

2024 Christine Blair - Mayoralty Candidate

Candidates in District 9 & 10 and the two Mayoralty Candidates were asked to complete and submit a questionnaire composed by The Shoreline Journal. Questions are printed in *italic*, while candidate's answers are printed in **BOLD. The following is the submission from Christine Blair, incumbent mayoralty candidate for County of Colchester.**



Christine Blair

What do you consider to be the strongest asset of the municipality and how in the short term can it become an even better Municipality of Colchester?

Colchester County's greatest strength and biggest asset is our people, our residents. They are hardworking, strong, resilient and true. They are volunteers, community supporters, are there for each other in times of crisis and demonstrate family values in their day-to-day lives. Our 17 volunteer fire brigades, Colchester Ground Search and Rescue first responders are great examples of that. I have a high level of respect for what the brigades and our residents do for our communities. The work of our municipality is centred on the services we provide our residents. The Municipality of Colchester's Council and Staff have to think in both the short term and long term for our residents. Providing day-to-day services in an efficient manner that affect our residents, while at the same time looking ahead with vision on how we, as a municipality, can enhance services, enable developers, encourage businesses (which provide jobs), deal with the infrastructure for housing and keeping our youth in our communities. This takes planning strategically and budgeting wisely, all the while recognizing we are responsible to our residents and taxpayers.

How will you assist residents to cooperate and urge all the municipality to ensure better services are provided to the very remote rural areas?

Colchester County needs reliable internet connectivity. We had already begun installing internet for rural areas but was delayed almost two years due to lack of supplies and lack of workers during the height of the COVID pandemic. The fixed wireless portion of our rural broadband internet project is now complete and work has begun to deploy the majority of the fibre to homes associated with the project. We also recognize that cybersecurity for our computer systems is crucial when working from home. We receive far too many impersonating, scams, phishing messages and need to be mindful to carefully check before responding to any message that appears questionable.

Physician recruitment for our health needs in rural areas is ongoing. Colchester has worked closely with our neighbouring municipalities of Truro and Stewiacke, Millbrook First Nation, the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce, TCEP, and local medical professionals to encourage more family physicians to come to this area, to locate in our rural areas, which is so important. We are working in conjunction with Millbrook First Nation towards a new 10,000 sq ft medical clinic. It will have doctors, specialists, nurse practitioners and other medical professionals to serve the whole region of Colchester.

Neighbours helping neighbours getting to town, to see doctors, buy groceries, do errands, has been our way. But we also know public transit at reasonable costs may be another service for rural communities so we are looking into what other municipalities are doing and what that would look like for Colchester.

Our priority is maintaining quality delivery of services that impact daily lives of our residents throughout Colchester.

What services need to be improved to achieve and deliver a better lifestyle for all residents?

The Municipality provides services to all its residents. The type of service provided depends on where you live. In rural areas, houses have septic systems, for example, while in built-up areas, like Debert, Tatamagouche, and Valley, sewer systems are put in place through the Municipality. Security in our communities is essential for the peace of mind of our residents. Colchester has an excellent relationship with our policing service. With other local municipalities and Millbrook First Nation, sustainability is key to dealing with climate change issues such as floods and hurricanes. Colchester, with Truro and Stewiacke, works with Emergency Management jointly. Accessibility is another issue on which we take a regional approach.

As mentioned above, we are reviewing public transit, physician recruitment, and internet connectivity.

Everyone complains about condition of roads and highways. Since rural residents have to travel farther for everyone – work / shopping / medical / banking / government service, should roads in rural areas be prioritized?

The condition of our roads is a chronic issue and prioritized based on the condition of the road, wherever the location. The majority of roads in Colchester are owned by the Province of Nova Scotia. The Municipality of Colchester owns approx. 31 km of paved and gravel roads, which are maintained through the County. There are another 200 km of private roads in the County which are owned and maintained by the landowners. An exception - Colchester, as the owner of the Five Islands Municipal Park, and therefore a landowner on Broderick Lane, assists with grading and plowing that private road up to the Park. As municipal representatives, a lot of road complaints come to us. I contact the provincial Area Manager, giving the information on the road, and asking that it be repaired. Our staff, and I, have regular meetings with him twice a year to go over road conditions in the County, so even though the majority of roads are not municipal, we do our best to keep informed and to assist residents with road problems.

Should a plan be developed to improve, pave or repave all county-owned roads within five years? What about J-Class roads?

When the Municipality of Colchester approves its capital budget and five-year plan, road paving is included and prioritized on the condition of the road. To pave all 31 km of County roads every five years is not practical. In 2022, the cost of paving was approx. \$52 a foot or \$156 a meter; today it is approx. \$110 to \$115 a foot or \$353 a meter, plus HST. Some companies charge more. Our decisions must be reasoned, based on road conditions and our capital budget.

J-Class roads are another issue. The 110 kilometers of J-Class roads our municipality has been discussing are provincial roads. For several years, the province has an agreement municipalities may sign for three years. Under that agreement, if the municipality wants a road paved, we must pay 50 per cent of the cost of paving. While that means 50 cent dollars to be spent, it also means a huge expense for the municipality. If the municipality submits a road for paving, it has to be done by October 31st, and the province prioritizes it based on their budget. The province does



County Council Election Coverage

Presented by **The Shoreline** Journal

Hi I'm Mike Rushton. I live in Bass River and I'm 73 years old. I have lived sixty eight years of my 73 in district 10 and know the majority of you who live here. I'm not a great speaker, but not shy when speaking my mind when needed.

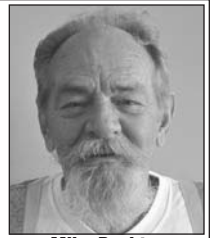
I make no promises except, I will do whatever possible to fight for our way of life in our district. I have seen alot come and go in our communities. I will do all I can to defend our way of life. From our work to our home we seem to have lost out on a lot from our roads, power upgrades, communication and infrastructure.

I ask for your support in the upcoming election, and I hope to have the opportunity to represent you. If you call me with a issue I will do the best of getting you a answer and call you back to give you the answer.

You can contact me 902 890 9378 or 902 647 2037 or michaelrushton1950@gmail.com.

Sincerely yours Mike Rushton

Mike Rushton, District 10 candidate
E-mail: michaelrushton1950@gmail.com; 902 890 9378 or 902 647 2037



Mike Rushton

the work and sends the municipality a bill for the 50 per cent. I believe a plan needs to be developed on how we can pay for that 50 per cent without burdening taxpayers who are already paying property taxes for homes along roads that are in poor condition. Plan, set money aside in our capital budget that will allow us to get this work done. That takes an agreement of the majority of Council – and we have not been able to get that for years – but it is coming up for discussion on September 25.

Based on tri-government level of financing (Feds/Province/Municipal) should the municipality pay half its 1/3 or 20% (Feds 40%/Prov 40%) share from general revenues, while applying an area rate based on assessment to all tax bills for the remainder, should the municipality develop a five or ten-year plan to pave all County-owned and J-Class?

Our residents expect services through the municipality from the tax dollars they pay. As we know, the Property Valuation Services (PVSC), sets the properties assessments, mostly based on market value (which has been increasing), sends the assessed property values to the municipality, and we set the tax rate which tells the amount of money charged per \$100 of assessment. In Colchester County, our tax rate has remained 88.5 cents residential and \$2.28 commercial for 6 of the last 7 years, only being increased a half cent in 2019. Area rates are based on the services received in the community in which the taxpayer lives, for example, fire service has a tax rate. I believe our taxpayers do not need a greater tax burden if it can be avoided.

What our responsibility is as a municipality is to stretch those tax dollars in the best way we can, plan ahead for large expenditures we know are coming (for example, the reserve fund for the balefill liner which is approx. \$4 million). We can do this by accessing grants and funding from both Federal and Provincial grant programs that will assist us to provide services to our taxpayers. For example, the Canada Community Building Fund (formerly Gas Tax Fund) is a federal program providing funding for Canadian municipalities to help build and revitalize local public infrastructure. Infrastructure for housing is going to be a big expense for Colchester over the next few years and we will receive funds from this program.

Please see Question 5 for the response on County and J-Class roads.

With an aging population, should the municipality encourage more senior and long term care housing facilities be developed and those facilities be built in the rural areas, which would allow residents to remain in their community and also be a job provider?

Colchester County is an enabler for developers. It is through the municipality that developers to our County with plans for developments, based on what the developers want to do. We welcome developers with solid plans that will accommodate all areas within our County, the demographics associated with building homes (age-related, one level, accessible, close to one's home community, affordable). Developments may include public housing or private long-term care facilities which would provide jobs.

Since 4600 jobs are projected for Scotia Port (should it proceed) and many other job-creating projects planned throughout the municipality, should the municipality issue an RFP for a "Needs and Capacity" study to determine what will be needed for the next 10 years for tradespeople / professional services / capacity to supply construction materials / building supplies / restaurants / or accommodations and how schools / NSCC / apprenticeship programs need to increase programming to train people for those jobs?

While work has begun on the container port for the proposed site, one of the first steps for Scotia Port is the approval of a highway interchange. That is a multi-million dollar project that must be approved by both the Federal and provincial governments and is crucial to the development. Steps are being taken to address this request and similarly, work has begun on implementing the plan for a container port with rail. Our municipality is prepared to advocate for various programs in NSCC or through other educational facilities for well-prepared tradespersons and apprenticeship programs to train and provide local jobs.

**School is
in session...
PLEASE
DRIVE
CAREFULLY**

The
Shoreline
Journal

**ELECT
Cheryl-ann Slack
District 10**



**For information and assistance:
Phone: (902) 956-3142
Email: cheryl-ann.slack@dal.ca**

Authorised by the Official Agent for Cheryl-ann Slack