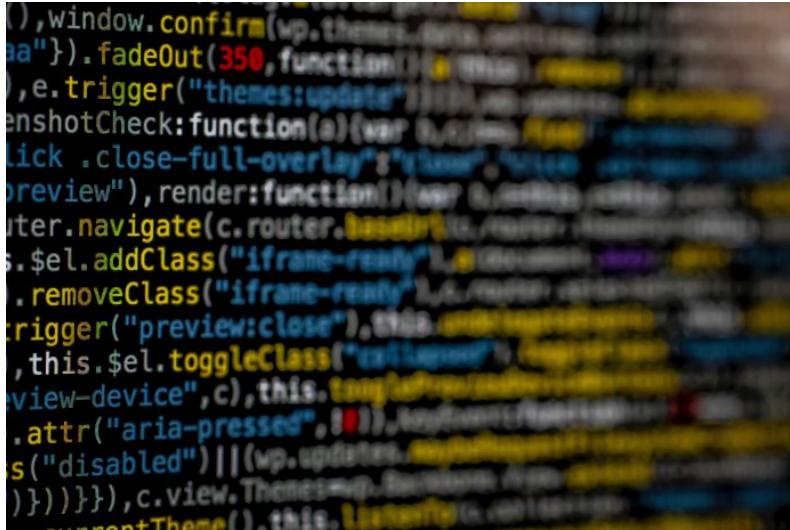


Q&A – Week 11 – Do you support Transparency and Open Data?

By **Dan Gray** - June 18, 2022 @ 8:25 am



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Our site is going into week eleven of our question-and-answer feature in which SaultOnline poses a question from the community to those running for both Mayor and Councillor.

As of this week, we no longer include those currently sitting in these positions, instead we have only approached those listed on [the city of Sault Ste. Marie website](#) who are running for the respective positions.

Three new community members put forward their application this week and will be sent questions going forward they are, Ward 1 Brent Derochie and William McPhee and in Ward 5 Martin Poirier.

As always the question is put forward early in the week and a deadline of Friday at noon is given for responses to be submitted. The responses are listed in the order in which they were received.

This week's question from the community was-

How would you make the city more transparent if you were elected?

Would you agree with providing the open data many other communities are already pushing for? (See Windsor, Niagara Falls for examples)

This includes opening up snow plows GPS tracking as well as a crime map and other policies implemented across the province and the world to be more accountable to the citizens who pay the tax dollar.

Do the answers here match yours? tell us in the comments.

Mayoral Candidates –

Matthew Shoemaker –

Absolutely I would love to see an open data catalogue developed for the City. I actually already asked for staff to do this by resolution on May 10, 2021. There are some great examples of open data catalogues at the municipal level, including the City of Edmonton.

We should see what the best practice is across Canada and implement a system that has already been proven to work. Of course, the cost of implementing such a system needs to be vetted carefully as well, but there is a benefit that goes beyond just the financial aspect of it.

In terms of transparency at City Hall, I think my record speaks for itself. I've had recorded votes implemented for all council votes, video-recording of closed session meetings, and (for a period of time until council overturned it) had board & committee appointments being done in open council.



Tobin Kern-

Transparency is vital to building a trustworthy relationship between any government and their citizens.

In my mind, the best solutions are ones that increase transparency without any unnecessary cost in dollars, resources, and carbon emissions.

The best way to demonstrate transparency is through demonstrated accessibility, straight talk, and results. If council members are visibly engaged in addressing pressing issues, accessible to their constituents, and the results of their efforts are apparent, transparency is there. I encourage council to attend public events and demonstrations organized by their constituents to listen to matters citizens obviously care about. I also advocate for visibly promoting open office hours, and greater access to address council. In terms of demonstrating results, I would encourage council to strive for loftier goals and achieve them, such as much greater action on climate change. Incrementalism does not appropriately address crises, systemic change does.

I would also propose that essential data already collected by the city (with few exceptions—privacy, etc.) be readily available. This is a low-cost way of supporting transparency, and demonstrates there is no obfuscation.

I would, however, be cautious to commit to the collection and publication of new data and the deployment of new technologies without a cost/benefit analysis. Having worked in positions that required collection of extensive amounts of data, I know increased data collection and publication, and adding responsibilities for new technologies can pull staff away from the important work they are employed to do. The staff in city departments that oversee the services in the community, and work to provide the best service possible with the resources they have, look to find efficiencies to provide better services where possible. I have confidence in their ability to continue to provide quality services, but would have no problem proposing that council investigate if it was apparent that was not happening.

Our community has a lot of pressing and monumental challenges that need to be worked on. In my opinion, the best transparency is proven action on things that matter a lot. If we focus too narrowly on minute matters to find small efficiencies, it may end up costing us dearly due to inaction on bigger issues and loftier goals.

Ozzie Grandinetti –

Does transparency exist in the city of Sault Ste. Marie? LOL! This Council is lacking transparency in decision making which has driven them to make decisions which do not meet the interests of the citizens of SSM.

Transparency is critical for all municipalities, but especially the citizens of SSM. People need to be consulted, and the Mayor and Council have a duty to consider the views of citizens in decision making, and at the end, be transparent towards citizens on decisions that have been made. Transparent decision making reduces the chance for suspicious actions of City Council members with the budget, property, and public assets management.

I am completely supportive utilizing tools and mechanisms to increase transparency and accountability towards the citizens. I am fully supportive of using technological innovations in order to enhance transparency and accountability. I will ensure that the citizens have access to public documents maintained, drawn, or received, such as licenses, permits, authorizations, certificates, confirmations, other public documents or services, including the procedures for their acquisition will ensure that citizens are able to participate in the activities of the municipality, allow them to present and be heard during City Council meetings and will ensure staff organize multiple dates and times for public meetings.

GPS tracking is a subject that I am very passionate about. All our vehicles, including snowplows, sidewalk cleaners, buses, employee driven city vehicles should all have GPS devices installed. There should be interactive tools that allow citizens to see when their roads will be plowed and where maintenance work is being conducted. Provincial and Federal governments and other municipalities such as Windsor and Niagara Falls have been using these tools and they increase transparency and allow employees to be held accountable and informs citizens when to expect a service in their area. I would definitely meet with the leaders of City Windsor and Niagara Falls

and learn more about their tools and implement the ones that make sense for our City and increase transparency and accountability.



Donna Hilsinger- No Response Submitted

Ward 1 –

Sandra Hollingsworth – No Response Submitted

Ward 2 –

Luke Dufour –

Open data in SSM is a bit more complicated in SSM than these other communities that you mentioned. First off, open data is not an end point in itself. Simply posting raw data, writ large doesn't really mean anything without analysis and then action. Cities that have embraced the way data can inform efficiencies in their operation have done so thanks to the analysis and actions with the data. The whole point of having this data is so we can make better, quicker and more responsive policy choices.

Any Open Data system is dependent on the amount of data it stores for the aggregate quality of any actions that come from it. Most folks don't realize this but through the Innovation Center, we have one of the best stores of municipal data in all of Canada. SSM was very early to this work and has several agreements with other organizations that have enhanced the quality of the raw data we have access to. These agreements however, frequently come with privacy regulations attached to those outside organizations. Were the City to simply post that data, we would be in violation of those agreements and would defeat the entire purpose of having this high quality database.

One of the reasons our Low Income Home Ownership pilot was so successful in getting unique Provincial funding was that we had an underlying set of maps/data that outshone anything other municipalities had to show as a target/measurable objective.

That said, there have been times when the City has leaned too heavily on the 'we don't want to stigmatize neighbourhoods' line too heavily. Citizens already know what goes on in their neighbourhoods and sharing some of the maps/policy interventions that data is leading us to can really help citizens feel heard. Likewise with crime data (which belongs to the Police Services Board not City Council).

There are some tremendous opportunities coming up in the next few years to further integrate the quality of data we have in SSM into our services. I know the most about Social Services due to my service as Chair. The data we have around child health and well being is tremendous and has already guided investments in things like parks. Data could also help us in our fight against homelessness by allowing us to target folks who may be on the brink before they become homeless.

Rather than pushing for just a dump of raw data, we should be pushing for smarter, more efficient policy choices being made with data as a backbone in our community.

Lisa Vezeau-Allen – No response submitted.

Ward 3 –

Kurtis McDermid-

When it comes to transparency the overall complaint I hear overwhelmingly is that of a communications problem.

- Lack of public consultation
- Lack of debate
- Lack of engagement and reach

The fact is that our municipal government holds public consultation, townhalls, open council sessions, advertisements for the aforementioned and more. What they lack is active communication skills. As a business owner I know that regardless of your product or service it doesn't matter unless you get eyes and ears on your product/service and bodies in place. To say that the city held public consultation about a project like The Plaza is truthful. They put an ad on local news and a social media post or two out to promote it and added it passively through media channels but everything they did doesn't matter because they didn't get enough butts in seats

and eyes and ears engaged when the hard work needed to be done. The passive approach to engaging the public needs to stop. You need to be active, loud, present and repetitive to get people involved. Business owners, like myself, who grew up through the dawn of social media, understand this better than anyone.

Transparency is only successful if the public is actively engaged. Every council meeting is streamed, aired on Shaw and local news. There is 200-2000 pages of supplementary documents available for every council meeting online, from public feedback to engineered drawings. What we don't have is effective, active promotion of these. What good is this transparency if no one knows about it?

Active engagement drives transparency. The more eyes and ears on the municipal government the more transparency will be unavoidable. Councillors social media pages can't go dark after an election, public engagement needs to be constant, and city hall needs to be a hub of buzzing media presence. We need to see our councillors and city staff constantly in the news, on social media and in our community and not just during election time and during events, always.

We are hosting Summer Moon Festival next week. I have been involved both through my business and as a private volunteer. I started writing this on my phone while onsite at one of the murals. Our Tourism division is working night and day on little to no sleep to get this done and I'm proud to be out there with them but cruise around on social media and around the locations that are being prepared and notice there is not nearly enough councillors around helping the wheels turn and radio silence on social media other than sharing the posts by the festival pages.

If we can't get our council pumped up, live on Facebook and social media promoting this, talking on news shows and actively promoting such an amazing festival loudly and proudly how can we ever expect them to actively express their opinions prior to votes, drive people to public consultations, tell us motions they intend on putting forth, and being publicly and actively transparent about the workings of council? Pumping up and engaging a community about a festival is the fun stuff, the easy stuff.

If we can't get that done how can we expect to engage the community about the hard choices, planning, development, funding, budgets and the inner workings of council and city hall?

Do I want GPS on snow plows, crime maps, and all of that? Absolutely, but what good is any of that if we continue to have council members who's media presence outside of chamber walls goes silent after election season?

Those who follow me know that I am anything but silent. I share the good, the bad, and the ugly of being a father of three, a business owner and a citizen of Sault Ste. Marie. A win or lose in October would never change that and it shouldn't for anyone else either.

Positive and active relationships with local media and a push for recognition from national media that we lack in a detrimental way are critically needed long side active and ongoing public engagement that isn't considered effective till there are eyes and ears on them. That is what is going to make our city workings not just transparent but actively transparent.

Angela Caputo– No response submitted

Ward 4 –

Marchy Bruni – No response submitted.

Ward 5 –

Matt Scott –

Transparency is one of my fundamental beliefs when it comes to politics because taxpayers deserve to know where their money is going. I will continue to strive for an open and transparent municipal government by encouraging less closed council meetings in areas I don't believe necessary. I would also like to implement an open correspondence initiative where parties looking to contact council at large could request to have their question or concern publicly displayed for the purposes of transparency.

Obviously with transparency there is a concern about privacy, another thing that I am adamant about preserving. Any efforts to be transparent will include measures to ensure privacy remains intact where it is reasonable to do so.

A city wide open data plan is needed and something that should be a high priority for all current and potentially new councillors. The technology is available and affordable. Providing open data to residents allows for the curious citizen to aggregate data to see where their dollars are going. Part of this initiative would include near real-time GPS data for the purposes of seeing where

your grader or bus is. I foresee a future for Sault Ste. Marie where we engage with our residents and share data so that we can be open with taxpayers as well as be open to receive suggestions based on what they see in the data. We have a lot of interested and intelligent people living here that I'm sure could find important uses for the data.



Corey Gardi –

The best way to be open and transparent is to be available to constituents, and follow up with them to ensure their concerns are addressed. I think it is also very important to allow the public to know your position on issues. I do my best to do that during Council meetings, and by way of social media, and by taking the time with residents/businesses that reach out to me to discuss issues.

The City is continuously improving efforts in transparency, which I support. There is definitely advantages to things like GPS tracking of snow plows, as you mentioned in your question.

Dave Mornix – No response submitted

Below you will see a running bi-weekly score kept of who answered and who didn't, with a nod to those who participated in the first 9 weeks of the previous format included.

Do you have a question you want asked of your candidates in the weeks leading up to the election?

Let SaultOnline know and our staff will do their best to get answers for not just you, but the community as a whole.

Thank-you for choosing us as your source of news in Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.

Dan Gray

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

