

**Craig Bridges** – Oct 16, 2010

The city's ability to properly fund fair and progressive social and environmental programs is dependent on two key items: the level of local employment and ability of the constituency to absorb costs into its tax base; and the ability of the city to leverage program funding from the provincial and federal governments. On the latter, I will work hard to maintain the positive relationship that city hall seems to have with our MP, and work even harder to improve what seems to be a strained relationship with our MPP, no matter who is representing the district after the next round of federal and provincial elections. These are key relationships that need to be fostered. I would like to see our city continue to improve its environmental record and begin to branch out in terms of green energy projects that will require intergovernmental cooperation and private investment.

The social needs side of the city has too many different facets to be answered in a short Q&A session, so I will simply list some of the main areas that I know have to be addressed (and I understand that there are no easy and no quick solutions, or else these issues would have been resolved years ago). We need more employment opportunities, especially in the entry and mid-level sectors – the higher end jobs will follow if a community has a stable base of employment opportunities that helps to bring people out of poverty. We need to have a strategy to have entry level houses built so that working families can break out of the poverty trap of renting for life. We need to improve the stock of affordable rental units, and I know that this is unpopular to say, we need to dislodge the people (and, yes it is a small minority not the majority) in our geared to income housing who are abusing the system. We need to help organizations such as HANDS to succeed in helping repair the holes in the “safety net.” And lastly, we need to re-invigorate the spirit of our community so that each of us spends more time helping our neighbours who need a hand up. We need to work with the police forces to stem street level crime and the trade in hard drugs – this is a big deal as it ties into myriad of other difficult social issues.

In terms of our economy, I would like to see this city diversify in two specific directions:

1. Look at the hundreds of millions of dollars in investment in green energy production that Sault Ste. Marie is moving forward with and work toward bringing that type of investment to North Bay;
2. Embark in a long term plan of marketing North Bay as a retirement destination for the Baby Boomers of southern Ontario. It would mean the construction of new condominiums near the downtown core as well as the construction of smaller homes, specifically designed for this groups needs. This plan would increase employment in all of the trades, as well as health maintenance and lifestyle fields, and provide a boost to our local merchants – especially in the downtown. It will also broaden the tax base, thus decreasing the average tax burden.

Communication is a difficult art for bureaucracies, and city hall is no different. The biggest issue that the community seems to have is getting city councillors to take the time to listen when the public is speaking instead of waiting until the public feels the need to yell. I watched this unfold regarding the Tweedsmuir Park issue and I understand it. From both sides. Councillors get pulled from all directions and have many groups to

answer to and sometimes feel embattled because of the interactions that they have regarding some decisions that are made. I see the need for a different approach to dealing with the citizens of North Bay, an approach that is less combative. I think that council and different citizens can disagree on many issues, but still have respectful dialogue. Sometimes we will have to agree to disagree, but we need to do so with greater mutual respect.

This city is blessed with incredible natural beauty and this is the city's single greatest asset. We must diligently protect the natural places, beaches, lakes, rivers, and green spaces that are the crown jewels of North Bay. Does this mean a freeze on development projects? No. Does this mean a permanent freeze on selling existing city parks? Yes. It means balance, but this is not just up to city hall. (Some of ) The good citizens of this city need to stop throwing coffee cups, water bottles, cigarette packs, and other personal garbage anywhere they please, and we need to stop the illegal dumping of yard waste, trash, tires, and building materials. City hall has work to do, but there are members of the public who need to stop trashing the trails, parks, and beaches.

When there is a controversial idea or decision that impacts community members, I think that council needs to follow the process for communication standards as set out by policy. That is the process, but like everything else in life, the way it is done is as important as what is done, and what I mean by that is that we need to have a personal touch to the communications, we need to understand that every community is different and every member of that community is different again, so communities need to know that each person is important and should be heard. I am a fairly simple person who likes things straight, so I will present the facts as I know them in an honest and respectful way, and make sure that I listen to how these facts are interpreted and how they impact people's views of the issue. While I do know how to operate a bulldozer, I do not intend to bulldoze over people.