

# Plan for Prosperity

*by Austin Wright*

2010 Chatham-Kent Mayoral Candidate

## Preamble

Chatham-Kent is in a crisis with no margin of error. The methods currently in use have not worked, and our leaders have not taken the swift action demanded by the situation.

Despite the apparent gloom and predominant bad news, Chatham-Kent already has most of the necessary ingredients to pull together as a community and overcome the negativity. This plan will outline how together we can solve the most vexing problems of escalating taxes, spending, and job losses.

You may recognize some components from my previous “Four Point Plan” that I released during the last two elections highlighting business Attraction, Retention, Start-ups, and Patronization.

In fact, Chatham-Kent has already acknowledged and implemented more of my ideas from past campaigns than have been advanced by the current mayor, who brought zero motions forward to keep his 4 year-old promises.

My platform ideas were validated in the Corporate Review Report, and identified as priorities that continue to gather dust. One way or another, my Plan for Prosperity will continue to be the agenda in the coming years. The only way to ensure it's done properly is by electing me as mayor.

This Plan for Prosperity sets me apart from all the other candidates, who have only just begun to notice we have a problem and think somebody should do something. That somebody is me, and I am pleased to present the voters with ideas of substance that propose solutions instead of the usual campaign rhetoric.

I am not deterred by the challenge ahead, and I'm dedicated to the hard work necessary to accomplish results for our communities.

I am ready!



## **Our Proud History**

Chatham and Kent County were carved from the wilderness by early pioneers with a proud drive for survival and prosperity. Innovation and resourcefulness were critical for building this community. We pulled together from the start, in charge of our destiny, but helping our neighbours. It's a model that served us well until something happened.

At the time of amalgamation, barriers went up between the people and our government. This was not a requirement of amalgamation, but the way it was implemented. Local control and input were lost. A sense of entitlement became entrenched at the top that shunned citizen participation in favour of paid professionals with big salaries who thought they should be the only ones allowed to promote Chatham-Kent.

Chatham-Kent adopted a “go big or go home” mentality where no middle ground exists, trying to be a big city. Consequently, we've spent a fortune trying to keep up with the Joneses with little to show for it. They have forgotten that there's a third way to get things done by using the resources in our community - our people.

There is a reason why Chatham and Kent became leaders in industry and agribusiness. *It was built by us.* From Tilbury to Wheatley to Blenheim, Ridgetown, Bothwell, Dresden, Wallaceburg, Dover, and all points in between, our business leaders who believed their communities were the best helped attract the industry that sustained our families with jobs to this day.

This system worked. I propose that we incorporate this important resource back into our Economic Development plans instead of discouraging community and business efforts. It's not hard to see that their current plan has not secured results, so it's time to stop addressing the problem with the same ineffective strategy, and take a bold new approach.

## **Business, Commercial, Industrial, and Farm Taxes**

Business, commercial, industrial and farm taxes are too high. This one item alone serves as a red flag, no matter how favourable the other factors may be. Too many times, various incentives are offered to new businesses while we neglect those who have been a part of our communities.

Similar properties in other cities pay far less tax, and the disparity between residential and commercial rates in Chatham-Kent is well-documented. We don't compare favourably, and it's hurting business attraction and retention. Chatham-Kent has lost too many opportunities over this one issue!

Chatham-Kent needs a plan to implement tax fairness to reduce commercial taxes. However, the residential and farm class cannot bear any more increases due to shifting the tax rates, so there's no simple answer. The solution must be tax-neutral for other classes.

There are two ways to achieve this challenging paradox. Part of this is getting expenses under control, which is addressed elsewhere in my platform. A portion of savings must be directed to reducing the business tax rates. It is important to understand that moving tax percentages between classes is not tit-for-tat. A meaningful decrease in business and commercial rates would amount to a much smaller impact to residential rates, which can be kept neutral through reduced spending.

Lowering commercial rates in this way won't achieve our objective on its own.

The next part requires a contract.

Part two is a mid-range plan setting out concrete tax reductions based on growth to the tax base. This means that getting more taxpayers will reduce the burden on everyone. The contract is with our business community and potential investors.

As we attract new business, and increase our population, a portion of added revenues must be directed to reducing the unfavourable business tax rates. Putting it in contract form creates a binding agreement. The better our success, the quicker we can achieve our objective of bringing our tax rates in line with similar municipalities. Business has a stake in the outcome.

Under this agreement, the municipality would promise to reduce business tax rates when there is success, and will endeavour to aggressively attract that new business. In fact, this contract can be used in our attraction efforts by assuring potential industries that plans are in place to phase in lower tax rates.

Businesses would play a role also. Since every business stands to benefit, each business would act as ambassadors to Chatham-Kent in the course of their business.

Whether attending trade shows, networking, or negotiating deals, our business community will be provided with the resources needed to sell Chatham-Kent as a desirable place to live and do business.

*This is how it used to be done*, and it worked very well with little cost to taxpayers. This is not “moving backwards” - it's using a method that brought success before, only now we'll be incorporating it into a comprehensive strategy.

“Support” does not have to mean money. It could be access to information, promotional material, or training. It means that municipal officials will not discourage and work against independent efforts because we're a team, and they will pursue all leads promptly.

To start this process, and refine the concept, I propose bringing a Notice of Motion to form a volunteer task force of business, accounting, and legal experts to brainstorm, consult, and explore a strategy to address the disparity of business, commercial, industrial and farm tax rates.

It is an election promise to spearhead this important initiative and attempt to sell my vision to council.

Market Value Assessment has also resulted in skewed tax rates.

The municipality must start providing input into the provincial MPAC so that Market Value Assessment is guaranteed to keep property values realistic instead of escalating arbitrarily and artificially just because computers in Toronto say so. That MPAC is flawed was already identified by the province but not properly fixed.

Tax increases from reassessment have hit the farm sector the hardest, and keeping farm taxes from escalating is one of the few things possible at the municipal level to assist farmers.

Rural water projects and drainage schemes need to recognize stagnant farm incomes.

Waterfront homeowners and those living near new developments have also been adversely impacted.

Market Value Assessments have resulted in skewed values in some areas. Part of the formula must be a mechanism to identify these areas and adjust tax rates accordingly.

For example, consider Erie Beach. MPAC has decided that property near water is worth more. This means Erie Beach residents pay higher taxes, because the tax rate isn't lowered. Prior to amalgamation, the tax rate would have had to be lowered or they wouldn't have been able to spend all the money. The municipality has to provide some insulation to areas affected by MPAC reassessments.

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## **Business Retention**

Business leaders know that it costs at least 10 times more to attract a new customer than to keep an existing one. In our haste to attract that big factory to save the day, we have neglected those businesses we already have. Time and again, an industry that has been struggling for months closes shop and catches municipal officials off guard after it's too late to intervene.

It is vital that the Economic Development Department have the resources to stay in touch with the ongoing needs of businesses and industry. Too many times we've heard, "We didn't see it coming," when faced with plant closures.

This department must be kept aware of any developments which could affect the viability of local employers, and open lines of communication which are presently overlooked. There has to be an ear to the ground in every community, and each plant should have a contact person that can advise us of any developments - good or bad. If adequate staff resources do not exist, then it would be wise to correct this.

I will introduce a hotline with the mayor and Economic Development officials to enable employees to report any news or suspicions of trouble within their company, so that the municipality can follow up quickly. This hotline concept shall include regular meetings with the business and labour community to keep our information current.

The municipality will maintain a database of possible sources of assistance so we have a palette of options at the ready. This includes federal and provincial programs, capital lenders, investors, and advice.

Some industries were lost due to mergers, sales, and decisions made by distant corporate bean counters.

The municipality needs to keep track of mergers and acquisitions, and identify plants that may be at risk due to identified corporate agendas or redundancy. In these cases, we'll be proactive in making sure the corporate head office is aware of all the business advantages in Chatham-Kent, including those that cannot be portrayed on a spreadsheet.

Existing businesses, industries, and farmers must operate in a climate conducive to success. We cannot hope to attract new business if our established business community is struggling. Investors must be assured that the municipality will continue to act as an advocate after their business has been attracted.

Our existing businesses need to be guaranteed fair access to all incentives, programs, grants and capital that are offered to entice new business.

We must also make it easier for existing businesses and industry to expand, using some of the same resources available for attracting new companies. Red tape and zoning hurdles must be streamlined.

In the course of promoting Chatham-Kent, opportunities may arise to mention existing businesses, and forge important relationships.

The municipality should maintain a database of our local businesses and what each does, so that they have situational awareness. If the chance to promote existing sectors presents itself, then Economic Development officials will have access to current information and be able to provide contacts.

Our municipal website is not being used to highlight the many innovative and thriving businesses in Chatham-Kent. I propose adding informative facts, photos and video to promote the award-winning business culture we have.

While it is desirable to have a place to highlight individual companies, the same should be done with entire sectors.

One overlooked fact is that in every industry in every corner of North America, people who contributed to the success of the organization have roots in Chatham-Kent. Perhaps using Facebook or other online tools, we might make an effort to search these people out and use their success stories as references for our community.

During the worst of the recession, when our auto sector was in crisis, the mayors of major cities met to discuss solutions. Chatham-Kent's place at the table was empty. Mayor Hope stayed home to make an announcement so important that it was hyped for days in advance. The photo-op news conference was not announcing some major investments. Mayor Hope skipped a critical meeting to tell us the Olympic Torch was coming.

I will travel outside Chatham-Kent as required to advance the best interests of our community. Chatham-Kent will once again have a strong voice at AMO, Great Lakes Mayors, and every other important meeting. While some photo-ops are reasonable and necessary to connect with the public, I will make sure our overlooked Ward Councillors play a more visible role in our communities.

### **Electrical Problems**

During the campaign, the problem of intermittent power failures and unreliable supply was raised as a serious issue. Upon speaking with manufacturers, I hear that even a momentary glitch can shut the line down, scrap unfinished products, and result in huge costs. This problem affects Tilbury, Blenheim, Wallaceburg, Ridgetown, and many other communities.

It is imperative that this problem be resolved. To date, little has been done except

consult with Hydro One to take over their assets and distribution in Chatham-Kent, which has gone nowhere.

First, we must determine where the fault lies. If Chatham-Kent equipment is failing, it must be replaced. It sounds like some installations are prone to lightning damage, so better lightning protection is needed.

Where the problem is found to result from unreliable Hydro One feeds, then we must lobby them, and the province, until it is resolved. Withhold payment to make them fix it if they won't listen.

I want to see an engineering report presented to council to determine what we must do to finally bring our electrical supply up to 21<sup>st</sup> century standards.

### **Expansion**

Our own business community is a potential source for new jobs and growth.

We must also make it easier for existing businesses and industry to expand, using some of the same resources available for attracting new companies.

It's not fair to offer incentives to attract new industries but neglect pre-existing businesses that are already employing people. Our policies must consider the homegrown growth that might be possible.

## **Business Attraction**

Our current practices must be supplemented with fresh new approaches. We could identify companies with expansion potential through government sources, trade & business publications, and the internet. Any prospective leads are then followed up with a promotional package custom tailored for that business.

Research must be done to understand the business' needs, much the same way a job hunter would research a prospective employer. It is far more efficient to target prospects with specific material as opposed to sending generic material out to everyone - we'll look more professional as a result and save money by focusing our resources where they will be the most effective.

Cultural amenities, sports opportunities, first-rate education, adequate health care, and solid municipal infrastructure all play a role in catering to the needs of prospective business owners, employees, and their families. We have built or approved many nice things. There is no shortage of things to do. It's time to start taking advantage of all that Chatham-Kent has to offer *now*.

## **Return On Investment**

By now, everybody has identified that business attraction is a priority. At the same time, some candidates are proposing measures that will hamstring our efforts. Chatham-Kent needs to be aggressive and relentless in our pursuit of new jobs, and think outside the box.

Business understands the concept of "spending money to make money" so any new tax-based expenditures (and there will be some if we are to avoid stagnation) must be analyzed for Return On Investment to be justified.

Some mayoral candidates suggest cutting everything and never raising taxes, never borrowing money, and saying no to any new spending. That line of thinking might net uninformed votes, and perhaps short-term tax relief if Administration makes the cuts one candidate thinks they will in response to orders to cut 10% from everything.

We have suffered from similar myopia long enough, as the only promise is long-term deterioration and future financial liability - with no prospect of lower taxes *ever*.

Prudent spending of tax dollars in key areas with a positive prospect of Return On Investment will be viewed more favourably by businesses considering Chatham-Kent than merely holding taxes stationary. It is a more important indicator for prospective businesses that a community has the kind of forward vision required to attract new business rather than merely maintaining lower taxes at the expense of growth.

Once businesses start to locate here, taxes will indeed drop for everyone due to expansion of the tax base - more taxpayers, each paying less.

## **Grants**

The municipality has secured grants from upper levels of government to help finance business attraction. These grants have been made available for specific measures. One example is money to update our website, which was squandered on out-of-town consultants who produces little noticeable improvement.

Municipal staff will pursue available grants and ensure Chatham-Kent is applying for everything that will benefit our attraction efforts. I will encourage that we define specific goals when applying for grants.

Should we need money for a particular venture, then we will liaise with our provincial and federal counterparts in attempt to leverage some financial support, and lobby to the extent necessary.

Any source of potential funds should not be overlooked, and this may include programs and partnerships in the private sector.

## **Identify Emerging Sectors**

Several existing and emerging sectors have been provided grant programs by the federal and provincial governments.

By identifying sectors which are eligible for provincial and federal grants, we can maximize the incentives we are able to offer. Careful research can give us the edge.

Many companies, particularly foreign ones, may not be aware of incentives to which they qualify. If Chatham-Kent identifies these grants, we can efficiently target those sectors with offers that give us an edge over other municipalities.

The green energy sector is ripe with incentives. When I first started promoting green energy in my 2003 mayoral campaign, part and parcel was to be efforts to attract the manufacturing. Subsequently, the province has dropped billions into this sector, but Chatham-Kent was not at the table.

We knew from day one that these components were manufactured overseas, but did nothing to attract the industry here. Nobody should have been caught off guard. Chatham-Kent can't afford 4 more years of missed opportunities.

A focus on green energy will position Chatham-Kent as a progressive environmentally friendly community. This will interest many businesses in their quest to capitalize on environmental responsibility, and they will want to locate here where the concept is fostered.

Another important prospect is the electric car. A privatized space race is loaded with potential.

Emerging industries, new innovation, and the research sectors provide a rich source of attraction targets.

We'll scour trade publications for hints that we can follow with strategic attraction efforts. Our Economic Development hotline will encourage calls from the public when prospects have been discovered.

I discovered an interview with a wealthy industrialist in India who wanted to set up a factory in Ontario. I immediately passed this on to Randy Hope. He characterized the contact as an "opposing position" and told me he mailed the company a letter that morning. This is symbolic of Hope's failure to move Chatham-Kent forward.

- a) It should not matter where an idea comes from if it's in the best interests of our community;
- b) "Mailing a letter" is an embarrassment. Business is attracted by proper research and killer proposals that are custom tailored to make a good impression, then hand-delivered (there was a Chicago office) or at least couriered at the end of the day after using all our resources.
- c) Every lead must be tracked and followed up. It's not enough to mail a letter and cross fingers. We've heard of too many leads that were lost due to lack of communication, poor planning, bad record-keeping, and no follow-through.

### **Partnership With Entrepreneurial Agencies**

The provincial government has a charitable agency called MaRS that matches entrepreneurs with advisors to help with exploring new markets, developing new products and services and raising capital. They also provide access to services such as market intelligence.

Chatham-Kent is currently not involved with MaRS. In response to my query, Economic Development Services has stated an intention to explore and pursue this resource as part of our overall strategy.

### **Municipal Website**

The municipal website is a disgrace. It's utilitarian, bloated with invisible scripts that make it slow, and it doesn't produce a very favourable first impression. Our Economic Development website is terrible. The coding is sloppy, the interface is lazy, the graphics are lame, tools don't work properly; Nothing about that site screams out "come and invest in Chatham-Kent." During mayoral debates, mayor Hope called it an embarrassment, which it is.

Chatham-Kent just paid \$641,555.33 to a Brampton company for a complete website overhaul. It has locked us in to using proprietary software with annual licencing fees, when Open Source alternatives existed that are *absolutely free*. I have asked for

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copies of the tender, contract, and council motion, but have been denied.

There is much valuable information on the Chatham-Kent portal. However, the interface is unfriendly and disorganized. It's hard to find things you need.

There are no photo galleries of our communities, pictures of our residents, business and personal testimonials, or multimedia.

This website is the FIRST IMPRESSION many people get of Chatham-Kent. It is critical that it be user-friendly, up-to-date, and interesting. Today's reality is that we are more likely to attract a new business, industry, tourism or doctor through a Google search than any other means. Our Google placement rates poorly compared to other municipalities.

I will use my considerable expertise in photography, web design and software programming to ensure our website is providing vital information in a friendly and effective way, and that our people have more input to the content.

The websites do not use compression, which can save up to 89% bandwidth and make the site load faster, particularly important for dial-up and wireless.

This is probably our first and best chance to create an impression, and it's economical. Relevant pages of the site should then be translated to major foreign languages using readily available software and be proofed by members of our community to correct odd grammar.

Each community in Chatham-Kent should have its own web section, with local history, community events, and business information.

Much of the required content could be solicited from our own people. I envision a proud, user-driven system.

### **Presentations At the Ready**

We never know when a presentation may be required.

We should have all the tools we need at hand ready to fly, such as powerpoint presentations, professionally produced DVD movies, video projectors, and electronic documents which can be quickly customized and printed in-house (or in a hotel room).

These would showcase various aspects of the municipality, and be used by staff trained in the art of making exciting presentations.

Microsoft SharePoint was recently installed at huge expense as a single-bidder contract to assist the collaborative effort. I would rather have seen us use free Open

Source alternatives, but it's important to unleash the full power of these applications.

Somebody is required on staff who is adept at making images, graphics and video look their very best. The photos on our Economic Development site are awful.

### **Get Back With the Province**

Many huge investments have been announced by the province. Chatham-Kent has been largely shut out of the process. In several cases, provincial involvement meant that incentives could be offered that municipalities alone cannot.

Chatham-Kent needs to renew a relationship with the province and make sure we're able to secure the same advantages as other municipalities.

This involves the mayor consulting with our MPPs, and holding regular meetings at the Provincial Legislature. Make sure the province is well aware of the resources we can offer, and keep them up to date.

We cannot remind the province enough that Ontario doesn't stop at London.

### **Municipal Act Prohibitions**

Many times, we have lost businesses to other areas because the Municipal Act prohibits certain incentives. At the same time, Michigan has no such constraints, and the province has worked with other municipalities such as Woodstock to short circuit the provisions.

In cases where we feel the Municipal Act is working against our best interests, it is imperative that we lobby for changes, providing solutions and involving the AMO where necessary.

Wherever a loophole exists that might give Chatham-Kent an edge, we should look at exploiting it. The province can help us work around barriers as well, but we have to be firm in requesting it.

### **Small Business**

In Chatham-Kent, 50% of our employees work at businesses with less than 10 people. Including firms employing less than 49 people accounts for 78.9% of total jobs. Without question, small and medium sized businesses represent the best promise of immediate results and diversification.

Larger industries will be more interested in communities with a vibrant small business sector rather than those desperately seeking large factories to the exclusion of all else.

The municipality cannot "create" jobs, but we can create the conditions necessary

for businesses to thrive. Getting our house in order with strong ethics rules, and responsible financial practices is imperative.

More work must be done to cut red tape at all levels of government.

Attraction efforts must think outside the box and start looking in unconventional places for potential businesses and entrepreneurs.

We can create a database of businesses that we have in Chatham-Kent, and that we do not have here. Then we use that information to fill in gaps in the business community.

Our Chambers of Commerce must be more effective at addressing the needs of small businesses, particularly on start-up. These organizations should play a key role in promoting and networking local businesses, even with other communities, and assist entrepreneurs to compete in an era of big-box domination.

Numerous businesses are started by retirees, who may be highly experienced and have enough savings to become established.

New immigrants to Canada are often highly educated, dedicated to hard work, and may have arrived with some start-up capital. Chatham-Kent must establish adequate English programs, and be prepared to help people start a business using resources in their first language while they learn English. The low cost of doing business, our temperate climate, and affordable cost of living are all attributes that should interest new Canadians. The federal government should allow us to promote our community by distributing our brochures (in their language) to any immigrant upon arriving, and these resources could be made available in various embassies as well.

### **Fibre Optic and Wireless Infrastructure**

Some parts of Chatham have access to fibre optic networks and wireless infrastructure, but it's not consistent across the municipality.

The networks we have should be better promoted. This information will be of great interest to small and medium sized businesses. We can't forget the powerful incentive such infrastructure creates in our smaller communities.

Several recent studies have rated Canadian internet as the slowest and most expensive in the industrialized world, and some third-world countries have even beaten us.

I propose forming a panel of IT experts to identify the best way to get Chatham-Kent on the forefront of 100 Mbps fibre internet penetration into Canada. This could involve strategic partnerships with interested companies such as Google.

The federal government has announced intentions to pursue this kind of strategy in the long term, but no concrete plans are on the horizon. This gives us the opportunity to lead the way and give them the roadmap, and if Chatham-Kent does, we'll have a significant advantage.

I envision a system built with federal and provincial assistance, owned by the people, and managed by a consortium of our small, independent internet providers. The system must maintain net neutrality and not tolerate throttling or deep packet inspection. Pricing must be more in line with countries that have adopted this technology already.

### **Travel Policy**

Sometimes, domestic and international travel may be necessary to secure results. In the past, this was done in an *ad hoc* fashion, and netted little success.

Working with council, I will establish a protocol governing foreign and domestic travel. Council needs to be informed of travel plans in advance and be given an opportunity for input so that nothing is overlooked. All resources including provincial and federal governments will be utilized to maximize our chance for success.

A checklist will be created, and priorities identified.

Any such trips will have a debriefing session with council so we know what transpired.

(Randy Hope promised to tell council what he did in South Korea, but we never learned what happened. That trip was conducted in secret without consulting Economic Development officials who had been involved with Korea previously, and it was extremely dangerous and foolish.)

On a previous trip, municipal officials were set up with a blackmail attempt. Hope went alone so we don't know if anything similar happened, or if promises were made with taxpayer implications. Randy Hope told the media that the Koreans paid for the trip, but he later testified that he paid for it himself, so whatever happened there was bad enough that he had to change his story.)

### **Trade Shows**

Everything from static displays to cutting-edge innovative technology are presented at trade shows. These events are valuable opportunities for promotion and networking. Until recently, Chatham-Kent has been absent as a participant, both as guests and with information booths. For example, a major Electric Car show was held in BC in September where the latest innovation was unveiled, and manufacturers converged. This is an industry we want to attract, but we weren't there.

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I approached Economic Development Services with concern about this missed opportunity. As a result, I'm advised that a position is being created to pursue industry trade shows as part of future attraction efforts.

The mayor must have missed the memo, because he criticized my plan to become more active at trade shows when I introduced the strategy at a debate. In one breath mayor Hope says we have to do everything to attract more industry, but then doesn't want to pursue trade shows because he doesn't want to defend the cost to taxpayers.

This is a prime example of small thinking, and what sets me apart from Randy Hope. He is assuming that the only way to attend trade shows is to send the mayor or high-salaried employees. Our own business community is already attending such events, and it would be far more efficient to connect with these people and provide them with promotional material and some training.

We can't afford to dismiss new methods. Trade shows offer a valuable opportunity and the cost is offset by potential Return on Investment. Now, Economic Development have plans to attend 14 trade shows this year to promote Chatham-Kent.

With a new Con-ex Centre approved, it's time to start thinking big and trying to attract the kinds of shows here that were beyond our reach previously. We are in a good central location for all of Eastern North America, so let's go after national and international events.

### **Community Business Attraction Panels**

When I see our rural towns, there is still a measure of success from past business attraction methods. This was achieved by the business community itself in cooperation with town officials, who worked together with a common vision for the community. Diversification was an important achievement.

Now, there is nothing in place to allow and encourage communities to take charge of their destiny. As a result, people have the impression that Chatham gets everything.

As part of my plan for municipal restructuring, I propose that each community with an industrial or business area have a body of stakeholders in place to advocate for that community, and pursue economic development activities in concert with official channels. This could be through the Chambers of Commerce, or preferably as an independent panel like the Wallaceburg Community Task Force.

However the group is comprised, the leading business people in each community will be tapped. Resources will be available to help communities perform their own attraction efforts in cooperation with Economic Development staff who can't be everywhere at once. There will be a web portal for each community.

While Chatham-Kent is “all one now” I think that some friendly competition between communities would be healthy. When effort is met with success, there should be some benefit to that community via reduced tax rate. This provides a strong incentive to promote business and residential attraction.

These groups should be encouraged within the framework of Economic Development to promote their community, forge contacts, and act as ambassadors as they go about their own business. There should be rewards within communities to recognize successes, such as area-rated tax reductions.

The concept that all economic development action has to come from expensive municipal staff must end. Instead, it is a team effort.

Each community will have a delegate to liaise with mayor, council, and Economic Development staff.

We must promote all regions of Chatham-Kent fairly, not just the 401 Industrial Park. Economic growth must benefit all communities in Chatham-Kent, because we can't just rate our rural communities as “zero growth” and forget about them.

### **The 401 Industrial Park**

At a cost of over \$11.8 million and rising, the 401 Industrial Park is 30 years too late, in the wrong place, and not filling up according to the plan taxpayers were sold. It has diverted municipal attraction efforts away from more suitable business parks that already exist in other communities. It's not a very good billboard.

Many communities have been expanding towards the 401, and since they didn't want residential units next to a noisy highway, industry was used as a buffer. This provided easy transportation access and acted as a billboard. With no such expansion pressure in Chatham-Kent, the new Industrial Park must fulfil a different role.

The Industrial Park project should be given a makeover to differentiate it from every other generic 401 Industrial Park by creating a bold new design that caters to environmentally sustainable industry.

Co-generation projects, waste heat recovery, and other innovative symbiotic business relationships should be explored. Trees, water and greenspace should complement the landscape. Let's turn the present white elephant into a futuristic model business park that will allow us to offer something nobody else has. This kind of image will be in big demand for many existing companies.

I'm not suggesting that we spend a dime more out there, but that the plans be changed on paper and in our promotions. The new wave of environmentally-conscious businesses will want to be associated with such a concept.

## **Agriculture**

We must not forget our agricultural sector, since these are businesses also.

Issue number one is that farmers cannot absorb any more tax increases. Period. MPAC already phased in punishing increases to assessment. There isn't room for more.

There is potential to attract more companies to process our local agricultural produce. While full-scale processing facilities are likely a thing of the past, there is an emerging need for smaller facilities to pre-process local produce and convey it to the central processor.

Our economic development plans must identify new agri-markets. It's hard to find local produce in our local stores in Canada's breadbasket, because corporate purchasing is done at the Ontario Food Depot in Toronto. I remember buying produce as a kid from tailgates in Market Square, and finding it in grocery stores. We can do better in opening markets.

Bio-fuel research and waste digesting is emerging with promise.

We used to have hemp production that American paranoia killed. Now that the latest electric cars are being made of hemp composites, perhaps that's a new market to explore.

Council should receive regular updates from the various farming associations and ensure the agricultural community has knowledge and resources to promote Chatham-Kent in the course of doing their business.

Some farmers are discovering that Certified Organic farming commands premium prices. Industry connections in conjunction with Ridgetown College could be used to identify opportunities and assist the transition.

## **Promote What We Have**

We already have everything we need to attract and retain businesses, but too often we sell ourselves short. There is an administrative mindset that Chatham-Kent is missing ingredients, and this often results in some new grandiose spending scheme to solve everything. If we are missing any amenities, we should keep it to ourselves and start promoting what we do offer.

Think about the cost of doing business where up to 14 days of production are lost each year due to poor weather. The cost of heating everywhere else in Canada is much higher than Chatham-Kent. We need to better promote our weather, in terms where its positive impact is calculated in the bottom line.

I've seen advertisements for another community up north, with a retired couple

enjoying the view near a lake. They didn't show the blackflies or how deep the snow is in May. We should have a chart from Environment Canada comparing our temperatures with Toronto or Montreal.

There is vacant land and empty buildings across Chatham-Kent that are suitable for many kinds of operations. These resources must be catalogued and promoted.

Many businesses require industrial quantities of natural gas and water, which are both resources we have in abundance.

We could better market the fact that Chatham-Kent has hundreds of megawatts of planned and operational wind turbine electrical capacity. We might as well take advantage of this proximity and call it local green power.

The Chatham-Kent municipal airport can handle a wide range of private and corporate aircraft. Downtown Toronto is 20 minutes away. We have no traffic jams or borders on the way to the airport. The municipal website didn't even have current information on the airport until I asked them to fix it.

Throughout the campaign, some candidates have claimed we don't have skilled workers. To properly promote Chatham-Kent, we must highlight our people, who in many cases are very skilled. Our companies consistently win quality awards. It's time to promote our human resources in a positive light, and cast any retraining needs in terms of keeping up with technology.

There are many aspects of living in Chatham-Kent that we could promote but don't.

### **Poached Prospects**

There are many Chatham-Kent companies that do little local business. They could be located anywhere. (High taxes are threatening many of them, which I've addressed elsewhere.) Across Ontario, and particularly around the Greater Toronto Area, there are thousands of similar companies that could be located anywhere.

Chatham-Kent could devise a strategy to "poach" companies from other areas by offering lower cost of living, milder climate, minimal winter shut-downs, comparatively cheap real estate, fast commutes, and every other advantage we offer.

When companies see potential for higher profits and easier lifestyles, they may consider relocating. First we identify potential targets, then direct specific promotional material, following up wherever interest is expressed.

Across Chatham-Kent in every community, there are commercial buildings and property available that is suitable. Chatham-Kent could maintain a "Toronto" office for those businesses that wish to retain a big city address.

Most of these businesses would likely be smaller, which would add jobs and diversification to the local business communities.

### **Diversification**

In the past, we have suffered from having too many eggs in one basket. An important part of our strategy must be to diversify our employment base.

Other mayoral candidates have suggested that some jobs have negative impact on communities. Having no jobs is a worse impact. We cannot afford to socially engineer our business community by refusing jobs like call centres. They have a place, but we must move beyond the notion that they can provide satisfactory employment.

Attracting businesses from a wide range of sectors is critical.

We also must prioritize recession-proof sectors. Education and health care fit this criteria, and in fact education is already the largest employer in Chatham-Kent. The way to do this is have a panel of educational experts brainstorm and come up with suggestions.

### **Broader Horizons**

The United States has traditionally been an important trading partner. Recently, we've lost too many jobs when companies closed or moved operations out of Canada. Our dollar is flirting with parity, making our products more expensive. The American economy is trillions in debt, with no sign of emerging unscathed. Trade agreements have enabled companies to leave without consequences.

While opportunities will still exist, it is wise to focus on other parts of the world for markets and attraction efforts. It must be a priority to consider the stability of prospective industries and the countries they are from.

Many jobs will come from immigrant entrepreneurs. Chatham-Kent needs to redouble its efforts to attract qualified foreign innovators.

How many businesses could we attract from saturated places like Hong Kong, or other cities on the list of most expensive places to do business? Send these companies material that makes them interested.

### **New Start-ups**

Many good business ideas come from within our own community. Small businesses are the driving force of our local economy, providing many jobs and supplementing our tax base. There are many obstacles and pitfalls to starting a business. My goal is to move beyond previously identified red-tape issues, and address the many difficulties new businesses face.

Chief among these concerns is access to capital. Entrepreneurs are frequently discriminated against by financial institutions despite their insistence that they help small businesses. These lending decisions are no longer made in our own community - Head Office computers now decide who gets loans. We must lobby these banks to return authority to local bankers and insist that more of our deposits and bank fees are invested in our communities, instead of contributing to obscene national profits.

Bankers must be targeted with Chatham-Kent promotional material as well so they understand that good things are happening here.

We must identify unconventional local sources of capital, and put local investors in touch with our entrepreneurs. Federal and provincial programs such as MaRS are there but not being utilized.

New businesses need more relief from the massive amounts of paperwork which restrains business owners from directing their efforts to building the parts of their business which create profit.

### **Cold Calls**

Sometimes, just picking up the phone and making calls can trigger some interest.

It can be done as easy as this: several years ago, I read some articles on wind power in national publications. Wind energy is a vital component in Ontario's energy plan, and I wanted a vibrant industry here before some other place got it first.

So I got contact numbers for these companies, picked up my phone, and cold-called them. In most cases, I was able to speak directly with somebody and I pitched my case for locating a project in Chatham-Kent. In a couple of instances, I was even able to speak with the president.

For example, I was able to sell the community aspects of being a great place to live and do business, and I had done enough research to inform them that Chatham-Kent is one of the windiest populated areas in Canada with an accessible topology and close proximity to the power grid, making us a natural location for a wind farm.

In almost every case, nobody even knew about Chatham-Kent, and nobody from here had ever called them. While I can't take any credit for the projects that are locating here (maybe I was speaking with the janitor), I'm pleased that some of my plans are happening.

Unfortunately, the other half of my plan was to attract the manufacturing here, and the municipality failed on that aspect spectacularly without my supervision as mayor.

We have to scour the world for emerging new sectors, and send them a custom pitch to locate here. This is a proactive approach - we find the prospective customer

through research, make the call, and follow up in writing with a relevant information package. If the lead is promising, visit them in person, following council-approved protocol.

## **Downtowns**

Across Chatham-Kent, we have many unique downtowns.

Working with local BIAs, we need a more coherent plan to take advantage of this resource and make sure that each area remains viable. How can our communities better complement each other?

All our towns should be included in promotions as part of the overall shopping, dining and entertainment experience.

Downtown Chatham needs to be rejuvenated. There must be more incentive to maintain properties and keep them rented out. In the past, there were tax incentives to keep them empty, so perhaps there should be a tax surcharge on vacant or unmaintained buildings.

Parking continues to be a problem across the downtown area. A shuttle service might allow employees to park across the river. Downtown parking should be free for customers. We easily forget that in larger cities, we have to park blocks away from our destinations and pay a fortune for a few hours.

The completion of the Capitol Theatre is creating some excitement. New construction is proposed that also addresses parking concerns. We must continue to take advantage of the good things that are happening and support viable ideas.

I'd like to see The Downtown Chatham Centre be redesigned with a historical concept so that lower level stores also face King Street, providing a vibrant presence on the outside street instead of a brick wall.

Aspects of the Historical Downtown ought to be reviewed for relevance, since this policy can create the reputation of being stuck in the past, particularly when a good portion of the downtown is post-1980. When those old buildings were constructed, they were examples of cutting-edge architecture. Nobody ever intended Chatham to be anything other than a modern thriving city.

It is imperative that efforts to attract businesses to downtown stores complement existing retailers; an emphasis on art and crafts and other unique retail outlets would help make the downtown an interesting destination.

## **Education**

I will form a committee of educational experts to investigate the possibility of

attracting a University Campus and expanded post-secondary programs in Chatham-Kent, including academic and medical curriculum.

Working with the school board, I'd like to get local history on the curriculum. Chatham-Kent must ensure adequate retraining programs are set up and funded, including efforts to encourage the Grade 12 GED program and Independent Learning Centre.

Too many unemployed workers were denied retraining because similar jobs existed elsewhere. Ontario Works makes it almost impossible to upgrade education. I'll set a policy direction to improve literacy and high-school graduation rates.

We can form partnerships with business and industry to implement and advance job-skill development.

Many universities are offering free online courses (though not always for credit). This resource should be utilized more to improve learning.

While some use of decommissioned schools was attempted for foreign students, things didn't work out. We need to maintain a list of vacant schools and pursue renewed interest in these ventures.

The Southwest Regional Centre may offer a perfect opportunity to house some kind of post-secondary institution, and finding a use for the property is a high priority.

We are positioned to be a driving force in research, if adequate partnerships exist between the industrial sector and learning institutions. Many opportunities in the automotive and alternative energy sectors will go to the communities that promote University and College based research.

## **Railway**

The only thing more frightening than the municipality purchasing and operating the C&O Railway between Chatham and Wallaceburg is having the rail line remain abandoned.

The Wallaceburg industrial area is said to be dead in the water without rail access. In particular, steel treatment and stamping could not exist without the railway, since the steel rolls are too large and heavy for trucks. There may be some interest in locating such a plant here, but it is contingent on the railway.

All talks are currently conducted in camera, so the public does not know what is being planned. I think we need to know.

I am supportive of acquiring the railway, but only after studying the business plan and making sure it is a viable and responsible venture. Benefit to the Wallaceburg industrial park will be weighed heavily.

In any event, our waterline follows the railway, and the opportunity should be taken to provide a trail along the corridor, and legitimize use of the Black Bridge in Chatham.

## **Airport**

The Chatham Airport has a 5038' x 75' paved runway, with aircraft-activated night lighting. They sell 100 LL aviation gasoline, and Jet-A fuel. Several local pilots and corporations keep aircraft in hangars, or tied down. There is a pilot lounge and passenger waiting area in the terminal building. Many transient pilots visit the airport for fuel and local food while enroute to other destinations. An average private corporate aircraft would take less than an hour to fly to Toronto, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Flint, Chicago and Detroit, making the Chatham airport an ideal tool to attract new industry.

The Municipality should recognize the importance of visiting aircraft. The lounge is often well-stocked with outdated tourism information. There are very few local photos on the walls. We can do a better job promoting our Municipality to visitors. This is very important since, statistically, these visitors are more likely to be business executives or doctors. Pilots always remember airports where they are treated well, and will tell other pilots, and often return again.

There were plans to introduce user fees for landing aircraft at the airport. This will destroy it, and harm our chances of attracting new business. Other cities have already lost new businesses solely because of landing fees, and the Chatham airport would be similarly blacklisted among pilots. The end result will be less aircraft using our airport, less fuel sold, less visitors requiring food and lodging, and greater cost to taxpayers. No airport has ever increased revenue by introducing user fees.

As I pilot myself, I understand the value of the airport to our local economy, and see the vital role it plays in our future economic growth. One day, I landed my airplane, and taxied past 4 or 5 corporate jets parked on the apron. When I went inside, Ron Evans, Chief Flying Instructor, proudly commented that there were "13 million dollars worth of aircraft out there." That's the name of the game! I will ensure that our airport is attractive to corporate executives, visitors, and business owners alike.

The flight school is no longer active. Plans were in place to reactivate it and bring some foreign students to learn how to fly, but something went wrong and this fell through.

The Chatham Airport is a forgotten gem in our portfolio of business advantages. We have upgraded the taxiway to accommodate larger aircraft, repaved the runway, and updated instrument approaches to mitigate the wind turbine impact. A pilot mayor would cleverly promote the airport as a local portal for tourism, business attraction, business expansion, and maybe it could help attract doctors to our area.

## Tourism

Many new ideas can help make Chatham-Kent a destination, and playground in our own backyard.

Tourism must be enhanced by exploring alternative promotional avenues, such as forming strategic partnerships with the private sector to distribute promotional material.

We should design tourism programs that cater to day-trippers. Passport programs would allow people to purchase a card that can be redeemed at merchants around Chatham-Kent. These could have specific targets, such as day-trippers, classic cars, motor bikes, bicycles, and hiking.

I'll work with neighbouring counties and states to implement a Lake Erie Circle Tour. This could include road and waterway components so that canoeing, kayaking, sailing and powerboating are accommodated.

Greater public access to the Lake Erie shoreline is a priority.

Our trails initiative seems to have all but disappeared from public view. This needs to be brought back for an assessment.

Where suitable property comes up, we should consider adding to our trail and bike path inventory. I don't favour expensive construction like the \$20 million bike paths. We can be creative and do more for less, such as starting with crushed stone as in Erieau. Partially paved shoulders using tar and chip, and following the lifecycle budget instead of doing special construction are other possibilities.

There could be growing success with "Reality" tours, where visitors pay to re-enact the final day of freedom on the northern terminus of the Underground Railway, or fight in the War of 1812 on a scale ship.

If the jail ever becomes decommissioned, then we could put it back to period condition and get tourists to pay us to stay there as part of the historical experience.

The Thames River, designated a Heritage River, should be better promoted to people seeking outdoor adventure - it actually has rocks and rapids in East Kent, and is very scenic.

Everyone can play a role by holding their Family Reunions, corporate picnics, weddings, and other events in Chatham-Kent. We can't user-fee and insurance-premium our facilities into disuse. This goes for community events as well.

The municipality should sponsor a community insurance fund to self-insure events such as festivals and parades - money set aside in trust, earning interest, to be used

only against possible insurance claims - to enable events to continue without the burden of excessive liability insurance premiums or denial of coverage. This will keep volunteer service group's money in Chatham-Kent instead of padding the profits of foreign insurance underwriters.

The bicentennial of the War of 1812 is coming up this term. We should get History Channel in here to make a documentary of re-enactments in advance, so people will be aware of the upcoming occasion. Plans must be made to capitalize on this milestone.

Geocaching is another emerging pastime that holds the potential to attract people to Chatham-Kent, and get them all over the rural areas.

Better signage is needed along the 401 and other highways. There isn't even a pictograph showing the way to our wonderful beaches. Barriers with the province must be removed to allow the signage we need.

It is also important that we try to attract attention before people get in their cars. This requires a prominent internet presence and search engine domination. Our tourism site was recently updated at great expense, and it does look better now. There's more to do like adding video and photos, and linking that in with Google Earth.

Strategic advertising may produce valuable returns. We need brochures at service centres and hotels. Guerilla marketing and viral YouTube videos might help attract attention very economically.

Our waterways are under-promoted. The Thames River stopped being a viable trip due to speed restrictions, which needs to be examined with respect to wake control. Areas along all our waterways should be designated for camping to attract canoeists and kayakers.

## **Entertainment**

The whole of Chatham-Kent offers many entertainment activities. There needs to be an overall strategy to maximize the experience and find efficiencies.

Working in conjunction with our local theatres, I'll suggest new ideas for Music Festivals designed to entice visitors to stay several days, including the use of rural facilities.

I want a coordinator to promote "reverse tourism" where people in Chatham have the opportunity to purchase tickets and see shows in rural areas such as Thamesville, Bothwell, Wallacburg, Wheatley, Ridgetown, Highgate, and everywhere else entertainment is found. These smaller intimate venues can complement larger

facilities in Chatham.

The Capitol Theatre is built and open. I do not support wasting more tax dollars on a witch hunt looking for unsubstantiated allegations when the project has been audited several times. It is critical now that we support what the theatre can do for our community, get it attracting out-of-town dollars to Chatham-Kent, and get taxpayers' loans paid back. The programming to date has been successful and fits in with the type of entertainment a 1200 seat facility is intended to accommodate. Everyone now knows that's the wrong way to make a theatre, so let's learn from it and put the divisive chapter behind us.

### **Film & Television Industry**

Chatham-Kent is an ideal place to create a thriving film and television industry.

With the move to HDTV, a great opportunity exists to fill the need for new programming.

As an amateur filmmaker myself, I will work hard to introduce concepts which will designate us as a "Hollywood North." The Chatham-Kent website currently mentions nothing about this important emerging sector, while other municipalities have policies and movie coordinators to assist producers.

With "Reality TV" being popular, Chatham-Kent's rich history provides ample opportunities for local productions.

Local film groups and film festivals have already started promoting Chatham-Kent as a shooting location.

Attracting or creating film festivals is another way of getting people into the community for a whole weekend.

### **Photos**

While visiting the civic centre, the absence of any local photos on the walls is very noticeable. Likewise, this is absent from the web site, airport, 401 rest stops, train station and so on.

These bare walls should be covered with images that make us proud. Expand this to windows in vacant stores. Promote photo contests.

## **Patronization and Shop Local**

We all have to be a part of the solution. Our leaders must make an attempt to inspire consumers to support our local businesses. If, as a recent study suggests, 79% of our consumers leave Chatham-Kent to shop, we have a major problem which needs to be addressed.

This solution is very basic in theory. We support our neighbour's business, their employees shop local, and so on. Eventually, it finds the way back to us by supporting our job. This is true on global and national levels, and it starts here at home. Consumer responsibility begins with us - Big Box stores would not import cheap Chinese goods which put our neighbours out of work if nobody bought them.

I want to initiate a free online database of all Chatham-Kent businesses and industries that can be searched for specific products or services. Too many paid directories, including about 7 yellow page books and that useless waste of paper provided by Bell Canada make it difficult to find anything.

Our tendering process must be fair and transparent. We must consider any hidden costs of awarding outside contracts, and hidden benefits of awarding contracts locally. We must be careful to avoid the twin pitfalls of this approach - inflated local bids, and black-listing local companies from obtaining outside contracts. A firewall approach is not correct.

Discretionary non-tendered spending should always benefit local (independent) businesses in all of Chatham-Kent where possible. How can we justify spending our tax dollars outside the community at the expense of businesses who are contributing to those tax dollars in several ways? We must balance the Municipality's need to protect the taxpayer's interests with the obligation to support our local businesses.

If consumers support big-box discount stores to the exclusion of our independent retailers, we will devastate our business community and promote the inundation of part-time minimum wage jobs. We won't attract a single business or doctor just because we have a big Wal-Mart or Home Depot. If Chatham-Kent is able to project a thriving, vibrant, diverse business community, then that will be the best reason why a company would wish to locate here.

I challenge citizens to become more informed consumers and support our local economy.

## **Accountability & Ethics**

We must ensure that Chatham-Kent is well run, that our leaders are fair, and that our finances are conducted wisely. We cannot permit the kind of mischief and intimidation that has marred the last 4 years.

Council is the ultimate authority in the municipality. As head of council, I will exercise my obligation under the Municipal Act to represent the public, enhance the best interests of the municipality, develop and set policy, ensure administration carries out the will of council, and to maintain financial integrity. I will be accountable to the public, and will hold administration to the same high standard.

To improve ethics, I propose appointing an Integrity Commissioner, Auditor General, Lobbyist Registrar, and Municipal Ombudsman, as permitted by the Municipal Act. These will be volunteer appointments vetted by council. Each position has special powers, and can go places council cannot, including compelling testimony under oath.

Freedom of Information needs a complete overhaul to remove the power Randy Hope gave himself as Head of MFIPPA. Currently, the mayor sees all FOI requests and all replies, and determines what is released. He's used this power to give private and confidential information to others for inappropriate purposes, and also to hide and obstruct municipal information that should have transparent public access.

FOI applicants are not advised the mayor will see everything, and is in full charge of who gets what. Randy Hope promised transparency and did the opposite. I will overhaul the freedom of information policies to remove the politicization and abuse of the process.

## **Finance**

Having an Auditor General will ensure maximum transparency and identify to investors that Chatham-Kent is well-run.

The Municipal Act permits a municipality to appoint an Auditor General who reports to council and is responsible for assisting the council in holding itself and its administrators accountable for the quality of stewardship over public funds and for achievement of value for money in municipal operations.

*The Auditor General is entitled to have free access to all books, accounts, financial records, electronic data processing records, reports, files and all other papers, things or property belonging to or used by the municipality, the local board, the municipally-controlled corporation or the grant recipient, as the case may be, that the Auditor General believes to be necessary to perform his or her duties under this Part.*

*The Auditor General may examine any person on oath on any matter pertinent to an audit or examination under this Part. The Auditor General has the powers that Part II of the Public Inquiries Act confers on a commission, and that Part applies to the examination as if it were an inquiry under that Act.- Municipal Act*

This is not a function that council can perform, contrary to what some candidates stated. I propose the position be a volunteer appointment fully vetted by council.

## **Community Identity**

Most of my thoughts and observations on community governance were validated by the Corporate Review and Community Governance Task Force. Certain parts of amalgamation weren't done well.

I intend to open up lines of communication with rural communities. I'm concerned about escalating user fees and insurance premiums disincentives. There should be local business attraction efforts, and success should be rewarded by area-rated tax credits.

To achieve this, I first proposed forming a network of community councils, nominated and elected at townhall meetings, to serve as volunteers. They would meet to address local matters, and have certain authority designated by council, so that some decisions are made back at the local level.

A delegate would liaise with the ward councillors and mayor, with a defined communication strategy. As mayor, I'll spearhead this initiative. It can be tried on a provisional basis, and if it works as well as I predict, it can be a permanent part of municipal restructuring on passage of a proper referendum.

## **Debt**

Chatham-Kent has incurred some debt to complete important capital projects. This debt, at today's low interest rates, enabled infrastructure to be maintained and improved in a prudent, forward-thinking manner.

Standard & Poor's has rated this debt low-risk with a positive outlook, and we have a better credit rating than Essex County. While not alarming in the proper context, I **will not become complacent about our levels of debt**, since maintaining our good credit standing saves tax dollars in interest. There had better be a very good reason to take on further debt!

Some candidates are once again provoking outrage by distributing false debt figures. Their figures look good and provocative on glossy paper, but it isn't factual. I question the source, and challenge them to disclose the accounting principles they are using to inflate the debt figures and unduly panic voters.

They also forget that not all the debt is funded by taxpayers. The PUC pays debt through rates, not taxes, and our water rates are some of the lowest in Ontario. The loan for Riverview Gardens is paid by the province.

## **Health Care**

Being the husband of a breast cancer survivor, this issue is very close to home. I have seen the system work to save lives. I've also seen how easy it is to fall between the cracks like too many people here. My wife has no follow-up because of the doctor shortage. The system that saved her life is now failing. Proper health care is critical for business attraction efforts.

I am strongly motivated to address this crisis. Doctor recruitment efforts must continue, stressing the amenities we already have in place. Council must continuously lobby for recognition of foreign doctor credentials, and identify new physician attraction methods. An independent Medical Officer of Health is a top priority - still - just as it was in my 2003 campaign.

I want greater emphasis on wellness programs designed to keep people healthy promoting active lifestyles, trails, recreational facilities, outdoors activities, and nutrition. Let's do this financially smarter than current methods. I saw a Participaction ad recently that said absolutely nothing (federal tax money hard at work), and \$20 million in paved bike trails is not effective use of tax dollars.

There has been too much silence on the lack of family doctors, and I'm putting it back on the agenda. I have personally faced struggles that include delay and denial of medical care, and that's not acceptable for anybody.

The Sydenham Hospital must receive moral support from the municipality to maintain and protect existing services and make sure the LHIN or province never try to interfere with its important role in the community again.

## **Labour Relations**

Good relations with organized labour will prove that we are able to form effective partnerships and work as team players.

There is an undercurrent in our community that blames unions for our job situation.

I'm disappointed it's still an issue today.

I want a hotline set up so that workers on the front lines of any employer facing potential problems are able to communicate to municipal officials, hopefully in time to intervene. We have been blindsided too many times, with H.E. Vannatter and Great Lakes Fish Corporation coming to mind, despite workers knowing of problems for months in advance.

When it comes to business attraction and retention, I have always said that labour must be at the table and be part of the solution. I won't promise to agree on everything, but I want the lines of communication open.

Some of my plans include community projects best advanced by labour, because, to be quite frank, Chatham-Kent has gained an unfair reputation with respect to labour issues, and I'm serious about putting that to rest so it doesn't hinder our business attraction efforts. It's the dragon in the room that everybody is too afraid to acknowledge.

### **Economic Development Services Structure**

The Corporate Review recommended against forming an Economic Development Corporation like some other cities have done. The reason was that given the current state of affairs, council needs a more direct hand in its activities. They did not rise to the occasion.

Some reorganization of our Economic Development department is needed. New positions are being created, and some of the things I've been suggesting for years are now being done.

In the past, we've had issues with key staff not even living here, and spending too much time caught up in bunny trails like the Rec Centre that did not contribute to job attraction and should have been spearheaded by a different department.

It's the job of EDS to "sell" the community as it exists today, and council's job to provide the forward vision required to attract business tomorrow.

## **Conclusion**

This Plan for Prosperity is the most comprehensive election platform ever suggested in Chatham-Kent. It identifies the problems, provides solutions, and explains how to achieve results.

Chatham-Kent needs the unique mix of businesses which can only be achieved by independent entrepreneurs. They provide the colour and diversity in our business communities and prevent us from looking like every other generic Americanized city. Once a thriving business community is established as a community highlight, big industries will come looking for us!

With the consultation and backing of Council, components of this plan should be debated, improved, and implemented without delay. The health of our business community influences every aspect of our quality of life, from attracting doctors, industry and tourists, to retaining our young people. Even our health and mental outlook relies on a thriving, positive community.

Let this plan serve as a checklist, so that in 2014 we don't hear the same election questions yet again. It's time to move Chatham-Kent forward. I ask for your support and vote to make that happen.

**Austin Wright,**

**2010 Candidate for Mayor**

This platform was created by Austin Wright, with material from election campaigns in 2003 and 2006, plus much new material.

**Plan for Prosperity – by Austin Wright, Candidate for Mayor**