

Notes made at a General Meeting of the Harmony Residents Group Inc. in the evening of Wednesday, September 8, 2010, in the Platoff Street Community Centre.

This meeting began shortly after 7:00 PM with about 50 people present, including 4 members of the Group Board of Directors.

R.Busbridge began the meeting, explaining that it was a regular meeting of the Group arranged to have mayoralty candidates answer 5 questions of specific concern to the Group, so that this meeting was not advertised. Present were Messrs. Braybrook, Eke, and Guy, with written responses from Mr.Darte.

Question 1:

Referred to several controversial issues that have divided town residents and asked candidates how they would try to resolve them. The general response was more and better communication between residents and politicians. Mr Braybrook noted that town council only met once monthly and that additional meetings should be held to listen to a citizen advisory committee, composed of people with specific talents in engineering, medicine, law, etc. He said that there are gaps in policies that have been adopted by town council.

Mr.Eke suggested workshops to explore all sectors of interest in town, tourism, Business, schools, churches, etc.

Mr.Guy suggested that council learn from past issues and avoid costly legal actions. All stressed the need for dialogue, not confrontation.

Question 2:

Referred to the workshops held to prepare a Vision for the town and asked what first three steps should be taken to realize it. Mr.Darte mentioned a need for a secondary plan prepared by town council in collaboration with local organizations such as the Historical Society, Parks Canada, Schools, etc., with special attention to problems of traffic, parking and congestion in the Old Town.

Mr.Eke said Heritage must be recognized as the essence of the Old Town and the local economy must be diversified beyond tourism, zoning lands for industrial and commercial use and pursuing the vision for the waterfront. He noted that town council did not adopt the vision report but merely received it so that its \$69,000 expense is wasted without a plan to implement.

Mr.Guy mentioned his support for Project Niagara and said there is a need to form an Old Town Business Opportunity Association which might have more ready access to government funds than the local Chamber of Commerce. Again, he mentioned the need for dialogue, not more committees but working groups of councillors and local organizations.

Mr.Braybrook said it was necessary to determine what residents really want which will require better communication between council and local organizations. He said that only 3 of the 7 Vision proposals are of critical importance.

Question 3:

Asked if candidates were aware of the cost of the local sewage plant improvements proposed. Mr.Darte said the 3 alternatives seemed to be to improve the local site at accost of \$35 Million, move it to another local site for \$43 Million or move it to St.Catharines at much higher cost.

He favours improving the local site to avoid unexpected problems and that the extra cost of moving it is unjustifiable.

Mr.Eke favours moving it to near 3 Mile Creek because of the odour problem experienced at the present location, and said this idea is favoured by the regional council chairman. He believes that the province will not accept structured wetlands as the sole primary treatment for sewage but that the lagoons might be retained as a refuge for wildfowl. He thinks a new plant could be designed to demonstrate new technology to residents and students.

Mr.Braybrook favours moving the plant a short distance west to relocate it on town property and suggested that additional government funds might be available for this option, making it the most economical. If the plant remains where it is, the lagoons need not be retained but if they are abandoned, the property leased by the region might revert to Parks Canada.

Mr.Guy said that cost is important but that he has not studied the alternatives sufficiently to form a definite opinion, but that the lagoons should be moved for the benefit of Garrison Village residents.

Question 4:

Asked if candidates support the Group concept of and Historical/Nature Park on the Parks Canada Lakeshore property. Mr.Darte supports it, said there is enough to accommodate a number of uses and that he will investigate the availability of funding from various organizations.

Mr.Braybrook referred to his involvement with the structured wetlands experiment on the site in the mid 1990s and supports this aspect of it but that the province does not accept it as a sole primary treatment method, an obstacle to be overcome as well as that of the money needed for it.

Mr.Eke supports it because the current economic downturn has made people look for less expensive recreation which the proposed park would provide. It could start small but must be financially sustainable.

Mr.Guy said it is a concept that few would oppose but that the priority of Parks Canada is with the 1812/14 War Bicentennial and must be convinced to place the park concept on their list of priorities. He suggested that the property might be transferred to the Niagara Parks Commission and an extension of their people mover buses would make it readily accessible.

Question 5:

Dealt with the lack of a Ward system of representation in town and how candidates would determine the interests of residents who pay 75% of taxes. Mr.Darte suggested creation of a computer website and groups to advise council with members chosen, not by council but by local organizations, agriculture, churches, heritage, etc.

Mr.Eke does not support a Ward system because he believes that it would narrow the interests of councillors who need to listen more carefully at public meetings because not all good ideas and advice originate with council or town staff employees.

Mr.Guy said he would provide biweekly reports and change council meeting schedule to provide more time for them to hear from residents.

Mr.Braybrook said residents felt that they are not being heard by council and that they should be provided with more structured access to it. He would open the Mayor's Queen St. Office to residents one day each week. He favours a Ward system and has proposed it, but that it was rejected at a Ontario Municipal Board hearing. He said that good people in council rather than the system of representation is the most critical factor to residents satisfaction.

Candidates made brief closing remarks.

Mr.Guy has lived in town for 11 years. He says there has been no strategic plan since Mike Dietsch was Mayor, but that he will prepare a 4 and 8 year plan. He would avoid raising taxes by generating more non assessment based revenue and make region taxation more representative

because town residents pay 7% of such taxes but are only 3% of the population. He said that regional government should not be proud to state that it is the largest employer in the region.

Mr. Braybrook said that town administration staff is growing faster than the population, that the region should adopt more user pay policies and that taxation based on assessment is the result of provincial legislation where any solution must originate.

Mr. Eke has been a town resident for 35 years with long involvement in local politics, instrumental in the town purchase of the land where the new library was built and the new community centre is being built. He has served on regional council. He said that the town spends too much money on legal fees as a result of council failure to resolve issues by compromise rather than confrontation.

One question drawn from several in a hat asked how neighbourhoods are to be protected from noise, traffic and cottage rental problems.

Mr. Braybrook said that existing Bylaws pertaining to cottage rentals are not enforced on weekends and that the noise bylaw is so vague as to be unenforceable.

Mr. Eke said that the policy must be changed so that Stop signs are not erected only as a result of the number of accidents.

Mr. Guy said Bylaws should be enforced 24 hours a day, seven days per week with substantial fines for infractions. He said that cottage rental problems are a result of more vacant houses and fewer Bed and Breakfast rooms being rented.

R. Busbridge thanked candidates for their comments and members for their attendance.

C. James, Secretary