

# ESSEX MAYORAL RACE 2006

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"It's going to take a long time before we get rid of it completely, there's no doubt," McDermott said. "A lot of us will have to die off before it will be eliminated."

Both candidates agree that residents will have to accept amalgamation and say a priority of the next council will be to bring the two towns together.

"We've got to stop our bickering," Snively said. "The province has put this amalgamation together and it's like a marriage, we have to make it work."

The Essex Free Press spoke with both candidates, who provided responses to seven questions. Their thoughts on each question appear below.

## 1. Name your greatest character strength and describe something that you have done during the past year that demonstrates that characteristic.

**McDermott:** I prefer to be an Indian compared to a chief. It's much easier to be an Indian than a chief. And I like getting dirty, but I think one of the best things about me is, I can look at somebody, size them up, and I'm usually right on. I am a people person. If there's a need to make adjustments with people or with myself to make something work better, I think that's a quality that I have. I can bring the best out of you. You may not see eye-to-eye with so-and-so but with a little bit of direction from me, we're a team.

**Snively:** Our local Harrow Youth Centre has been failing financially and I've done successful fundraising. I've done a pig roast and raised money to keep it afloat. (An example of one of my character strength's) is the drive to keep programs that relate to the rate payers going.

## 2. Property taxes typically increase each year and sur-

## charges, like the sewer surcharge in Ward 1, create an added burden for some taxpayers. How would a council led by you attempt to control the tax burden?

**McDermott:** Just as we did this past term. Overall, the municipality's (tax burden) probably went up. But we have a debt that we incurred as a new council from the previous council of a little over \$5 million. That money went to pay down the debt, which is now just over \$3 million. So, we've done an excellent job of holding (down) taxes in our municipality despite of what some people are saying.

**Snively:** The only way you're going to control any user-pay debt is by future growth. In the town of Essex itself, we were slated for 400 new homes in the Mady development and I haven't seen one home go in there in three years. So, somehow we have to proceed on getting the developer to start building subdivisions in our area and take the burden off the taxpayers on user fees - to spread it out and maybe we can level it off. The only way you're going to get down water and sewer rates is by future development. We didn't see that residential boom go - we had potential growth. We had subdivisions that were slated to go in. You can't say it didn't happen because of the economy, because the economy has been slowing in the past year. But three years ago, the economy was in good shape. I really can't answer why the growth didn't happen.

## 3. In your opinion, what is Council's role in ensuring that the economy will grow and prosper in Essex?

**McDermott:** This next four years are going to be tougher than ever for those who sit in those seven (council) chairs, because the economy is struggling as it is. We're always looking to get new businesses to come to

town but you can't make anyone come either. Like in Essex, people talk about the (vacant) storefronts. I don't care what town you go to in Ontario, that's what I look at - (vacant) storefronts. We're not alone, that's for sure. We just try to bring people in the best we can.

**Snively:** We all know the automotive industry is on the down slide right now. We know the days of the \$20-\$30 an hour jobs are moving out of our area and into different countries. The only way I can see how we're going to change that is by trying to attract light industrial (businesses) into Essex and Harrow. Right now in Harrow we have an industry of Atlas Tube, we have Sellick Equipment - I think we should be attracting some type of light manufacturing industry. I think we have to look at how we're going to get together with all of the municipalities and put a task force together and say how we can save our municipalities from going further into debt. The only way you're going to do that is to attract industry into each of our municipalities.

## 4. In your opinion what are the most pressing issues related to roads in the municipality?

**McDermott:** We've done a study with regards to roads and through (Ward 2) Councillor Richard Meloche, we've got a ten-year roads study. Between him and (Deputy Mayor) Percy Dufour who are out in the rural areas, representing that part of our municipality, we have done something in regards to the roads and that's nothing but a plus. And the private roads people, there's a by-law that could be changed. If someone would come to council with a proposal...I understand we do have a chance to change the by-law with regards to private roads but, at the present time, the by-law is if you

bring the road up to municipal standards, the municipality will take them over. So if that gets changed, that's where we have to stand.

**Snively:** First of all we've got to maintain the roads we have. We've got a lot of roads that are in dire straits. Each year I think we should look at each ward and figure out how much road work we're going to do. For example, in Ward 2, taxes went up 110 percent since amalgamation. In Ward 2, they had the least amount of money spent in that area. I think we should really look at doing road work in that area. In Ward 3, if you look at some of the concession roads - they need a lift. They should've had a lift probably within the past two years but that's been neglected. We have to look at each road differently. (Those on private roads) are paying a 14 percent levy on road tax. They're asking for basic services like snow removal and grading.

If you look at the (private) roads in South Colchester, services on those roads, and the way some of the beaches want to be done, to bring them up for drainage, and if they want the roads asphalted, those roads have to be widened and it's going to cost the taxpayers anywhere from seven to ten thousand dollars a piece for each household to bring those roads up. And I don't think that's what the taxpayers are looking at. They want basic road maintenance - snow removal and road grading.

## 5. Essex Memorial Arena was closed last year for structural repairs and was given a five-year lifespan. So far the Kinsmen have managed to gather approximately \$600,000 in cash and pledges. Do you support the project and what do you think should be done to carry the project forward?

**McDermott:** Do I support the project? Most definitely,

Because it was no one in Essex or Essex County who said the need is there. It was an outfit we hired (DMA Consulting). And they didn't just look at Essex, they looked at the whole county. Six or seven arenas are needed in the county. Now, we don't want be the sixth or seventh one five years from now because chances are, we won't need one then. But right now, we need another ice surface.

Some people have been bashing me, saying we're cramming this down their throats. If we were cramming it down their throats at all expense, we'd of had it half built by now. We've been working on this project for three years. We're not cramming anything down people's throats. Nobody on this council, let alone me.

I know what the needs are, I'm a taxpayer also. It's needed. There's no doubt we're going to get it. Are we going to get a twin pad right now? At this time, we're not sure. But believe me, we will have a new single pad built early next year. Guaranteed. Will we twin it when (Memorial) arena is done in and no longer viable? Time will tell.

The Kinsmen are waiting to get the big donors and waiting for a plan. That was supposed to happen two months ago or a month and a half ago. Because of this or that, it went from a \$12 to \$13-million pad to \$16 million in three weeks. They just changed the figure and it's like - hold it, stop right there. And that's when we decided there's a complex in St. Thomas, Ont. - a twin pad arena that cost them about \$10 million a couple years ago. It looks like it fits our needs, it's just a little smaller square footage than we were going to build here but it's not a bad project that they have there.

It's an on-going thing, all channels are open. We've had a couple meetings with

the Tecumseh (Ice Track) group. We're just in the listening stage right now because there they don't have anything concrete, but they're talking about having an ice pad for Essex, one for Lakeshore, but there would be a capital cost. They haven't given us a figure yet, but I've heard through the grapevine it'll be about \$5 million. So \$5 million to rent the ice over there - I don't know. It doesn't make sense to me, but we have a package from those people and we're listening. People have been asking me to make a comment on it. How can I make a comment on it when they don't know what they're doing?

**Snively:** The arena is a hot election topic right now. I think we have to look at two things. What is it going to cost us to bring (Memorial) arena up to standards? Or, what is a final cost on building a single-pad arena? I know something has to be done out there, but, at the present time I think we have to try to get through this downturn in the economy. We cannot come back to the taxpayers and say, 'Look, we're going to raise your taxes to pay for an arena.' There's a lot of people on fixed incomes, on pensions. There's a lot of people who've lost their jobs. What I'm saying is, we're going to have to try to get through these rough times and then take a look at it. I will not support a twin-pad arena. With the Ice Track project in Tecumseh going ahead, I think it's within ten minutes of Essex. That's going to alleviate some of the ice time. I also think that if we build a single-pad arena, we should get together as a community and fundraise. I think we should set our goal and fundraise X amount of dollars. With the revenue coming in, it would offset the operating costs. It shouldn't be on the general tax levy.

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