

Chamber urges immigration reforms



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The local chamber of commerce is lobbying the federal government to steer immigrant investors to smaller cities like Windsor.

“Typically, immigrant investors migrate to larger urban centres such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver but there’s a tremendous need here and in other smaller but no less important cities for similar levels of investment,” said chamber president Matt Marchand.

Marchand said Windsor, based on its population, could expect to attract between 20 and 25 immigrant investors. “Basically, we’re getting zero.”

Immigrant investors must bring \$1.6 million in investment to Canada in order to qualify for entry into the country.

Marchand said that the migration of young people seeking schooling and then employment elsewhere creates two potential problems — a drain on high-tech talent and a smaller pool of people willing to take over their parents’ businesses.

“When business owners retire, we don’t want to see those businesses close,” Marchand said. “We want them to continue either with family members taking over or possibly employees who, in turn, need may access to investment capital.”

Marchand made his comments Tuesday to more than two dozen chamber members at the organization’s first webinar.

Marchand said the chamber is also supporting programs launched by the federal Department of Immigration to adopt a just-in-time immigration policy which could close the skills shortage gap.

“We have companies locally who needs skilled trades workers now and anything we can do to fill those jobs more quickly would help our local companies,” said Marchand. “Unless that helps comes, we are leaving productivity, wealth and growth on the table.”

In addition to its lobbying efforts, the chamber recently released the first of three white papers on key issues facing local businesses.

The first covered transportation issues and the next two will focus on taxation and environment and energy.

“We want to make sure that business issues are front and centre when it comes to policy decisions,” said Ed Miles, chairman of the chamber’s board of directors. “While we are always cognizant of the political landscape and the many competing interests it faces, we need to present a strong business case for our members because we need a healthy business community to keep the economy ticking over in this region.

“When there are only so many investment dollars to go around, we need to strike a balance in how they are spent,” said Miles.