

## **Chamber of Commerce – Candidate Questionnaire 2017 – Robert Dumanowski**

### **1. What inspired you to put your name forward for consideration in this election?**

I decided to seek re-election because I (genuinely) still have the passion and desire to serve this wonderful community. The citizens of Medicine Hat are an incredible and resilient group of people. To this day, I find nothing more gratifying than to take an issue or concern brought forward by someone, work it through the system, only to see it eventually brought to a positive conclusion. As a first generation Canadian (of parents and older siblings who immigrated to Canada), I learned the value of hard work. My parents instilled in me the adage of “giving back to your community.” After 16 years in public office, I still find that my convictions, coupled with a strong hope and belief in this community, keeps me resolved to even do more. It would be my honour to continue to represent the citizens of Medicine Hat at City Hall.

### **2. What qualifications and/or experiences will assist you in being an effective councillor?**

I have had the pleasure to serve on City Council for 5 terms (16 years). I believe that my experience and proven leadership, coupled with a strong sense of commitment and integrity, make me an inviting candidate to the broad electorate. I have served on almost every committee, commission and advisory board that the City is connected to. I know how to navigate through the red-tape. I have a solid relationship with every senior administrator of the City. I regularly caucus with business leaders/organizations, unions, and the private and public sectors. I am a familiar name and face to our front-line staff. All of these relationships have been forged out of my will and desire to represent the citizens of Medicine Hat in the most collaborative and comprehensive way possible.

### **3. Please list your top 5 strategic priorities that you will commit to during your four year term.**

- Creating and maintaining a strong robust economic climate that supports good jobs and a growing tax base in our community. We must be innovative and willing to do everything possible to facilitate an entrepreneurial spirit in Medicine Hat and area. A strong relationship with the Chamber of Commerce, the DMO, and Invest Medicine Hat will allow us to diversify our support.
- Ensuring that our Corporate Asset Management Plan is adhered to (so that we can ensure that the planned and protracted replacement of our water & sewer lines is achieved). This also includes a coordinated plan for the maintenance and replacement of sidewalk and roadway system overlays. Our critical infrastructure must be maintained systematically.
- We are very fortunate to have some of the best public facilities (for a mid-sized community) in the Province. Likewise, we must be resolute when it comes to maintaining (and in some cases) expanding these facilities, as needed. Medicine Hat’s “quality of life” and growth depends on it.
- We have made a concerted effort to ensure that our Municipal Airport meets the needs of a growing community. The expansion was necessary. Improvements to the runway will make things even better. A “new” Development/Growth Strategy around the airport will foster a need for an increased demand for flights in/out of Medicine Hat. This will

bold well for airlines (like Integra, Air Canada and WestJet) to consider adding supplementary flights to our region.

- Our commitment to *Financially Fit* is not only necessary, but prudent. We are in an era where a dependence on dividends from the Utilities is unsustainable. Creating a Heritage Fund will allow us to put some of the profits away for the next generation. A diversified NGPR (Natural Gas & Petroleum Resources) Growth Strategy will bold well for our citizens.

**4. What opportunities for growth and development do you see in the future for Medicine Hat? What strategies will you seek to implement in order to achieve this?**

The idea of new ‘smoke stacks’ rising in the air anytime soon is not realistic. We are in an era where growth most often comes from ‘within.’ The City must continue to do everything possible to create an economic climate that fosters a growth mindset. Small business is an incubator for medium-sized business. Medium-sized business is an incubator for large business. A reasonable and fair (stable) property tax base and a shrinking non-residential to residential tax ratio, will only serve to make Medicine Hat and area “the place” to do business.

**5. In the past Intermunicipal Collaboration has been entered into on a voluntary basis. The Municipal Government Act review will make the adoption of an Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework a requirement. What aspects of the Tri-Area Intermunicipal development Plan would you like to see expanded, eliminated or amended?**

The Tri-Area Intermunicipal Development Plan signed by Medicine Hat, Cypress County, and the Town of Redcliff in 2010 has served all of our communities very well. The IDP regional framework allows all partners to plan in a systematic way that further enhances and facilitates our strong relationship. That being said, the Province has made strong overtures during the past few years that they would like to see enhanced “regional” collaboration between communities who share natural relationships (by proximity or otherwise). We are fortunate that none of the partners sees this as a threat – but rather, as an opportunity. Regular reviews of the IDP serve every party equally. An upcoming review of the IDP will allow all of the partners to identify and strengthen its ties even further. Shared topics of interest such as transit to Redcliff, access to (additional) potable water, and shared/proportionate funding for capital projects, as well as ongoing operational support for facilities that are accessed by all of our citizens, will be front-and-centre in the next IDP review.

**6. Businesses in Medicine Hat pay a non-residential tax rate that is above the provincial ratio average. In your opinion what is a reasonable ratio? What factors should be considered when calculating the non-residential tax rates?**

Like every other community in the Province, the City of Medicine Hat strives to achieve an optimum Non-Residential to Residential Tax Ratio. Since 2008, Medicine Hat’s tax ratio has consistently been shrinking – but we can always do more. A careful comparison of the top 18 communities in Alberta shows a median 2.00 tax ratio. In the same comparison year of 2015, Medicine Hat’s ratio stands at 2.25. A growing and sustainable tax base will only serve to shrink/shift that tax ratio even more. We can’t afford to transfer that burden to one sector

unfairly. Strong and robust residential sector development will create the opportunity for the City to chip away at the non-residential base. This should in reality, further stimulate a strong business climate, which in turn will foster even more residential growth. Finding the right 'balance' is critical to the long-term vitality of the community.

7. **The City has committed to a Downtown Revitalization Development Plan. What is your personal vision for downtown Medicine Hat? Are there any further opportunities that should be included in the overarching future plans for development in the core of the City?**

I can't recall a recent election where the promotion of the "core of our community" hasn't been one of the front-and-centre issues. Past councils have demonstrated their commitment to the downtown by making continued investments in that area. Literally millions of dollars have recently been dedicated to the deep infrastructure replacement (some of the oldest and complicated infrastructure in the city to replace). Streetscape and lighting improvements are slowly (but surely) creating a more vibrant environment for businesses and the customers alike. To that end, the Downtown Development Incentive Plan (DDRP) has provided over 40 grants to 27 different properties since 2011. Annual grants of \$100k per year for the 'champions of downtown' – the CCDA – continues to foster a mindset of redevelopment and investment. A great example of this is "The Beverage" building on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street S.E. The next City Council must continue to place emphasis and investment in its downtown core. This will go even further to create a climate where a diversified (niche) business climate can grow.

8. **Medicine Hat has made major investments into recreation facilities as well as decisions for cutbacks. What vision and direction do you have for the development of our recreational facilities so as to best service the population of Medicine Hat?**

It is vital that a growing and vibrant community like Medicine Hat continue to monitor, and when prudent, invest in the maintenance and addition of new recreational facilities. A great example is the Family Leisure Centre (FLC). The expansion was significant – but the majority of the funds came from other levels of government. This enhancement has made the FLC one of the premier (single destination) recreational facilities in the Province. That being said, we must be careful that our 'wants' don't overcome our desire to attain fiscal management. The construction of the berms (to protect low-lying areas of the city) have now become a highly sought-after form of recreation. The growing trends (for the past 10 years or so) is for more dry-land spaces. This may necessitate the need for additional expansion for such a purpose at the FLC (in the future). And, we can't forget the popularity explosion in "pickleball." The development of a newly passed Sport & Event Council may compel the next council to review the current Recreation Master Plan. The fact of the matter is, recreational tourism is big business, and great for the community's profile.

9. **Medicine Hat travelers are left with limited options when it comes to air travel. To facilitate a more convenient and efficient travel mode for Medicine Hat and area how would you pursue lower airfares, increased flight frequency, better connection times and increased load capacity for travelers?**

We have made a concerted effort to ensure that our Municipal Airport meets the needs of a growing community. The building expansion, runway improvements (to the tune of \$15m) and a newly revised Development/Growth Strategy for the airway proper will go a long way to create a more positive experience for the airport authority, flight companies, and the customer base alike. The object of any airport (particularly in a mid-sized market like ours) is to increase flight ridership. Regular communication with our flying partners led to recent improvements. The question is, can we do even more or better? Fees and taxes at any airport can make flight options and expansion prohibitive. Striking the right balance between necessary fees (to maintain operational costs at the airport) and a desire to see increased flight options, is the million dollar question. That said, I'm confident that with a continuous open line of communication between all parties, our region will continue to demonstrate an increased demand for flights in/out of Medicine Hat. The final litmus test may very well be, when will the likes of WestJet see it fit to finally take a hold in our market?

10. **How do you feel that the council and the City can provide a more efficient business-to-government process to streamline government services for business both online and within City Hall?**

Business (large or small) play a critical role to the ongoing vitality of a community. It is not only necessary, but essential that City Hall continue to have an open two-way communication with the business community. This function is largely accomplished through the noble efforts of the Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Home Builders Association of Medicine Hat, and others. A lot of effort has been made over the past few years to ensure that regular meetings between the City and these organizations take place. This has inevitably led to an increase of dialogue (to create solutions to perceived or real issues in the business and development community), but also a decrease in complaints. A one-stop-shop approach for licenses and permits at City Hall has made significant gains over the past few years. The Chamber of Commerce Executive Director (Lisa Kowalchuk) has also brought a strong business acumen (and advocacy) to the table. This allows City Council to be front and centre with policy input and changes.

11. **As costs for services increase and costs to businesses increase at all levels of Government, how will you evaluate the increases and charges to ensure fee structures are reasonable and that any increases are implemented over a reasonable period of time?**

Costs and fees for services is a reality in every municipality. The fundamental question we constantly have to ask ourselves is, are our fees and charges reasonable? The City sets its fees and charges mostly by benchmarking them against what other 'like' municipalities are charging (usually at the median level) and, by monetizing the actual departmental costs, which in turn is extrapolated into an appropriate fee(s). Regardless, the City needs to ensure that the fees and charges are appropriate for "our" economic climate. Establishing fees and charges using any kind of metric that comes to mind, only to stifle economic development, isn't going to mean

much of anything to anyone, in the end. Graduated fee increases have worked well for the City in the past. At the very least, this way, the fee increases are predictable and better absorbed in that case.

**12. What are your plans and/or strategies for achieving financial sustainability while balancing service delivery, capital requirements, cost containment and fair taxation levels?**

*Financially Fit* is a good example of how our City responded to a downshift in commodity pricing all around the world. This of course had a direct impact on our dividends. This sudden shift challenged every level of government to ‘do more with less.’ Other levels of government are now recording mounting debt-levels, unlike nothing that has been seen before. The City of Medicine Hat (on the other hand) responded by making measured cuts and reductions that would ‘tighten the purse strings,’ but not put us in a precarious position. Some staffing reductions were also achieved through attrition. The City’s NGPR (Natural Gas and Petroleum Resources) Department cut staff in the 10-15% range (mostly made up of contractors). To that end, the fact that the majority of our unions understood the need to do their part for Financially Fit (and voluntarily settled for a 0% increase for 2017), is not only unprecedented in the Province of Alberta – but to be applauded. The question is, can we do more? I believe that with a measured approach, we can. The derivative of “pulling all the levels” set-out in Financially Fit will put us in a better position to deal with economic up and down swings in the future. We can’t underestimate the positive impact of establishing and supporting the likes of the DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) and Invest Medicine Hat. In a short couple years, these organizations have created a profile for our region which is now just beginning to pay dividends. The economic climate in the Medicine Hat and area hasn’t been as good as it is now for many years. In fact, a national business publication named Medicine Hat as the place to do watch-out for in the next few years – where we are poised to have some of the strongest economic growth in Alberta, when compared per capita to other mid-sized communities. This is evident in the developmental upswing evident throughout the community the past few months.