutions, CD-ROMs, web -- because, I mean, I was talking to a friend of mine and basically he was telling me he's out in the rural parts of the Regional Municipality, and they don't have enough textbooks and so the children can't take their books home. They have to do their homework in school. I don't know what they do. I don't know how they manage. But it's an atrocity. I think that would be my -- one of my third greatest -- one of my goals, I guess, one of

the things I would like to accomplish. Because, I mean, you know, as Whitney Houston once said, I believe that children are our future, you know. I think we need to -- so that would be my big three, sir.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Now, Walter Fitzgerald, this questioner says, currently HRM does not publicly release quarterly financial updates, therefore, we have no way of knowing whether HRM is on budget until the end of the fiscal year. Do you have plans to provide more meaningful quarterly reports?

WALTER FITZGERALD That surprises me because we started it just recently, the first quarterly report came out in the month of September and it put us about \$1-million ahead, I believe. Debating whether it was a million or a little more, little less, and there's some other financial projections and we have to continue that. We're going to do a second and third quarter and final. We should be able to keep it up-to-date so all the citizens know where we stand, staff knows where we stand. I think that whoever wrote that question just better get a little closer to the source. It just shows that nobody perfect - politicians up here or people out there. But we do do quarterly reports. It's only recently, but that's it.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Maybe the chairman should have known better than to read that one. [Laughter]

WALTER FITZGERALD That's correct.

IAN THOMPSON That's why I'm not running.

WALTER FITZGERALD But you're one of the smart ones, Ian. I didn't mean that against you.

IAN THOMPSON Ken Ozmon, what ideas do you have to deal with the growing traffic on the peninsula?

KEN OZMON That's a good question and one which certainly a lot of people are concerned about. I think we have to take a multi-pronged approach to dealing with the traffic problem. It's not solvable by adding a ferry or adding a lane or adding a bike path. I think we have to have a comprehensive plan and I think it has to be a plan that involves all the surrounding areas for the

Municipality, not just a corridor from Windsor Junction to Halifax Centre. Part of the solution lies in what was suggested by the Downtown Business Commission, by Kate Carmichael this morning on the radio, getting rid of the Cogswell exchange. But that's only a Band-aid, part of the solution. That's what we've been suffering from all along, I think, is attempts to solve what is a major problem and a growing problem by Band-aiding it or suggesting interim measures to try and deal with a specific problem in a specific area. It's not going to work. It's not going to work until we get a comprehensive plan and then stick to it and carry it out.

IAN THOMPSON Mr. Kelly, why do you seem to assume that the competitive process now underway for the harbour clean-up will not provide a best cost solution? Does HRM and CUPE have the skills, knowledge, to undertake a project as large as the Halifax Harbour Clean-up?

PETER KELLY First of all, HRM does have the skills to operate such a plan. We already currently operate five such plans in HRM. So we do have the expertise. I will admit that we do need the help to construct and that is why we're going through this process. So that is a given. It will be built independently of HRM.

The point is what is the most cost effective approach for HRM. Is it a 3-P, we don't know yet because we did not receive the proposals back yet. But we have asked staff to ensure a value for dollar by having a shadow bid to ensure that we get what we deserve in terms of the most cost-effective operation. And until we see the numbers, do the analysis, compare what the process is going to be, then we will all know. But until then we have the skills, we have the expertise, but we need more data.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. To Aaron Peters, what qualifications do you have to be CEO of HRM?

AARON PETERS Well, I'm a small business person which has forced me for many years to manage resources effectively and every year balance my budget. It's like the principles I studied at university. I did some courses in economics of public finance and it's interesting and, of course, accounting. But it's interesting because from a fiscal standpoint the principles of managing a small organization or a large organization are very much the same.

So I think that from an accounting standpoint, a fiscal standpoint, I do have the knowledge and the expertise to handle it from that standpoint.

I think from a fundamental standpoint I have the interest of the people at heart. I think between the two the democratic interest of the people, the various groups within the community, and sound fiscal management and the ability to be innovative and look for creative ways to solve

problems which come up. I think that those give me the ability, and I think you all can relate to that, balancing your own books, would give me the ability to take on the job.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. There's been an amendment or an addendum to that question that I asked. I guess I asked the question incorrectly. I'll just offer this as a statement rather than a question. This questioner says the quarterly statements do not show the variance, apparently, from budget so we have no way of knowing if we are on budget until the end of the year.

WALTER FITZGERALD But any business in this community doesn't know from second to second where they stand. The Halifax Regional Municipality under our very, very good staff can tell us where we stand at each quarter. And the second quarter we will know, we have a good estimate. They give us a projection where money is coming in, where it's not coming in, where it isn't up to scratch. We deal with a \$460-million budget and they aren't constantly incoming and we have to predict. I would think our prediction over the last number of years is not bad at all. Now I'll take my next question.

IAN THOMPSON The provincial government is currently facing many financial challenges. Given that Halifax is the dominant generator of wealth in the Province, how are you going to protect HRM's financial interests from being unduly affected or negatively affected by provincial policy.

WALTER FITZGERALD Oh, it's going to be very, very difficult. The provincial government has been very tough. They're trying to pay back their money too quickly. It took them a long time to get -- I've gone through two governments. It took them a long time to run up to \$12-billion in debt. They should have a system the same as the Regional Municipality that you have to pay the debt the following year. So the provincial government is cutting us back. They're putting the assessment notices on us. They're doing all kinds of things. I won't get into these. But if they're going to cut us this much we're going to have to be very careful. The \$8-million assessment along with the \$8-million that's been -- going to give from another tax which we presently use as some recreation is going to put us \$16-million in the hole and then with gasoline tax we're going to be in big, big trouble. I do not think the provincial government should cut down on the municipalities as quickly as they're doing by paying back their taxes in one year. You can't balance a budget in one year. They've gone 11 or \$12-billion into debt and they can't get out of it in one year. They have to think of the citizens who pay the taxes and that's you out there. You just can't be wrung through the wringer and expect the municipality to do everything you need.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Mr. Ken Ozmon. Property taxes are a big concern for residents of HRM. How do you plan to lower taxes and improve services?

KEN OZMON Well, I talked about property taxes in my remarks, Mr. Chair. I think that we have to, first of all, stop trying to convince people that we're lowering their taxes when, in fact, we're not. I'm arguing for being honest about the tax rate and bringing the tax rate down to the point where it offsets the increased assessments. That certainly is one objective.

I think we can improve services by prudent fiscal management. As you know, I haven't been on council so I don't think that I should be held responsible for the management that's gone on before. But on the other hand, I have balanced the books many times for 21 years straight and I think at the same time we were able to move ahead. So I don't think that prudent fiscal management is necessarily a deterrent to achieving objectives. I think we have to keep our minds on both.

IAN THOMPSON For Peter Kelly. Are you for or against supplementary funding?

PETER KELLY With regards to supplementary funding, I was the one that brought this issue to council. I was the one that asked for the plebiscite that this issue is an issue of taxation. This is the first time in Nova Scotia that you will have a chance to vote on whether or not you agree or disagree with this tax. So, number one, it is your choice to decide. I am one of 238,000 voters. So we need your help to decide whether or not you believe this is the way to go.

Before we can go into the supplementary programs we have problems with our core programs. Lack of textbooks, lack of supplies, lack of programming, and across the province they are being treated more different than we. They are getting more dollars than we are as well. If the province treats us as well as they treated other municipalities and the other eight school boards, we would not have this problem that we have today. So the point is that there are problems. The point is it is a taxation issue. And the point is it's your choice.

IAN THOMPSON Aaron Peters, are you for -- your position on privatization. What is your position on privatization and private public partnering?

AARON PETERS Well, I -- someone once said that the government which governs best governs least, and I don't know if I totally agree with that but to a great extent in terms of privatization if you're speaking of -- in terms of the government sort of getting out of managing certain firms, corporations and that sort of thing. I mean I think that the only thing that

government really should be responsible for are those corporations which it can be seen that there's a need for them to manage because there's some kind of public policy issue. I think that other than that, I mean the private sector I believe is probably, you know, the best part of society to manage a lot of companies.

And in terms of the public/private partnership issue, I think that's a -- I think it's an excellent idea. I think that, you know, the business community can work with the government, municipal government, if they so choose to help, you know, to share some of the costs. I mean, you know, we all contribute to the community economically. The marginal propensity to consume is very high. We spend a lot of our dollars [to recycle?] And, you know, I think that, you know, it's in some ways because we're all in this thing together, you know, through some kind of programs where we could work, you know, work with the private sector, they could help sort of, you know, help with, you know, voluntarily help with the public sector needs.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. I'm going to ask a question to Walter Fitzgerald and then we'll do one more round of questions and conclude. To Walter Fitzgerald. Do you support, would you support a single business tax rate for all of HRM?

WALTER FITZGERALD A single business tax rate for all HRM. Yes, I could do that. A single business tax rate for all HRM. We're working on it now. We have to get it straightened away but if it comes out favourably I could support it, simple as that. But right now we have a business occupancy and business tax rate. I think that it should be -- We're trying to put everything into one. You can't do it all in four years, and I think that that would be the right way to go.

I could also add a couple of other things but I won't, to other questions that were asked, if I had more time because supplementary funding is very important to me and I'd like to see that answered correctly.

IAN THOMPSON To Ken Ozmon. Final question. This concerns the creation of the Capital District Health Authority and questioners wondering whether you have given any thought to how we might align HRM with healthy public policy for the population?

KEN OZMON Well, I haven't given it a lot of thought to be honest with you, Chair. But I do think that we have to promote healthy communities and I think the best place to start, in this instance, is probably the centre of the health expertise in HRM. We must do things which reduce the number of people who have to use our health facilities and I think promote good healthy lifestyle within our community to offset the rising cost of health delivery.

I think that citizens will come on board if they're challenged and if they're provided with the opportunities. Opportunities such as: bike trails; and hiking trails; the extension of the Trans Canada Trail throughout our community. I think all of these things will add up to promote a healthy lifestyle. But I think, too, some of the direction has to come from the schools. I think the best way to convince people to live a healthy lifestyle is to emphasize that in the schools.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. To Peter Kelly. This questioner says that there's been promises for expanded services, police, transportation, how do you plan to proceed without increasing the residential tax rate that you promised to hold?

PETER KELLY With regards to policing, since amalgamation we've gone from 448 down to 385 sworn officers. So there is a difference on the street. There are economies of scale that I believe that we recapture and re-invest that into policing. We need to focus on the issues, and the issues are that people are wanting to feel safe and they want a proactive police force, and we have to find the resources in which to meet that objective.

IAN THOMPSON To Aaron Peters. What kind of relationship will you be fostering between the two levels of government?

AARON PETERS That is provincial and municipal?

IAN THOMPSON Yes, I assume so.

AARON PETERS Academic divisions anyway. If anybody listened to the televised debate or I spoke at an education forum, one of the things that I've always been talking about - I don't know if it's quite the right term - but I refer to it as a municipal constitution. For any of you who don't know, I don't mean to insult your intelligence, but the Constitution of Canada basically lays out the division of powers between the federal government and the provinces. Section 91 and 92, I believe, each respectively lay out the powers and there are some physically funding formulas in place. I think there is nothing to govern the relationship between the Province and the municipalities. And I know that the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, which has representatives from all the municipalities, it's been an issue with them. There's been nothing hard and concrete but I think it's important now if we begin with any kind of supplementary funding or provincial duties, i.e. the downloading of these under the municipality, that we have some way to set out a relationship and perhaps even talk about some funding formulas. So that

the downloading, you know, because I mean once it starts it sets a precedent and then who knows how far it might go. So I think it's important to begin to really speak about these relationships between the two and have some form of, I'll the word, constitution to set out those powers.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. To Walter Fitzgerald, the final question. What are you plans for improving the traffic situation on the Bedford Highway?

WALTER FITZGERALD The Bedford Highway. I'd like to improve the traffic conditions on -- I was just writing it down here. I thought you might ask me that. You know the Herring Cove, the Purcell's Cove, the Bay Road, the Bicentennial. From the Fairview overpass to the Mount we put in a four and five-lane highway some time ago and that we wanted to put it right through to the road that goes left up into Rockingham and that was curtailed and the rest of the road was condemned and put into a two-lane highway. So when that happens and when we took over we have a two-lane highway through Bedford. I go through Bedford quite often and it's jammed into two lanes and then coming sometimes into two and a half and then eventually four.

Regardless, regardless there's going to be traffic tie-ups. We can't make the Bedford Highway any wider and we have to put in a connector to -- we have to get up to the Bicentennial some way in that piece just out by Rockingham. And other than that the only other thing you can do is improve transit and I think that's what we have to do. We have to improve transit and we have to improve some of the other systems to take the pressure off the Bedford Highway.

IAN THOMPSON Thank you. Well, thank you to all four candidates. You know our system doesn't work without people like the four at the table here today. So on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, and those present, thanks so much for today but thanks so much for getting engaged, getting involved, making your perspective known and helping us all to create a stronger and more dynamic community.

Thank you all for coming. I hope you have a good afternoon and I hope you go away feeling better equipped to vote later this month.

[APPLAUSE]