

Responses of Keith Hull

SOS Collingwood Questions for Candidates for Collingwood Town Council

1.) In order of priority how would you rank the top five (5) priorities for the Town of Collingwood over the next 4 years?

1. **Growth.** The town has been identified by upper tier levels of government as a growth area within Simcoe County. It is anticipated that the population will increase by 10,000 people over the next decade while at the same time current provincial policy legislates that we increase density as we build out while increasing (on an even greater basis) within the existing built areas (i.e. downtown). Many of your questions relate to growth and planning. I am not an expert in the area of planning and nor should I be. However, I understand the pressures the community is facing and the role as a member of Council to work with our Staff, Consultants and Legal Team to ensure that appropriate questions are being asked and answered and that all information is available and carefully considered before making a decision. Issues come and go but the ability to make tough decisions must remain constant.
2. **Local Economy.** Recently, the Town was identified a leader for entrepreneurship. I think we have a real opportunity to properly leverage our quality of place to continue to attract young, creative entrepreneurs to the community. These individuals are creating excellent employment opportunities within the tech, education, healthcare and hospitality industries (to name a few) working with clientele both locally and abroad. I would like to see both the Town and County continue to foster and promote this entrepreneurial spirit as the return to the community in terms of intellectual and creative capital, revenues and employment are somewhat endless in the “new economy.” Further, many of these “new” business sectors have a reduced carbon footprint when compared to traditional industries of the past.
3. **Affordability.** This is not unique to Collingwood but given that one of our largest industries is tourism it is perhaps magnified. Simcoe County has made a significant investment in Collingwood with the development of new housing at the corner of High & Second streets. However, there needs to be more in order to meet the demands of several demographics. Further, there needs to be increased cooperation between municipalities and industries (see point #5) specific to housing.
4. **Finances.** The current Council has done a good job of reducing the debt while increasing revenues and reserves. With the recent sale of the utility to EPCOR and the airport to private interests the next Council will be charged with the responsibly and opportunity of investing millions of dollars on behalf of the community.
5. **Regional Cooperation.** Although, in my opinion Collingwood remains the hub of the region with the hospital, high schools, college and significant commerce located within our boundaries, we are still a region comprised of four municipalities and two counties. Yet in many ways we continue to operate in silos from one another. Recently, the Blue Mountains engaged in a significant housing study. I applaud them for undertaking the exercise, however as example, given that many of the people who work for Blue Mountain Resort either live or do their shopping etc., in Collingwood, I

think we should have had a greater stake as part of the study. On a positive note (and I was pleased to be a part of the push) we expanded our transit service both in terms of the size of the fleet and routes, but perhaps more importantly we were able to cross those boundaries expanding services west to Blue Mountain Resort and east to Wasaga Beach. The expansion of the transit service has been a success and is one of the few tangible items the municipality can do to provide an affordable option for many within the community and region. I will continue to work with Council and the upper tiers of government (funding) to expand this service.

2.) Much has been said recently about the need for greater “Transparency” in how the Town conducts its affairs. What changes do you think are necessary to improve transparency in how Council, and Town staff, make decisions?

It is unfortunate that a cloud continues to hang over the community with regards to the Judicial Inquiry and ongoing OPP investigation (both of which I support) as a result of decisions made between 2010 & 2014. Much has been made about the “number” closed door meetings held by the current Council with one candidate going so far as to use the term “evils” of in-camera meetings. The reality is that this Council has held less in-camera meetings than the proceeding Council and in fact has done more in an effort to be transparent and open with their communication and engagement with the public. I also firmly believe that the number of in-camera meetings this term would have been far less had the current Council not had to deal with the fallout of the previous Councils decision to sell the first 50% of COLLUS to form COLLUS/PowerStream.

3.) What is your position on inter-governmental cooperation between the Town and its neighbouring municipalities (e.g. the Town of Blue Mountains, Clearview and Wasaga Beach) and where and how do you think such cooperation would most benefit Collingwood?

I touched on this in my response to question #1. Although we are comprised of four different municipalities and two different counties we are a region sharing our natural and physical assets. The two issues in particular that should be cooperatively pursued are Housing (and in particular Attainable Housing) and Transit. At the County I would welcome the opportunity to work with my counterparts to lobby the Province into expanding GO Transit between our region and Barrie. Lastly, as a region we need to ensure that all local Municipalities work collaboratively in an effort to pursue the best available healthcare for the region.

4.) Collingwood is under intense development pressure like it has never seen before in its history. What increased complexities and pressures do you think this presents, and how will you ensure the Town’s planning and building departments are equipped to address them? Are there any additional skills and experience you feel are required to manage these pressures?

Everyone agrees that Collingwood and the region is under intense development pressure. The complexities are enormous whether they relate to heritage, affordability, active transportation, green technologies etc. These are all pillars that I would like to see preserved and enhanced as they relate to planning and development. Similar to ownership of a sports franchise we as a Council need to work with our CAO (General Manager) to ensure that our current and future staffing (Team) are in place to be able to manage the pillars that I identified as they relate to planning and development. Further, we must support them with clear direction and the tools necessary to perform in an ever increasingly complex profession.

5.) The mounting development pressure in the Town is generating a heightened level of community interest in the Town's planning and development process and decisions. Do you think the Town has adequate public consultation processes in place to deal with these decisions or do you think changes are required, and if so, what changes?

The short answer is "Yes." Between regular meetings of Council, Standing Committee meetings, public meetings there is ample opportunity for public consultation. In fact under the new committee structure the public has direct access to members of Council on a regular basis and can speak to any issue of their choosing. The real issue that needs to be addressed and improved upon is communication. This not only applies to planning and development but across all departments within Town hall. I am pleased that the current Council has committed to overhauling our Town website as this is a start. Specifically, if looking at a development within a particular part of Town I think we should increase the number of times residents are contacted and the current perimeter from the location of the subject matter.

6.) The Town has recently approved a Waterfront Master Plan. What is your perspective on that plan? Do you think it contains the right priorities or are there changes you feel are required? Should its implementation be a priority for the new Council?

One, I think it is a fantastic plan and the current Council and members of the community who participated in the process of drafting the document should be congratulated. Secondly, I think that the document does contain the right priorities and it should be a top priority for the next Council. In listing my top five priorities I did not specifically identify the waterfront or this plan. However, Growth, Local Economy and Finances are all interspersed as part of the development and protection of our waterfront.

7.) Both the Waterfront Master Plan and the Town's Official Plan state that the protection of Collingwood's sensitive wetlands and shoreline areas are a top priority. How would you rate Collingwood's performance in protecting these areas to date? Do you think Collingwood currently has appropriate processes and controls in place to protect these areas (especially from development), or do you think improvements are required, and if so, what improvements?

In terms of rating Collingwood's performance I think that is somewhat subjective and requires further context. As an example much of the shoreline and green space enjoyed today was once privately owned lands or used as a "dump." Today, what was once a "dump" is now the Arboretum and home to perhaps some of our best naturally protected shoreline. Within recent decades there have been missed opportunities, the Silver Creek wetlands being a specific example but overall I think the Town has done a decent job of protecting our shoreline and wetlands. It is also important to remember that these areas are also under the purview of the NVCA (Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority) and the MOE (Ministry of Environment). It is also worth pointing out that thanks to organizations like the Blue Mountain Watershed Trust, the Nature League and Environment Network help to keep environmental issues both locally and regionally in the forefront. It is also important to remember that as a Council we are in many ways bound to existing policy currently in place as they relate to the Planning Act. The opportunity for improvement is in challenging those who want to develop to along the waterfront to exceed current legislative standards that are in place. We are not a community desperate for development and therefore as a Council we should not be afraid to say "No."

8.) What role do you see Collingwood's protected wetland and shoreline areas playing in your vision of the Town's social, cultural and economic future?

I believe that the majority of us who live in Collingwood either on a full or part-time basis as well as those who are tourists are drawn by the "quality of place" that the community and region has to offer. Therefore our protected wetlands and shoreline areas will continue to play a critical role as part of the Town's social, cultural and economic future.

9.) SOS Collingwood has raised specific concerns regarding the recent development proposal for the Living Waters/Bear Estate property. While the developer has asked the Town of defer consideration of the application until 2019, a decision on the matter will likely come before Council early in its next term. What are your views on that proposal and what level of public consultation and input do you feel needs to occur?

I watched (on Rogers TV) the Development and Operations standing committee meeting on August 13th when this issue was deputed before the five members of the committee and like many who were in attendance was surprised to learn toward the end of the meeting that the developer had deferred their application until 2019. I am, like many concerned with the density of the overall development and this phase in particular. Although representatives have suggested that whatever is being proposed is to be built on the existing footprint the parking and supporting services will be significantly increased and must be taken into account. Given that the developer deferred their submission I look forward to seeing the revised plans before making a firm decision on the proposal. When the developer submits their revised plans the public will have the same opportunity to engage and comment with Council as experienced this past summer.