



StandOurGround.ca NEWSLETTER

Issue 016 - September 2026

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Save our Communities from Urban Sprawl!

Candidates and participants
enjoyed coffee, tea, and
desserts provided by the
Big Bite Bistro and
StandOurGround
member **Barb Mann**.



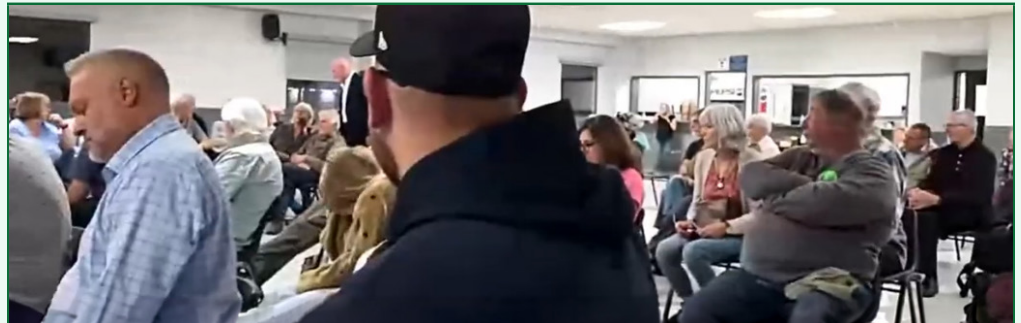
Foods for All Occasions
1128 Concession St. Russell
613-445-1333

StandOurGround Russell Township All-Candidates Municipal Meeting was a Great Success!

A large audience attended the **StandOurGround**'s All-Candidates Municipal Meeting giving residents an opportunity to hear from the 5 candidates: Charles Armstrong, Dominique Bertrand, Lisa Deacon, Nick Gallagher and Jamie Laurin. The candidates addressed growth, taxes, farmland, infrastructure, recreation, rural concerns and municipal accountability. Tara Barton-Maclaren running for trustee in the Upper Canada District School Board was introduced from the audience.

The meeting was run very effectively, with Martin Dagenais doing an excellent job serving as Emcee and Mark Van Dusen also doing an excellent job as Question Facilitator for questions from the audience. Harry Baker provided the microphones and other necessary equipment, greeted the candidates and members of the media in attendance, and helped ensure that the meeting ran smoothly from beginning to end. We would also like to thank Candice Vetter, Harry Baker, Mark Van Dusen and Mary Boland for their help in planning and organizing the meeting.

We would also like to thank the members of the media who attended—David Gonczol of *The Rustler* (who published his [video of the meeting](#) on his soon-to-be-launched online newspaper), Radio Maweja FM (who published their [video of the meeting](#) and [interview with Martin Dagenais](#) on YouTube) and Maneula Dascal of CJRO Radio—for helping to cover the meeting and bring attention to the issues discussed.



A large audience attended the **StandOurGround**'s All-Candidates Municipal Meeting



Emcee Martin Dagenais and candidates: Charles Armstrong, Dominique Bertrand, Lisa Deacon, Nick Gallagher and Jamie Laurin

Issues Discussed at the Russell All-Candidates Meeting

The emcee asked each candidate to introduce themselves and give a 10-minute presentation, in the language of their choice, outlining their priorities for the next four years. New candidates also explained why they were interested in becoming involved in municipal affairs.

CAN TAXES BE KEPT REASONABLE?

The candidates were then asked the question: ***“With infrastructures needed in the upcoming 5 to 10 years such as a wastewater treatment center, more Ottawa water supplied and locally treated and full-time firefighters, taxes will logically go up. Council was able to keep taxes down 3.9% this year, although it was initially pegged at close to 8%. My question for you is do you have any idea how to keep our tax increases at a reasonable level going forward.”***

Candidate Charles Armstrong explained that the proposed wastewater treatment plant would be paid primarily through user fees from properties connected to the wastewater system, rather than general property taxes. Because the project was estimated at approximately \$95 million more than two years ago and is likely to cost more by construction his suggestion was to gradually increase wastewater user fees to build up a fund for the future expense.

Candidate Dominique Bertrand emphasized *“When I speak with residents, I don’t necessarily hear people saying, ‘I refuse to pay one more dollar in taxes’. What people are saying is ‘if my taxes go up, what am I getting in return?’”*

Rather than promising that taxes would not rise because of other infrastructure projects, candidates proposed: Growth paying for growth • Expanding commercial tax base • Seeking government grants • Reviewing user fees • Using municipal assets • Controlling spending • Phasing major projects.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES?

The second question to the candidates was: ***“With the opening of the recreation complex coming later this fall, township wants to divest itself of the Russell and Embrun Arenas, the Camille Piché Community Centre in Embrun and the Russell Centennial Pool as the operating expenses for those facilities are needed to be diverted to the new rec center. My question for you is, do you have any suggestions on what could replace those older facilities?”***

Candidate Bertrand stressed that no decision has been made about the future of the Russell and Embrun facilities and said it was inaccurate to suggest that the Township is simply looking to get rid of them. She encouraged residents to complete the Township’s survey at [Russell.ca](https://russell.ca), saying it was straightforward and gave residents an opportunity to express what they want for the Township. Candidate Bertrand suggested that Piché Community Centre could become a municipal daycare because of its location near the parks and splash pad, with rooms potentially available for community meetings and other uses. She said the Embrun Arena is on prime land and suggested exploring whether the property could be used for affordable housing through partnerships with the province or counties. Regarding the Russell Arena, she noted its location near local schools and said she often hears that residents would like to keep the facility. She suggested exploring whether part of the structure could be retained for an outdoor rink, festivals or other recreation purposes.

Candidate Gallagher expressed his views stating: *“My preference is to retain, make better use of assets where possible, including exploring partnerships, leasing opportunities before considering a sale.”*

MANAGING GROWTH AND PROTECTING FARMLAND

Growth was one of the evening’s central issues. Several candidates said Russell Township must accommodate continued population growth while protecting agricultural land and the rural character of the Township.

Candidate Armstrong described the approach as building *“up and not sideways.”* He said *“the point is to literally to protect some of our valuable farmland around our villages. To do that, we have to meet the assigned number of residences that the United Counties gives us, which gets that from the province of how many residents we have to provide and how much population growth we have to accommodate. To prevent from growing out into farmland we are going to have to see more higher density.”* He also noted that concentrating development can reduce the amount of road, water and wastewater infrastructure that the Township must maintain.

ICE TIME AT THE NEW RECREATION COMPLEX

The president of the Embrun Minor Hockey Association asked about ice time at the new recreation complex and whether local youth organizations should receive priority, including minor hockey, skating, broomball and other local groups. There was also discussion about equitable access for women’s hockey and other groups, as well as higher user fees for organizations from outside the Township.

Candidate Gallagher said local teams and associations should receive priority for ice time. He suggested that outside associations could use the facilities after local allocations are made, with higher user fees to help cover the costs of maintaining the facilities.

Near the end of the meeting an Oldtimers hockey representative specifically asked whether their daytime ice schedule would remain the same. Candidate Laurin’s response was that existing ice-time allocations will be maintained for this year, with the new third ice surface providing additional opportunities. A new allocation policy will be reviewed by Council, including priorities for the Oldtimers hockey league and all local minor sports.

WHY DID YARD-WASTE DISPOSAL SUDDENLY BECOME EXPENSIVE?

A ten-year resident of Russell said the cost of taking yard waste to the landfill had suddenly risen to from \$0 to \$62 minimum, despite the material being recycled.

Candidate Lisa Deacon's response explained that:

- Yard waste remains free Saturday mornings between 9 a.m. and 12 noon.
- **The private company, GFL, changed the times when free yard waste would be accepted.**
- **Residents were not given sufficient advance notice of the change.**
- She said the situation should be addressed when the contract is reviewed.
- She said if selected she would ask if the Township would consider bringing back spring yard-waste collection during the 2027 budget process.

HOW WILL COUNCIL ENSURE THAT DECISIONS ARE ACTUALLY IMPLEMENTED?

A resident raised a significant issue about Council decisions and deadlines not always being followed up.

Candidates discussed: Performance measures • KPIs • Compliance • Scorecards • Communication • Management accountability • Decision tracking • Council follow-through.

RURAL WELLS AND GROUNDWATER

A rural resident described having her well run dry during last year's drought and asked what the Township can do to prevent water shortages mentioning that the City of Ottawa were very involved in working hand-in-hand with their rural properties on the issue of conserving water.

The discussion included cooperation with South Nation Conservation, better communication during drought conditions and the need for stronger provincial support for private well owners.

Candidate Deacon who is herself a rural well user spoke about the lack of provincial regulation and support for private well owners. She recommended looking at the Ontario Auditor General's report on private water systems and said the province should be pressed to address its recommendations.

Candidate Armstrong focused on groundwater quality, particularly significant groundwater recharge areas and the possibility of contamination entering aquifers. He described restrictions in planning and zoning intended to limit activities that could threaten groundwater.

HOW HIGH SHOULD NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS BE?

A Russell resident asked candidates whether there should be a limit on how high they would permit residential buildings to go.

The responses included:

- The current draft zoning approach contemplates apartment buildings of up to six storeys in certain areas.
- Firefighting capability was cited as one reason for establishing limits.
- Water and wastewater infrastructure capacity was also mentioned.
- Setbacks and the relationship between taller buildings and existing neighbourhoods were discussed.

Candidate Gallagher expressed his views: *"What can we do in our neighbourhoods now to avoid the need for building higher structures, and as I mentioned that can be more town homes, that can be more duplexes and triplexes. Again that's how we're getting more of that density but without growing up too much. If we can sprinkle that throughout we're alleviating the need to have more housing there. Again, not in just one area where there's going to be a ton of cars, lots of parking on the street."*

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

A long-time Russell resident and physician Dr. Gerry Heymans asked about the proposed expansion of the industrial park toward agricultural land and specifically referred to the high-quality red shale agricultural soil in the area and asked about the Council discussion in which the Mayor was the sole vote against the motion to expand of the buffer zone.

Candidate Deacon explained that she had brought forward a motion concerning a buffer zone between industrial development and the agricultural/rural area. The motion was seconded by Councillor Armstrong and co-drafted by Councillor Marc Lalonde. Candidate Laurin had previously tabled an amendment to expand that buffer zone to ensure that there was enough space between the minimal buffer zone. The buffer was ultimately increased to double the size.

HOW WILL THE RURAL VOICE AND AGRICULTURAL WAY OF LIFE BE PROTECTED?

Residents specifically asked how the rural countryside and agricultural way of life could be protected as Russell and Embrun grow.

StandOurGround member **Rhonda Bradley** raised concerns about the preservation of farmland:

“My question is that as the villages become more populated, it becomes more challenging for the rural voice and we have a vital rural countryside and that includes both rural residents as well as farmers. What is the plan going forward or what’s the vision in terms of preserving that rural countryside way of life as well as our agricultural future?”

Ms. Bradley’s question provoked a large round of applause.

Candidate Armstrong described agriculture as a major economic asset and said the Township should resist unnecessary expansion of urban/settlement boundaries. However, the candidate pointed out that the United Counties of Prescott-Russell has an important role in deciding settlement-area expansions, meaning Russell Township does not have complete control over the process.

Candidate Bertrand proposed creating an Agricultural Advisory Committee so farmers themselves could have a stronger voice in municipal decision-making.

Candidate Deacon emphasized: Listening to farmers • Working with farm groups • Following OFA recommendations • Supporting agricultural education • Working with the Russell Agricultural Society • Supporting farmland trusts. Candidate Deacon also advocated measuring whether existing growth targets are actually being achieved before considering further expansion onto agricultural land.

Candidate Gallagher again emphasized infill and densification rather than continual outward expansion, saying that farmland lost to development cannot simply be recovered.

Candidate Laurin’s final response emphasized that councillors need to listen to rural residents and that the buffer-zone decision at the Vars industrial park was an example where resident concerns had influenced Council. Candidate Laurin admitted: *“Did we always listen? No, we probably didn’t. But you know what? We did listen this time and we should continue to listen and continue to ensure that your voices are heard.”*

ROADS AND FARM MACHINERY

Another StandOurGround member, **Tony Baas**, a well-known Russell farmer, raised the issue of the width of local roads:

“My big question for Council is why are the roads always built on minimum distances with minimum shoulders considering farmer’s machinery are getting bigger, and we’re always fighting with traffic and we’re getting fingers and we’re getting yelled at because we’re on the road. We asked township to build a bigger shoulder so we can at least drive on the shoulder. Why are the roads built to accommodate small cars and not machinery especially since agriculture is such a big part of this Township?”

Candidate Laurin absolutely agreed that the Township should not automatically build to minimum standards. Candidates acknowledged that wider shoulders cost more, but said road design should reflect actual users. Concerns were also raised by another candidate about truck routes through the village and the need to revisit the Transportation Master Plan.

WILL THERE BE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS TO QUESTION COUNCIL?

Candidate Bertrand said residents are one of the Township’s greatest resources and supported regular “coffee with your Councillor” sessions—weekly, biweekly or monthly—to hear directly from residents. Candidate Gallagher said councillors should be available to listen to residents, hear their concerns and opinions, and answer their questions, in whatever format and as often as needed.

THE TURLEY/J. HENRY TWEED HOMESTEAD

There was also considerable support and applause expressed for preserving the Turley/J. Henry Tweed homestead on Craig Street, which was purchased by a developer.

 StandOurGround thanks all five candidates, our Emcee, the residents who attended, the media and everyone who participated in making the evening a successful opportunity for community discussion.

StandOurGround.ca welcomes your feedback, counterarguments, photographs, and written submissions for our Newsletter. Kindly inform us if you would like your Letter to the Editor to remain anonymous.

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