

Fredericton Chamber of Commerce Questions

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1. Workforce

a. With many people continuing to work virtually, downtowns across the country are struggling to recover from the pandemic and Public Health restrictions. What role can the federal government play to help ensure the economic viability of our downtowns?

The federal government has the responsibility for many of the policy levers that can help Fredericton’s downtown recover from the ongoing pandemic recession and continue to be an economically viable urban centre. The federal government administers many national and regional direct economic relief programs that the downtown business community has made great use of during the pandemic. These programs need to be there for our downtown business community and should be maintained until such a time as there is clear evidence of a sustainable recovery. However, it is important to not underestimate the impact that social distancing restrictions, isolation protocols, and travel restrictions that have had on downtown businesses. These pandemic disruptions have challenged all businesses in the Fredericton area by limiting access to markets, challenging existing labour pools, and essentially increasing the cost of doing business while simultaneously eroding the potential for revenue. Many of these pandemic effects have been visible because they have had direct and immediate impacts on the businesses in Fredericton, but there have also been significant medium and long-term disruptions to the markets and supply chains upon which our downtown businesses depend. These medium and long-term pandemic disruptions require a different federal policy response and will likely take a significant amount of time for our local business to accommodate to as the new post pandemic economic realities become known.

The federal administration of direct economic investments is a vital component of our pandemic recovery efforts, but it is not the only tool that the federal government can use to support the downtown. The federal government and its local representative also have a responsibility to advocate for and make strategic investments over the medium and long-term to support the downtown’s cultural and capital infrastructure. The federal government should be seen as a strategic partner in the downtown’s pandemic recovery as an investor in the cultural fabric of our downtown and its marketplace.

The federal government is a significant employer and direct investor in infrastructure and capital in the Fredericton area. This direct economic partnership should continue through strategic investments and commitments that align with both provincial and municipal growth and development strategies. The federal government should resist opportunities to sprawl meaninglessly in pursuit of short-term savings at the expense of the long-term strategic goals of its economic development partners. Capital investments in cultural infrastructure should reflect the needs of the Fredericton region and specifically lead to a funding commitment for the Performing Arts Centre’s renewal. Additionally, investments in cultural and heritage infrastructure should be considered to support the renewal of Officers Square as an important centre for civic engagement and learning about the founding cultures and nations. The

federal government should be actively working with its strategic economic development partners in these areas to pursue goals that reflect these interests.

b. Conversely, we think places with a high quality of life such as New Brunswick have an opportunity to attract remote workers from across the globe – how can the federal government help leverage this opportunity for our region?

The federal government should be adapting its immigration policies and programs to meet the changing needs of the marketplace, and it should be working with the other levels of government and the local service providers in this area to make sure that newcomers have all the information and supports required to transition productively to our region. There are also information technology infrastructure demands that must be met to attract and retain remote workers, from local high speed internet services to high level cyber security concerns. Reliable IT infrastructure at cost effective rates must be available, and these rates must be competitive internationally for it to have a positive impact on the attraction and retention of a remote workforce in the Fredericton region.

c. Industries such as retail, tourism and hospitality are having trouble attracting workers like never before. How can we boost the available workforce in New Brunswick?

There are many factors involved in attracting and retaining workers such as affordable housing and rents, available childcare, accessible healthcare, public transportation, minimum wage, and employment benefits. The federal government plays an important role in ensuring that services such as healthcare are reasonably accessible throughout the country. Under the current funding formula for Medicare, the per capita funding formula fails to account for the demographic realities of the province – we have an older and less healthy population. The failure to adjust for the particular needs of poorer regions has led to problems with healthcare, housing, childcare, etc. The federal government needs to ensure that all Canadians have access to similar levels of service throughout the country so that less well-off regions can attract and retain newcomers.

2. Housing

a. Homelessness is an issue that is increasing in our community – what levers does the federal government have to help local communities take care of our most vulnerable?

Health care services for our fellow citizens' mental health and addictions issues are not adequately being addressed in the Fredericton region. Consequently, many who struggle with these issues also experience income insecurity and soon find themselves struggling with housing insecurity and/or homelessness. One solution is to work with all levels of government to provide sufficient health related services to the members of our community to leverage the benefits of preventative and restorative health policies. The solution downstream is a more robust social safety net. This also requires the

cooperation of all three levels of government and the local service providers as they seek to help their neighbours in times of crisis. The federal government has an obligation to ensure that the outcomes intended by the Canada Health Act are achieved in the Fredericton region and it should partner aggressively with the other levels of government to ensure that the infrastructure and services required to achieve this are available locally.

b. The lack of residential housing – particularly affordable housing – is a barrier to addressing some of our most important challenges such as population growth and workforce attraction. What is your party’s plan to increase affordable housing across the country?

Affordable housing in the Fredericton region, as a reflection of both the relative cost of housing and the availability of appropriate housing stock, needs support from the federal government. Support through developer rent subsidies exist; however, they are inadequate in terms of the number of subsidized units they provide, their financial impact on their intended recipients, and their duration over the housing lifecycle needs of their recipients. The federal government should take a more proactive role in the provision of affordable housing infrastructure, including increasing the number of available social housing units, cooperative housing units, and ‘Housing First’ units for those requiring health and social supports to combat housing insecurity. During and after the Second World War, the federal government implemented an effective national housing construction program that produced many of the Dobie homes in the Fredericton area. This was done not only through subsidies, but through an actual infrastructure investment program that created housing units. The current Canadian housing crisis that we are facing as we come out of a pandemic recession requires an equally ambitious and effective solution.

c. What policies would your party implement to help residential and commercial property owners to “Green” new and existing housing stock?

The federal government should be providing robust tax incentives to address “Greening” residential and commercial housing stock. However, not all residents or business owners can adequately leverage tax incentives to provide for the kind of infrastructure “Greening” that is needed to meet the required climate adaptation and mitigation goals our environment demands. Alternatives to tax-based incentives like Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Programs must be made available to Canadians in all regions and in all types of housing stock. Currently, PACE programs exist in a few Canadian Provinces, but they need to exist as part of a national framework to in order to address the “Greening” of new and existing housing stock nation wide. The federal government should design a national program like this and underwrite the financial components of the program, so that its other level of government partners in provinces and municipalities can implement the program locally.

3. Fiscal Planning

a. What is your party's plans for pandemic spending in the short term?

The Green Party supports the continuation of market-based supports such as wage subsidies and loans to business.

b. What federal supports do you think will be needed for economic recovery in the medium term?

In the medium-term, the federal government needs to examine and address the supply chain issues that disrupted the marketplace while Canada was operating in the recent and continuing pandemic economy. Federal economic policy must use the recovery from the pandemic economy as an opportunity to pivot towards a green economy. Through workforce retraining and direct investments in greening industries, the federal government can help provide sustainable solutions for business to lower their cost of doing business and to help them access markets that are environmentally and socially sustainable.

c. How will your party manage the growing debt and deficit in the long term?

The Green Party supports long-term, thoughtful financial planning to address the debt and deficit. We need to get past election cycle budgeting and start planning on a wider time scale. The federal government also needs to work on increasing transparency and accountability by following metrics and key performance indicators.

4. Immigration

a. Our chamber has advocated extensively to the federal government regarding international students, particularly relating to gaining work experience and making connections with their local community. Would you be in favour of adopting policies to facilitate more opportunities for international students, such as:

i. qualifying for the Canada Summer Jobs program and the Student Work Placement Program

ii. participating in voluntary co-op terms and internships without obtaining a separate work permit

iii. allow international students to work more than 20 hours per week off-campus on a permanent basis (currently a temporary covid measure)

The federal government policies supporting both the immigration of newcomers and the financial and educational needs of international postsecondary students need to change the foundation upon which it they are based. These programs were largely designed before the need for newcomers as a policy for population growth was as widely understood as it is today. Currently, these programs treat international students as a transient resource for their community, when in fact they should be treated as a tremendous opportunity for Canada. Upon the successful completion of a degree program, international students have the skills and education required for participation in the Canadian economy and they also bring valuable language skills and higher than normal cultural competencies into the workforce. Given these qualifications and Canada's need for skilled labour, international students should have the same opportunities to participate in the workforce that Canadian citizens have. Further, upon the successful

completion of a degree program, international students that wish to stay in Canada should have priority access to immigration programs. But for our First Nations peoples, Canada is a nation of immigrants. It should be a high priority of the federal government to continue this immigration tradition with not only the international student population, but also with other members of the international community that are willing and able to add to the fabric of the Canadian nation.

b. What role does ACOA have to play in our population growth efforts? Would you advocate retaining ACOA-funded programs such as “Study and Stay”?

ACOA’s role as the regional funding agency for the federal government plays a vital role in our region’s economic development and population growth efforts. Under the current national and provincial frameworks for the attraction and retention of international students, ACOA serves an important role for creating meaningful opportunities for the next generation of new Canadians. However, more can and should be done so that Canada to attract and retain the world’s best and brightest.

c. With the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program becoming permanent, do you think it should be expanded? Can New Brunswick settle more newcomers than it is currently?

Yes, absolutely. The current numbers of newcomers entering our community through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program are not sufficient to meet our needs for population growth. The total number of newcomers to our region is also insufficient to meet our overall population growth targets. This program and others like it serve a valuable purpose in the overall population growth strategy of our region and it should be retained and expanded. However, perhaps the most important challenge to address, if population growth through the attraction and retention of newcomers is to be truly effective in our region, is increasing the social acceptance and community inclusion experienced by newcomers. The federal government and its local representative should take an active role joining the provincial and municipal efforts to increase community inclusion for newcomers.

5. Regional Policy Making

a. Given the exponential increase in health costs as people age, do you think federal health transfer should be weighted to account for older provinces like New Brunswick?

Yes, the federal health transfer should reflect the best possible demographic information about the populations that it serves. So, as the health care costs of people aging increases arithmetically, a similar increase should be clearly present in the federal transfers that support these required health expenses. With the Fredericton region recently qualifying to becoming a Statistics Canada Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) there should be more information and better-quality demographic information to use to this end.

b. Do you think provinces like NB (that are more rural and have fewer ways to mitigate fossil fuel use, like public transit) should have policies such as the clean fuel standard tailored for us rather than a national one-size-fits-all approach?

By the very nature, federal states are designed to provide flexibility in public policy program design suited to the needs of its constituent elements. To create effective environment policies, the federal government needs to design and deliver programs that reflect the demographic, geographic and other distinct regional factors.

c. NB receives about 43% less R & D funding from the federal government vs the national average. Should the government seek to close this gap in the next mandate?

Absolutely. The federal government should be allocating R & D funding in an equitable manner across the country. Arguable, the regions where there is less private funding for research, the government should be providing more funding to decrease the gap and incentivize growth where it is needed most.