

**Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce
2017 Candidate Questionnaire
Julie Friesen Responses**

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

I absolutely love our City and remain totally committed to serving the people of Medicine Hat with common sense, caring, respect, integrity, energy and enthusiasm. This Council has forged a strong team with a unified group of individuals sharing clear priorities for our community over the past four years. I am proud of what we have accomplished together this far. It would be both an honour and privilege to continue serving as we share our ongoing commitment to create increased economic vibrancy and quality of life in Medicine Hat.

I also believe we are at a turning point, an intersection in our journey into the future of this beautiful city. We can choose status quo which is never good enough, or we can work together to position our city for long term success and a solid footing amidst market and technology changes and new economic opportunities.

New, fresh ideas are important. So is experience and continuity. I bring experience, background, passion and courage and wish to continue making a contribution should you choose to elect me. I know how to build relationships, facilitate and strengthen a team environment, move toward consensus, develop goals, priorities and clear vision, understand governance and am someone you can trust has no personal agenda. My promise is to always act and make decisions that I believe are in the very best long term interest of the people of Medicine Hat.

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

Most relevant, as it has so many synergies with being a member of City Council and the strong community involvement associated with that, I would highlight my career as a Community Development Officer for the Province of Alberta. The vision is vibrant, resilient communities created through engaged Albertans and inspired leaders with the support of a strong, collaborative non-profit/voluntary and public sector. My role is to help build community capacity through such services as strategic planning, facilitation, governance and board development, public participation and engagement, training and skill development and regional or community partnership and collaboration building. This role is very intertwined with that of being responsive to the community as a member of a City Council team.

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

I am proud to commit to the following strategic priorities for the next four-year term:

- Economic Vibrancy and Entrepreneurial Spirit
- Innovation and Diversification
- A Safe Community and Sound Infrastructure
- Commitment to Financial Sustainability
- Focus on People and Quality of Life
- Encouraging Citizens and Youth Leadership

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?

From my point of view, there are endless opportunities for growth and development. It is our role, along with community partners like the Chamber of Commerce, Invest Medicine Hat, Destination Marketing Organization, Palliser Economic Partnership, Canadian Badlands, municipal neighbors, etc. to ensure we have created the environment that allows Medicine Hat to be viewed as a strong opportunity of choice for those considering business establishment. Part of this total package is ensuring that our community also offers excellent recreational, cultural and social opportunities along with beautiful parks and natural environment so that families will want to be here and participate in a stellar community environment. I believe very strongly that we always need to advocate consistently for the kind of entrepreneurial spirit that helps make us a community of choice.

With the amazing technological expertise and opportunity contained within our community, anyone from any walk of life can choose a smaller city like Medicine Hat and be able to compete successfully in a global market while enjoying the quality of life that may not be as readily available in a large city. We can offer it all. Aerospace, renewable energy, new diversified energy opportunities, an upcoming capacity market, manufacturing and greenhouse development are only a few of the many exciting prospects on our horizon.

The Chamber of Commerce has suggested in their City of Medicine Hat Municipal Economic Development Strategy that the City create an economic development strategy that addresses the major elements and tactics of economic development and that it is developed in partnership and consultation with the organizations currently engaged in economic development activities. I agree with this position and feel we are making good progress in this regard, however it needs to remain very intentional.

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 current Tri-Area Intermunicipal Development Plan would you like to see expanded, eliminated or amended?

The City of Medicine Hat, Cypress County and Town of Redcliff demonstrated leadership and commitment to an Inter Municipal Development Plan a number of years ago and I was personally proud to have worked along with them at the table as we negotiated a successful agreement while keeping a strong, established relationship with our valued neighbors. It is time to update the plan, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because the amendments to the Municipal Government Act will require more formalized regional relationships. As we work through our agreements, it is imperative we respect the spirit and intent originally articulated with such important aspects like contiguous boundaries, planned development without urban sprawl/residential leapfrogging, the cost of recreational facilities and other city services, water agreements and road agreements plus other items important to any of the municipalities.

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?

The Chamber of Commerce has long advocated that the non-residential tax rate should be lowered such that it is more competitive with the provincial ratio average. While I agree the whole climate around non-residential tax rates is one of great consideration for business development and retention in Medicine Hat, there are also considerations affecting the distribution of tax rates – population, type and mix of industry, economies of scale of commercial and industrial developments, relative values of property and commercial sectors compared to other municipalities, and potential economic shifts in values between the classes. In examining the non-residential to residential tax ratio, I note that Medicine Hat is between Red Deer (slightly lower) and Lethbridge (slightly higher), which are good comparators in this regard and provide a slightly different perspective as it relates to the provincial average overall.

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 share the complete commitment the City has adopted with respect to a Downtown Revitalization Development Plan and feel there are very good opportunities envisioned within that plan.

My personal vision is that 'Medicine Hat has a vibrant and welcoming downtown, filled with the buzz of people enjoying the many opportunities it offers. You can choose to partake in fantastic dining, amazing shopping and wonderful cultural opportunities. You can enjoy a craft beer while sitting outside enjoying the beautiful sunshine or take part in any number of great events with your family. You can enjoy the awe and natural beauty of the riverbank, trees and natural environment. There are housing opportunities and it is great to live downtown and share it with neighbors who enjoy the historical heritage. Business thrives here and there is something going on all the time'.

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?

At this point in time, I feel we offer absolutely stellar recreational facilities and have made the development of facilities a major focus and priority. Some examples of this are the opening of the Canalta Centre, Family Leisure Centre Expansion, Burnside Trail, new park developments/improvements, and the Methanex Bowl. A Recreation Master Plan exists and needs to be updated. It helps to guide development for the next years with well-considered research and planning for growth and ever-changing recreational opportunities and needs.

9. Medicine Hat travelers are left with limited options when it comes to air travel. To facilitate a more convenient and efficient travel model 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 worked closely with our air carriers for years to advocate for a strong presence in Medicine Hat and convenient, regular flight times. We lobbied strongly for another carrier and were

so pleased to welcome Integra Air. Air Canada added a daily flight and we continue discussions with WestJet and other carriers. In terms of airport development, our airport terminal expansion and renovations are complete. Airport lands have staged development plans finalized for airside and non-air side lots. There is support, engagement and strong lobbying for the air ambulance contract from AHS to ensure service levels are maintained.

The commitment to convenient air travel that is efficient, allows for competitive fares and good connections is and will be an ongoing priority in my opinion, and the Chamber has been a strong partner with the City in these ongoing efforts.

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?

The City, along with the Chamber, share a commitment to working with community partners and government to create a business friendly environment Medicine Hat. The City needs to remain committed to a considerable focus placed on reducing red tape, removing obstacles, streamlining processes, reducing processing times, simplifying complex reporting obligations, creating clarity and reducing confusion around regulatory requirements and creating a 'one stop shop' or 'one window' access.

Council and city staff strongly share the desire to provide a more efficient business-to-government process and have demonstrated this by the Open for Business Continuous Improvement Initiative, updating the Municipal Servicing Standards Manual, development and implementation of quarterly reporting, meeting with the business community to better understand hurdles and seek solutions together, implementing online processes that provide timely, convenient and flexible access for busy business owners.

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

Ongoing evaluation of fees and charges is essential and within that resides finding the right balance between cost and impact to business while ensuring strong stewardship of the public purse through appropriate and prudent fee structures. Within this term, there was a fee review and implementation within Planning and Development. There were increases and also some decreases. There is always careful consideration within our priority of economic development and fostering a sustainable, growing and diverse economy with a strong business and industrial base. Appropriate and relevant comparisons must be made with other municipalities. I also feel we could share an enhanced relationship in our meetings with the Chamber, and with their help, be in a better position to understand the impact of potential fees and charges prior to final decisions being implemented.

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

The citizens of our city have a right to expect strong financial policy. Financially Fit for the Future is a critical initiative in responsible financial management focused on the long term sustainability of Medicine Hat. The original communication plan and stakeholder consultation process will need renewal as we move forward. This may entail adjustment of the financial levers established. Our focus must be to remain committed to cost containment. We have made some tough decisions already with fees and charges in Public Services that are geared more strategically to those who use the services. We have closed the Arena and Heald Pool. A Heritage Fund has been established.

Focused, targeted Strategic Plans for both NGPR and Utilities for the long term are tailored to assist the City in return to profitability and position the organization for long term success and solid footing amidst market and technology changes in the world of utilities, especially energy. It is critical these are implemented and remain current, given changing trends, developments, opportunities, current and future demands. This is imperative in our long term financial sustainability.

We can no longer depend on our commodity market to provide dividends to the tax base. We must stand strong in contributing to the Heritage Fund. There will be more leadership and courage needed to face additional decisions related to a strong financial future. On some, we need to move forward more aggressively with spending cuts, on some we may decide the impact is too great to the people, but at all times our primary focus must remain on a future that is financially sustainable because the future success of our City depends on it!