


**Strong Mayor powers are a tool, not a normal way to operate**

First Monday — September 2026

By Chris Cooke

In the months leading up to the municipal election, First Monday will be asking Sarnia's mayoralty candidates some basic questions about their candidacy, everything from why they are running to will they make changes to the executive suite at Sarnia city hall.

Last month we interviewed Bill Dennis. This month it is Scott Molson.

The following is a Q&A in his own words:

**FM:** Why are you running for mayor and what will be different in a Scott Molson government?

***SM:*** *I'm running for mayor because I believe Sarnia has spent enough time talking about plans. We need to start executing them, measuring the results and publicly reporting whether we are succeeding or failing.*

*I am not running to manage Sarnia the same way it has always been managed. I'm running to bring a business-minded, results-driven approach to city hall.*

*My priorities are straightforward: fix the basics and build the future.*

*That means roads, water, sewer, public safety and responsible spending come first. At the same time, we need to grow Sarnia's industrial and commercial tax base so that homeowners are not continually expected to carry more of the burden.*

*I will never apologize for Chemical Valley. Industry built this community, provides thousands of good-paying jobs and remains one of our greatest economic strengths.*

*But it doesn't have to be our only identity.*

*I want Sarnia known for advanced manufacturing, energy, skilled trades, technology, tourism, our waterfront and quality of life.*

*Instead of simply waiting for investors to find us, I believe the mayor should be one of Sarnia's chief salespeople.*

*Accountability will also be different. I want measurable targets and a public-facing dashboard so taxpayers can see where their money is going and whether city hall is delivering results.*

**FM:** How do you feel about strong mayor powers and will you use them?

***SM:*** *I don't believe strong mayor powers should become a substitute for democracy or cooperation with council.*

*The mayor is elected to lead, but councillors are also elected by the people of Sarnia. I would much rather build consensus around good ideas than force decisions through simply because legislation gives the mayor that authority.*

*However, I would not rule out using a legal power of the mayor when it is necessary to advance an important priority for Sarnia.*

*My test would be simple: Is this in the best interests of Sarnia, is it transparent, and can I publicly defend the decision?*

*Strong powers should be a tool of last resort—not the normal way city hall operates.*

**FM:** Sarnia is debt free. What are your views on the use of debt?

***SM:*** *Being debt free is an accomplishment, and I don't believe we should throw that away casually.*

*But I also don't believe that debt free automatically means financially healthy if we're allowing roads, water mains, sewers and other assets to deteriorate faster than we replace them.*

*There is a difference between borrowing to cover operating expenses and responsibly financing a long-life capital asset.*

*I would not support borrowing simply to avoid making difficult budget decisions or to fund wants that we cannot afford.*

*For major infrastructure, however, I am prepared to examine responsible financing when the business case demonstrates that delaying the project will ultimately cost taxpayers more.*

*The question shouldn't simply be, "Do we have debt?"*

*The question should be, "What are taxpayers getting for their money, and can we afford it?"*

**FM:** What is your position on development charges?

***SM:** If Sarnia's development charges are substantially higher than competing municipalities, we need to understand why.*

*Development charges exist for a legitimate reason: growth should help pay for the infrastructure required to support growth.*

*But there is a point where those charges can discourage the very development we're trying to attract.*

*If a builder can cross a municipal boundary and build the same house for substantially less because of municipal fees, Sarnia has a competitive problem.*

*I would support a comprehensive comparison of Sarnia's development charges against surrounding and competing municipalities, including exactly what is included in those charges.*

*Then I want the development community at the table.*

*What is preventing you from building here? What would make Sarnia competitive again?*

*We need more housing, more assessment and more families choosing Sarnia. Growing our tax base is one of the best long-term ways to reduce pressure on existing taxpayers.*

**FM:** Would you replace CAO Chris Carter?

***SM:** I would not campaign on firing an individual city employee.*

*If I become mayor, I intend to evaluate the performance of senior administration based on facts, results and accountability—not personalities or political disagreements.*

*The CAO should understand very clearly what council expects, what the city's priorities are and what measurable results are expected.*

*If those expectations are being met, that should be recognized.*

*If they aren't, there needs to be accountability.*

*But I don't believe it is responsible leadership to predetermine someone's employment before sitting in the mayor's chair, reviewing the facts and working with the elected council.*

*I will hold people accountable, but I will also treat people fairly.*

*That's the standard I would expect from anyone working for me, and it's the standard I would bring to city hall.*

**Source:** First Monday, September 2026, Chris Cooke, pages 9 and 11. Transcribed from electronic scans of the original printed publication.