

District 5 Provincial Election Candidate Written Forum – Responses from Greg Arsenault

- 1. Housing is of serious concern in Stratford, as it is across PEI. From affordability, to general inventory, to variety of housing stock, it is challenge for many residents to afford to stay in their existing housing, let alone to consider trying to move and find something. What tangible commitments are you prepared to make to help address this issue over the next four years?**

“I had the pleasure of meeting with Mayor Ogden and the Town’s CAO Jeremy Crosby. They shared with me the details and hopes for the “Shape Stratford Program”. Funding received from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for this program will allow Stratford to take part in the Housing Supply Challenge. The goal of this project is to find innovative solutions to barriers around the lack of attainable housing and to look at potential solutions. I was very impressed with the initiative shown by the Town of Stratford in securing funding to participate in this program. If elected I look forward to working with the Town of Stratford to find solutions to the housing challenges faced by too many Island residents.

The Liberal Party in its election platform also recognizes that the current housing situation is a significant challenge for many Islanders, and is committed to taking tangible steps to address this issue over the next four years.

Building on the previous Liberal Government’s action plan, Belonging and Thriving: A Poverty Reduction Action Plan for Prince Edward Island (2019-2024), the Liberal Party has committed to continue to implement this plan and expand the scope. The plan implemented many initiatives to improve the quality of life for all Islanders, specifically those living in low-income situations.

To combat the housing crisis, the Liberal Plan also includes the following specific actions:

1. Expanded access to low-cost financing that provides incentives to property developers to build new housing on PEI, with a focus on affordable housing;
2. New grant/subsidy programs for builders who construct/operate what is considered affordable housing;
3. Making multi-unit residential properties qualifying businesses for immigrants to invest in order to qualify for citizenship under provincial immigration programs;
4. Making first-time home ownership easier under a new OwnFirst Housing program where first-time homebuyers with household incomes below \$75,000 have their interest rate subsidized by 1% for the first 5 years;
5. Provide financial and/or HR support to municipalities to expedite building permit approvals and zoning changes in order to help speed up the construction process;
6. Make community-funded housing projects eligible to be funded under Community Economic Development Investment Funds (CEDIF); and
7. Explore the strategic use of crown land for housing developments in partnership with communities and PEI’s First Nations.
8. Reinstate the Cabinet Committee on Housing to provide for leadership and accountability for housing projects and initiatives.”

- 2. The Town of Stratford has an exciting Community Campus project underway with plans for a multi-purpose recreational facility, sports fields, and cultural spaces to be included on the site, along with the upcoming high school. Are you supportive of this project and in what ways?**

“During the meeting with the Mayor and CAO we discussed the vision and purpose of the Community Campus Development. As someone who has been active in sport for my entire life, the prospect and vision of the Campus is very exciting. I will be a strong partner with and voice for the Town of Stratford on this project if elected. I have campaigned on my promise to work with all people to make our district the best that it can be. This project will be an example of the positive things that can happen when all levels of government come together. If elected, I will work to ensure that this project gets completed, consistent with the vision of Stratford residents.”

- 3. A recent review by Norbert Carpenter, Director of the Public Schools Branch, identified five schools of concern including three in the Charlottetown Family of Schools – Birchwood, Queen Charlotte and Stonepark Intermediate. These schools are of concern for a variety of reasons, including the increasing pressures on the school’s functional capacity. Before renovations or additions are completed on any of these aging school structures, will you commit to being a strong advocate for a new build in Stratford?**

“I support the building of a new school in Stratford. While it took an election for the PC party to make a commitment to build a new junior high school in Stratford, I was pleased to hear that the commitment was made. With a predicted PC majority government being elected, it will be essential that we ensure that the government delivers on this promise. If elected I will work to ensure that funding for this new build remains in the capital budget and will work with all stakeholders to ensure this project gets completed as soon as possible. I believe that my work experience as a civil servant in government will be an asset in the construction process.”

- 4. The responsibilities of municipalities have grown substantially, and that trend will continue as municipalities deliver increasingly complex services and tackle complicated issues. Since the government made a number of changes to the financial arrangement in 2008 from a tax credit to a grant system the Town of Stratford has been losing tax revenue in the amount of approximately \$600,000 per year. In the past five years this alone amounts to close to 3 million in lost funds. What are your party’s plans to work with the municipalities, including Stratford, to negotiate a revenue sharing deal that is fairer, predictable and provides municipalities with the funds needed to grow and service our communities?**

“Municipalities play a pivotal role in Prince Edward Island and the Mayor and CAO addressed with me the need for a new revenue sharing agreement with the Provincial government. They shared with me the need for additional tax room for the Town to keep pace with the growing demand for services. It is disappointing to see that the Town of Stratford is losing tax revenue, especially when these funds could be re-invested in the community. With my 20 years of experience working within government, I believe that I can help by bringing provincial civil servants and our municipal leaders together to develop a predictable and sustainable model of revenue sharing that will allow the Town of Stratford to grow and expand their services.”

- 5. The Town of Stratford has had great success with our Switch Stratford Program, which has allowed many residents to get off of fossil fuels and make their homes more efficient, including winning a national award recently alongside fellow municipalities in the program. However, our Federal funds in Stratford have been depleted for a second time. With climate change, natural disasters and other related environmental concerns a growing reality, what are your plans to help us address these from both the resident, business and municipal perspectives?**

“In my discussions with residents over the course of this campaign, I have been impressed with the number of homes that have taken advantage of the Switch Program. This is a fantastic program and I applaud the Town of Stratford for the leadership in implementing it and the success in helping residents get off of fossil fuels and make their homes more efficient.

Hurricane Fiona was a harsh reminder of the urgency of addressing climate change. The Liberal Plan has committed to allocating a minimum of 30% of the provincial capital budget to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to continuing with the commitment to renewable energy and working towards making PEI a self-sufficient province in terms of energy production through investments in renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, and reduce our dependence on energy imports. It is concerning that not a single MW of new wind energy has been generated since the PC party formed government in 2019.

I was pleased that the Town of Stratford has taken action in the areas of disaster resilience and emergency preparedness in the face of climate change and is also protecting environmentally sensitive land through the Bunbury forest land acquisition. I look forward, if elected, to working with the Town of Stratford to protect the environment and tackle climate change to ensure a sustainable future for all Islanders.”

- 6. Healthcare remains a high priority for residents in Stratford, and across PEI. What steps will your government take, if elected, to move us from the situation that we are in now on PEI? And how are your plans expected to get us different results than we’ve had with promises in the past?**

“The predominant issue of concern shared with me by the residents of District 6 has been the state of our healthcare system. I have heard daily accounts of what the Medical Society of PEI has called a “crumbling system”. I have heard from nurses who have been without a contract for 2 years and who are feeling burnout and ignored. I have heard terrible stories of long waits to get medical attention due to doctor shortages and the lack of family doctors.

The Liberal Party plan recognizes the importance of accessible healthcare for all Islanders and states that the crisis in healthcare requires transformative change and accountability. To address the healthcare crisis, the party has developed a Healthcare First platform that focuses on new ways of leadership in health service delivery. The platform identifies specific areas, including mental health and addictions, nursing shortage, poor working conditions, initiatives to address the chronic doctor shortage, and the utilization of key healthcare partners like

community pharmacists. The plan includes the introduction of a new Patients' Rights Act that will give Islanders legal rights when it comes to timely access to healthcare services, expedited professional credential recognition, both foreign and domestic, expanded access to mental health and addiction services by hiring new health professionals to provide added services, the adoption of a full scope of practice of existing healthcare workers on PEI and work with the nursing sector to introduce registered psychiatric nurses in PEI.

While I support these ideas, I have candidly shared with the residents of District 6 that I do not believe that any of the plans offered by any political party can truly fix the healthcare system. I have suggested that to really address the complex issues that are causing the healthcare challenges we face, we need to create opportunities for our healthcare professionals, civil servants and politicians to work together to respond to this crisis. It seems to me that we have many well intended people working at cross purposes and this has to stop.

Government must play a key role in making sure these discussions happen. With the talk of a majority government, now more than ever, we need to be sure we have enough different voices in the legislature to hold the government accountable.

I do not pretend to have the answers to the complex issues that we face in healthcare but I ran in this election because I thought I could help. If elected, I will listen and work with all sides to ensure we have a healthcare system that is there when we need it."

7. PEI is long overdue for a province-wide land use plan. What, if any, are your plans and timeline for introducing strong land use policy to control development and protect the land where municipal land use planning does not exist?

"The Liberal Party has committed to developing a province-wide approach to land-use planning which will include municipalities and all relevant stakeholders. Steps to modernize the Lands Protection Act will be undertaken."

8. In no more than 250 words, what would you like residents of the Town of Stratford to know?

"I am a first time candidate. Up until a month ago, I have never been connected to a political party. I decided to run when I was approached as I believed that my 20 years of experience in government and my work at Holland College, could help to make a difference in our community and our province.

I was born and raised on PEI. My wife Corena Hughes and I chose Stratford as our home 20 years ago. We have built 2 homes here and are fortunate to live close to our families and our friends. We love this community.

When I am not working or campaigning, I am an avid runner, cyclist and triathlete. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet so many people over the course of the campaign and I am thankful for the warm welcome I have received."

Greg Arsenault - Liberal Candidate, District 6, Stratford-Keppoch