

Five Dufferin-Caledon election candidates square off in final Board of Trade forum



By Jasen Obermeyer

The final Dufferin Board of Trade candidates' forum saw a wide variety of topics discussed at Orangeville District Secondary School last Thursday (May 24), from issues affecting the area directly to those throughout the province.

The five candidates – incumbent MPP Sylvia Jones (Progressive Conservative), Bob Gordanier (Liberal), Laura Campbell (Green Party), Andrea Mullarkey (New Democratic Party), and Jeff Harris (Libertarian) – TOOK the opportunity to state their ideas and their parties' platforms, along with answering several questions submitted on-line by the public.

Andrew Nowell (Trillium Party), and Stephen McKendrick (Consensus Ontario), declined to participate.

Joe Andrews, director of Humber College Orangeville and past chair of the Dufferin Board of Trade, was the forum's moderator.

Over 100 people attended.

Mr. Harris spoke first, and explained to the audience that he only got into politics in December last year. "I'm a business owner, not a career politician." He said voters should say no to the carbon tax, "Especially at a time when we don't have a balanced budget, and more spending just means more borrowing."

Ms. Campbell spoke next, and explained that although the Green Party doesn't have a seat at Queen's Park, they are "electable," and have "been working for you for years," including helping to stop the mega-quarry in Melancthon.

Ms. Mullarkey, a resident of Bolton for over 30 years, said she is running to give back to the community, particularly on dealing with the Greenbelt. "We need to keep that for our children."

Ms. Jones said voters "have an important choice to make," and the PC's offer a change of direction from the Liberals, a plan for businesses to invest in the province, and reduce hydro bills.

Ms. Gordanier said they need to "invest in people," and added that if elected, he will fight tirelessly for residents "each and every day."

The first topic that came up was on the Greenbelt, which all candidates said they support and don't want a reduction.

"We don't need more concrete," responded Ms. Mullarkey.

Mr. Harris and Ms. Jones said they wouldn't support expansion, in Ms. Jones' case being until "a full consultation with our municipalities, our conservation authorities, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture." Mr. Harris said it "should be kept" as is, but acknowledged the valuable area.

Ms. Campbell said the Green Party "definitely supports the Greenbelt," and they "need to be doing more," calling for expansion. "It's why we all live here."

Mr. Gordanier commented on Doug Ford's initial intent to pave it, and his quick retraction, saying he doesn't "have much trust in a person that says something that strong."

When asked about social assistance programs, Ms. Campbell said getting it "is just another added stress that people don't need," and advocates for a basic income guarantee.

"We want to ensure that all families can afford to live," said Ms. Mullarkey, advocating for whole families.

Ms. Jones said the PCs would remove the provincial income tax for everyone earning under \$30,000 a year. "That is going to make a big difference in the lives of people who are struggling in our community."

Mr. Gordanier pointed to various community care organizations such as Meals on Wheels, the Food Bank, and Hospice, but said "there's no doubt that there's a lot of room to improve."

Mr. Harris said the Libertarian platform would eliminate the corporate income tax, so more businesses from other provinces and the States would come in, giving higher paying jobs to those who don't make much, or don't have one at all, which he said is better than

?throwing more and more money.?

The next topic was on medium-sized hospitals, which all candidates agreed need more funding, but Mr. Harris said it's not just a funding issue, but a structural one. ?It's time for something new,? in regards to keeping the publicly funded system, but also allowing for private medical insurance.

Ms. Jones commented that medium-sized hospitals ?must be reworked,? and they need to listen to hospital staff, as the feedback they provide ?is valuable because it's happening now.?

Mr. Gordanier said the Liberals would continue to look into how much more funding is required, as hospitals ?need the right kind of support.?

Ms. Campbell commented that the Green Party would take ?an integrative approach? to health care, funding not just hospitals, but places like family clinics.

When education was discussed, Ms. Jones said the PCs would remove the discovery math curriculum, and get back to the basics of traditional math teaching. ?It's clearly not working for the majority of our students.?

Mr. Gordanier described the province's free tuition for students whose parents earn under \$50,000 as ?forward thinking,? adding that allowing students to come out of post-secondary school with less debt as ?nothing but a great asset to this whole industry.?

Mr. Harris said stats and numbers are good in general, but you ?want a solution for the individual.? He described a Libertarian plan to allow students to move from school to school. ?Give them a choice.?

Ms. Campbell and Ms. Mullarkey agreed on class sizes being too large and removing EQAO testing. ?Children aren't learning well, they're stressed out,? said Ms. Campbell. ?I don't think it really helps our kids,? added Ms. Mullarkey.

Next was on rural transportation, which Mr. Gordanier said municipalities ?need money put into bridges, roads, culverts, drainage,? adding that ?the money is there.?

Mr. Harris wondered, ?How much money is being wasted on consultations, regulations,? and said he understood that it does take time, but should ?streamline the process? so time taken on planning is reduced.

Ms. Campbell said they need to fund infrastructure and transit, and to do so need ?dedicated revenue tools that are fair and progressive,? including parking levies, road tolls, and congestion chargers.

Ms. Mullarkey said it's one of the ?biggest topics? she's heard, and should stick with public transit for now, until all research is done.

Ms. Jones said the majority of roads in Dufferin-Caledon ?are our public transit system,? and more talks with the province and municipalities are needed to see exactly where work needs to be done.

A similar topic was followed concerning the need for advanced green signal phase in Shelburne at the intersections of Highway 124 and Highway 10/89.

Mr. Harris said he couldn't understand why the province won't allow it, as an advanced green light ?isn't a big issue.?

?This is obviously something that can be done,? added Ms. Campbell, which Ms. Mullarkey also agreed with.

Ms. Jones said that what has been most frustrating was dealing with the West Region of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO); after she was told they will do their own traffic assessment when she gave them the county's. She said it shows a lack of trust and faith in the municipality and herself as MPP. ?It speaks to this ?them versus us.?'

Mr. Gordanier said, ?This is a no brainer,? but added that Ms. Jones isn't ?giving the attention that is maybe needed here.?

The candidates finished the forum by summing up how they would best represent Dufferin-Caledon, and their party for the province.

The election takes place next Thursday, June 7.