

Residents voice concerns during all-candidates debate

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"Why pay \$5 million and drive to Tecumseh when we can build an arena for \$7 million?" McDermott asked.

Candidates from each ward also faced questions from the audience.

Asked about his plans for new development in a "dying" downtown Essex, Ward 1 candidate Bill Arps

suggested disbanding the Business Improvement Area and establishing a Chamber of Commerce.

Morley Bowman, a 19-year council veteran, said he's faced the question at

every 'meet-the-candidates' event he's attended.

"The majority of new businesses fail," Bowman said. "As a council you have to try to improve the appearance of the downtown to attract businesses."

John Garinger suggested hiring an economic development officer or firm.

"We need a full-time representative," Garinger said. "The BIA is not full time."

Nick Spidalieri, owner of Nick's Hairstyling on Talbot Street, said the town should first concentrate on bringing in light industrial businesses, which will in turn attract retail stores.

Incumbent Randy Voakes, a chairperson of council's ad hoc economic development committee, said the group has already put a dozen recommendations forward to improve the vitality of the downtown. He said Essex and Harrow have both received \$10,000 from the town to improve downtown corridors by beautifying the area with hanging flower baskets.

Ward 1 candidate Robbie Shepley did not attend the event.

For Ward 2, candidate Randy McCloskey squared off against incumbent

Richard Meloche.

McCloskey said since amalgamation, property taxes in Ward 2 have doubled. He is an advocate of regular town hall meetings and said he will not support an arena project if it means Ward 2 residents will be taxed. Federal and provincial grants should be sought to help fund the project, he said.

Meloche said he's contributed to keeping property taxes down in the ward and helped create a new tax policy that treats urban and rural taxpayers differently.

"There has been no new debt added in the past three years," Meloche said.

Ward 2 candidate Jamie Shepley did not attend the event.

Among other issues, candidates in Ward 3 discussed the tourism potential in Colchester.

"Ward 3 residents are sitting on a little jewel," Deerbrook realtor Daniel Inverarity said. "It's so underdeveloped it's not funny."

Inverarity said there are "absolutely no jobs in Colchester."

"No growth means a town is just going to die," he said. Paul Innes suggested an

increase in hospitality in the area. Tourist-type establishments will follow, he said.

"But we have to be mindful of the residents already there," Innes said. "They have to be fully informed and involved."

Ron Rogers agreed with Innes about including the public in development decisions.

"It should be done in steps so it doesn't overwhelm," he said.

Incumbent and Deputy Mayor Percy Dufour said public development meetings should continue to be held in Harrow. He also said whatever is built has to be environmentally friendly.

In Ward 4, incumbent Peter Timmins is acclaimed.

Timmins thanked all ratepayers for allowing him to continue on council.

Candidates running for school board trustees were a last-minute addition to the event.

Kevin Madden, Kingsville-Essex candidate for the Greater Essex County District School Board, said he is a life-long supporter of public education and is opposed to the salary increase trustees will receive after the election.

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John Garinger

Elect
John
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Councillor
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