

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce Hamilton Agenda 2007

This is a document to summarize the key community priorities for action, from a business perspective, for those seeking election to public offices on municipal, provincial and federal levels.

Issues:

1. Integration of Transportation Networks

Improved and integrated transportation links, including shipping, air, rail and road are necessary to move goods in a just-in-time delivery world to ensure that this region is transformed to be an effective international gateway to Central North America. We believe that the expeditious completion of the Niagara-GTA Corridor (formerly "Mid Peninsula Trade Corridor") is vital to meet the evolving needs of residents, industry, tourism, transportation, and governments. We also strongly encourage increased funding and support for all forms of public transit. In particular, we need both a full service VIA Rail service to Hamilton, as well as greatly expanded GO Transit services to accommodate increased population expected in this City over the next two decades, as mandated under the provinces Places to Grow legislation.

2. Hamilton's Fiscal Imbalance (funding delivery of social services, business education taxes):

The current model of funding social services costs, almost solely on the backs of local ratepayers and business taxes, is not sustainable. To our knowledge we are the only jurisdiction in the G8 that has this expectation. There is also a systemic problem in the financial relationship between the federal and provincial governments. There also seems to be a vertical fiscal imbalance. (I.e. the distribution of revenue resources between the federal and provincial/territorial orders of government is inconsistent with the cost of meeting their respective constitutional spending responsibilities.) Additionally, provincial bonusing of business relocation to neighbouring jurisdictions must stop. For example, by refusing to consider implementing the uniform Business Education Taxes, as the province did for residential in 1998, this leaves a permanent tax advantage to businesses locating in Burlington of an estimated 37%. Hamilton businesses are thus, in fact, subsidizing education in neighbouring jurisdictions.

3. Research and Development (CANMET)

Hamilton has the potential to become a research and development hotbed. McMaster Health Sciences and Engineering have gained international reputations for invention and innovation. As an Education City with three post-secondary schools - McMaster University, Mohawk College, and Redeemer University College - we are a centre for knowledge and invention. Now, the federal government is moving Canmet to Hamilton to the new McMaster Innovation Park. Hamilton's future is depended on finding new opportunities. We have the infrastructure to support innovation and commercialization. Governments at all level will be asked to support and nurture R&D in Hamilton. Our objective is to evolve commercial and industrial opportunities to renew this community.

4. Shrinking Manufacturing Sector and Productivity Gap:

The growing productivity gap between Ontario businesses and our international competitors is a major factor affecting jobs and prosperity, particularly for our youth. A concentrated coordinated effort must be made between governments at all levels, on a priority basis, to address the various issues.

5. **Sustainable Health** (Seniors, Long Term Healthcare, demographics)

Our current health care system is clearly not sustainable as is. We need political leaders of all parties to abandon rhetoric and positions that are ideologically based to work collaborative for long-term solutions. Without necessarily abandoning the basic principals of universal coverage, this should include seriously exploring utilizing private sector alternatives to service provisions.

6. **Skills Shortages** (labour market shortages, adequate education, immigration recruiting)

Due to the aging demographics of our work force, we are experiencing growing skills shortages, which, if unaddressed, will reach crisis proportions in the next decade. If left unabated, businesses will close because they will not be able to find enough skilled people to do the kind of work demanded in the new innovative economy. All resources must be pulled together to address this problem holistically, (i.e. education, training, immigration, etc.) including both the focused pro-active recruitment of skilled people as well as the expedited integration of foreign trained skilled workers and professionals. This will be the business issue of the next decade.

7. **Provincial Intrusion in Specific Planning & Development**

Simply put, the provincial government is too directly involved in local planning and development decisions. The role of the province should be to provide broad direction and guidance in such matters (i.e. Places to Grow & Greenbelt Protection legislation). They should not interfere with local municipalities when it comes to day-to-day, planning and zoning issues.

8. **Great Lakes / Environment** (shorelines, funding & enforcement, harbour)

Hamilton Harbour has always struggled against the image of a polluted city with a toxic harbour. The Randle Reef Sediment Remediation Project is in the final stage of design and environmental assessment in preparation for initiating construction in 2008/09. This project led by Environment Canada and costing \$90 million is proposed to be funded 1/3 by the federal government, 1/3 provincial government and 1/3 locally (industry, port etc.). It is the most highly contaminated site on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes and the second most contaminated coal tar site in Canada, second only to the Sydney Tar Ponds. Funding commitments from the federal and provincial governments are required.

9. **Small Business Encouragement and Funding**

Currently there are only three funding resources available to small businesses. The small business owner is restricted to the amount of cost-effective funding options available to them. As a result, most small business owners are building up significant credit card and other high interest rate debts and this trend is hampering small business growth and success across the province. The Ontario government is in the unique position to be able to work closely with a partnered financial institution to provide the guarantee necessary for strong potential small business candidates to receive the low-cost funding they need to thrive within today's rising interest rate market.

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is the oldest, largest and most broadly based business organization extant within the Hamilton economic region. Since the Chamber was founded in 1845, it has been the recognized "Voice of Hamilton Business". Today, we comprise about 1,900 individuals who represent almost 1,150 companies and organizations of all sizes and sectors that collectively employ 75,000 people full time from all parts of the "New" City of Hamilton, and indeed beyond.