



Candidate Questionnaire

COLETTE M. SMITHERS – COLETTE SMITHERS FOR COUNCILLOR

1. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO PUT YOUR NAME FORWARD FOR CONSIDERATION IN THIS ELECTION?

I have had a lifelong interest in politics and community involvement, and over the last few years I have seriously considered becoming more involved in municipal politics. In 2017, my consideration became action and I entered the election for Medicine Hat City Council.

I have had a diverse career and many life experiences that have led me to have a 'people first' approach to leadership. I believe Council should be made up of diverse perspectives. After watching Council meetings over the last year, I feel new voices are necessary. We need Councillors who welcome diverse voices, who are team builders and collaborators, and who seek out the expertise that already exists in our community to help make informed decisions.

I believe I can be an effective new voice at the Council table, and that is why I was inspired to enter this election. I believe a leader's effectiveness comes first from attitude, and I bring a positive, practical, inclusive attitude to the table and a strong commitment to making informed decisions on behalf of the people of Medicine Hat.

2. WHAT QUALIFICATIONS AND/OR EXPERIENCE WILL ASSIST YOU IN BEING AN EFFECTIVE COUNCILLOR?

I immigrated to Canada from Ireland when I was 16. I spent my early career in Administration, Human Resources, and Health Safety & Environment specializing in start-ups and acquisitions across diverse industries.

At 50 years old I ventured into trucking, hauling O/D loads throughout western Canada and the US. I am a proud graduate of the first ever Women Building Futures / Imperial Oil Heavy Equipment Operator Program, and Safety Watch / Tool Crib Attendant for shutdowns and turnarounds.

In 2015, I traded in my steel toes to become the Director of Women Talk Medicine Hat, a published author, and enthusiastic community volunteer. I am a strong proponent for exploring new environments and ideas, and pushing oneself beyond the comfort zone of the status quo.

We need municipal leaders who are inclusive, strong role models for our young people and well-respected advocates and negotiators for our community to attract development and innovation.

I am this type of leader, and I feel that my 'people first' leadership skills are necessary for working productively with other communities in our region, provincial and federal governments, fellow councillors, industries, institutions, and citizens of Medicine Hat.



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3. LIST YOUR TOP 5 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES THAT YOU WILL COMMIT TO DURING YOUR 4 YEAR TERM.

My election platform is focused on three main issues:

1. Community
2. Transportation, and
3. Economic Development.

Two additional priorities for me will be:

4. Increased communication with citizens, and
5. Encouraging active participation from citizens to guide Council.

My focus on community is based on ensuring that Medicine Hat is viewed as a welcoming and inclusive community. I want families to move here and feel right at home, and I want low-income families and seniors to be able to affordably access city leisure services.

My focus on transportation includes ensuring City transit operates in an efficient and affordable manner, while still being able to get those who need the service as close to where they need to get on and off as possible. I believe complex issues like changing transit should involve in-depth consultation with those directly involved, e.g. city staff, bus drivers, and transit users. I am also concerned with ensuring safe, easily accessible routes in and out of our City for commercial transporting.

My focus on economic development involves creating an environment conducive to retaining local businesses and helping them grow and thrive, as well as attracting new business to our City. I believe we need to work in partnership with our neighbouring communities to promote, attract, and support economic diversification. We are not the “forgotten corner”. I see Southeast Alberta is the ‘Opportunity Corner’ with the City of Medicine Hat as its hub. In Southeast Alberta we have some of Canada’s best solar and wind resources, lots of skilled energy workers, and over 40% of planned commercial solar and wind projects in Alberta. I believe an opportunity exists for us to capitalize on the growing solar and wind energy industry in our region.

Beyond my three main priorities, it is also very important to me that the people of Medicine Hat set the agenda for Council, and that Council communicates plans and decisions effectively. The lack of communication from City Hall is a frustration for both individuals and businesses. Therefore, I believe a clear communication strategy is a fundamental requirement of the new Council.

Our city is diverse and boasts a dynamic, thriving community of inspiring people - entrepreneurs, artists, educators, innovators, financiers, business leaders, caretakers, visionaries, volunteers, retirees, and more. We need to encourage and provide regular opportunities for input from our diverse community about their ideas, concerns, and priorities for our city.

I have been collecting lists of issues that have been brought up by city residents. I will be posting my list, entitled **Hatter Hot Topics**, on my Facebook page - Colette Smithers for Councillor. I would like to see the new Council engage in addressing topics brought up by our community on a regular, ongoing basis. As a Council, we need to commit to engaging more often with city residents, as a group and individually, and not just when major issues emerge.



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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?

Growth and development begins with leadership. I believe Council needs to provide an environment conducive to helping current businesses grow and thrive, while also attracting new long-term businesses to our community.

Medicine Hat City Council must lead with a positive 'sunshine state of mind' attitude that fosters cooperation and collaboration among our residents, businesses, institutions, organizations, regional communities, and all levels of government.

There is no doubt that Medicine Hat and Southeast Alberta are well known for their energy expertise in the oil and gas industry. We can add to our stellar energy reputation by capitalizing on the emerging wind and solar energy industry in our region. I support the work of the SE Alberta Energy Diversification Strategy (SEEDS) group. They are a regional collaboration of partners (including the City, MHC, EDA, Community Futures, AB Government, Brooks/Newell) who recognize that the renewable energy industry presents an opportunity to attract commerce, grow the job market, support existing business, and diversify business within Southeast Alberta.

A 2017 report from SEEDS – www.seedsalberta.ca indicates SE AB has some of Canada's best sun and wind resources, and over 40% of planned large-scale solar and wind projects in Alberta are in SE AB. Each project brings hundreds of construction jobs, 10-20 permanent jobs, and provides vast supply chain impacts for local business in hospitality, trades, and service companies. Additionally, opportunities exist to develop training and research facilities and manufacturing and distribution centers for the solar and wind industry.

The City of Medicine Hat is one of seven regional members of SEEDS. My strategy would be for the City to continue in this group and extend their efforts to work in collaboration with our neighbouring communities to better understand, attract, support, and benefit from the renewable energy industry.

5. IN THE PAST, INTER-MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION HAS BEEN ENTERED INTO ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS. THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT ACT WILL MAKE THE ADOPTION OF AN INTER-MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK A REQUIREMENT. WHAT ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT TRI-AREA INTER-MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE EXPANDED, ELIMINATED OR AMENDED?

The Tri-Area Inter-municipal Development Plan (IDP) of July 2010, is a collaboration of the City of Medicine Hat, the Town of Redcliff and Cypress County, outlining the region's shared responsibility in the areas of land use; rural and urban development; service and growth; roads and transportation; environmental protection; oil & gas; water.

As the 10th anniversary of the IDP approaches, collaboration will no longer be voluntary, but a requirement of the MGA. This is a timely opportunity to review the tri-area IDP and propose amendments. A diverse panel, representative of all IDP collaborators, would be required to conduct such a review.



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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 Policy of 17JUN2015 on *Tax Equity: Narrowing the gap between residential and non-residential property taxes*, implies that services funded from property tax revenue are delivered in proportion to the assessed amount. This is not the case. Residential and Non-Residential (Business) property tax revenue is pooled to fund municipal services, including police, fire, road maintenance, snow clearing, parks, swimming pools, public transit, and infrastructure. These services are delivered to the city as a whole.

The formulas for assessing Residential and Non-Residential (Business) tax rates are calculated based on different criteria, thus it is not practical to suggest that Non-Residential (Business) property taxes should be close to or equal to Residential property taxes.

The 2017 Non-Residential Assessment Methodology clearly outlines the process to calculate property tax assessments on Commercial and Industrial property.

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?

There has been a lot of planning, consulting, and visioning done over the last decade to create an outstanding Downtown where people live, work, play and learn in a thriving, safe and diverse environment. Many of these plans envision a Downtown Medicine Hat that is the heart of our community.

With respect to downtown revitalization, a lack of communication from the City is one of the biggest frustrations for downtown business owners. And, as several of them suggest, it is long past time to break down that long-term plan into small actionable steps and do something.

As such, my personal vision for downtown Medicine Hat is one that is developed in collaboration with the City, the downtown business community, and interested citizens. Together, we need to create a practical strategy for revitalizing downtown that focuses on what the people of our community want, what the businesses in downtown need, and what the City can feasibly do to help address those needs and wants and decrease impediments to development in downtown.

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?

The Medicine Hat Council Strategic Plan 2014-2018 highlights a priority of Social Wellness: *A safe community that welcomes diversity and supports all citizens with high quality and accessible cultural, recreational, and public services.*



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~~It is important for our city to address social wellness in a single unified strategy; however, the implementation of the strategic plan has lead to a separation of cultural, recreational, and public service initiatives. Some of the concerns our residents have shared with me are:~~

- Cost prohibitive access to facilities for community driven productions, i.e., staging community theatre at the Esplanade
- Canalta / Esplanade are competing for events
- Mix of private vs public management of facilities
- No transit service to Canalta Centre
- Only 49/182 dates between 01OCT2017-31MAR2018 are booked at Canalta, 46/49 are Tigers games
- Segmented committees / boards; no central point of planning or administration for culture, recreation, and public service.
- Lack of financial options to facilitate participation, i.e., scalable transit fares, Fair Entry, family / group pricing, special offers
- More vacant space added to downtown with the closure of the arena.
- User fees constantly rising, another 5% increase proposed in Financially Fit

Council's approval on 18SEP2017 of the creation of the Medicine Hat Sport & Event Council, an initiative of the Alberta Games Society and Medicine Hat Direct Marketing Organization, is a positive step toward building a unified strategy.

We can also learn from the best practices of others. A great example of regional collaboration for the construction and delivery of recreational facilities and services is the Parkland County/Spruce Grove/Stony Plain alliance.

It would serve Council to conduct a review of all committees/boards existing under the social wellness umbrella, with a view to aligning and streamlining all under a unified strategy to 'support all citizens with high quality and accessible cultural, recreational and public services.'

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?

Medicine Hat Airport (YXH) is a regional airport owned by the City of Medicine Hat. As a regional airport, it does not function as a 'hub', but rather as a feeder into Calgary (YYC), a 'nationally-significant airport' in the National Airports System.

Just this year, the City of Medicine Hat received \$12,989,598 Federal Airport Capital Assistance Funding for the 'Rehabilitation of Runway 03-21 and Taxiway A', work that is currently underway. Additionally, Bylaw #4294 to 'regulate the use of lands adjacent to or in the vicinity of the Medicine Hat Municipal Airport within the city for the purpose of ensuring that any use is not incompatible with the safe operation of said airport', was presented and adopted at the Council meeting of 18SEP2017. It is as yet undetermined what, if any, additional services either the funding or bylaw could attract to the airport.



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~~Flight frequency, connections and load capacity at an airport are determined by the Transport Canada National Airports System categories. As a regional airport, Medicine Hat does not presently meet the criteria to offer additional air travel options.~~

Currently, Medicine Hat and area personal and business travelers have good travel options available to us, including frequent flights YXH-YYC, drive/park/fly, and a choice of daily door-to-door passenger shuttles. Shuttles have no load capacity restrictions, an appealing perk for international and/or long-term travelers.

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 online and within City Hall?

My apologies, I could not complete a response to this question before the submission deadline.

11. As costs for services increase and costs to business 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?

My apologies, I could not complete a response to this question before the submission deadline.

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

Decreased oil, natural gas and electricity prices have led to a \$23 Million shortfall in The City of Medicine Hat's operating budget for each of 2015 and 2016. The shortfall for 2017, 2018 and forward is undetermined. The Financially Fit for the Future Plan (FFTF) was presented in an Open House on 01JUN2016 as a plan to make up the funding shortfall. The framework of the plan identifies 7 Levers that can be adjusted to make up the shortfall. Those 'levers' are Cost Containment, Service Level Examination, Property Tax Adjustments, Grants & Investments, Utility Rates, User Fee Review and Financial Reserves.

On September 5, 2017 Council imposed a new transit system on the city, with little notice and no trial period. This new system was touted as being highly efficient, providing improved service in a cost effective manner. The system wreaked havoc on the citizens of Medicine Hat. After 1 day of operation, Council passed a motion to tweak and improve the new transit system. After 13 days of operation, Council passed a motion to revert to the old transit system.

This was the first 'lever' adjustment of FFTF. It not only caused and continues to cause social hardship for our residents, but also has exacerbated the financial challenge of making up the shortfall. The transit change was supposed to save \$650,000 per year in operating costs. The cost to revert to the old system has yet to be determined, nor do we know the total costs of research, data review, consultation and design of the new transit system.

The Transit debacle highlights the need for a full, transparent review of Financially Fit for the Future to ensure no further 'lever' adjustment is made without clearly understanding the ramifications to our citizens and our financial plan.



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Council should also seek clarification on the status of two other current significant financial issues that have not been addressed in FFTF. Details as follows:

- Canalta Centre
 - o \$74.9 Million project cost
 - o Additional \$10 Million loan to complete the project is being paid off through a ticket tax of \$2.15/ticket.
 - o \$5.4 Million is the estimated interest that will be paid on \$10 Million loan at 3% over 30 years
 - o \$400,000 was recovered through the ticket tax in 2015/2016; that equates to about 33 dates at full capacity of 5,500 patrons
 - o In the 182 dates between 01OCT2017-31MAR2018, only 49 dates are booked at the Canalta Centre, 46 of which are Tigers games.
 - o Financially Fit calls for the city to offload 40,000 sq.ft. of City facility space; the 4,000 seat Arena is abandoned and the Canalta Centre 5,500 seats added. Net add of 1,500 seats

- Manyberries
 - o 01JAN2012 Manyberries purchased for \$48.6 Million
 - o 08FEB2014 Emergency Protection Order protecting the Great-Sage Grouse
 - o 17SEP2014 City of Medicine Hat files suit of \$42 Million against Federal Government for loss of income on the Manyberries field
 - o 2016-2019 NGPR Return to Profitability Statement measure: Work toward a legal or negotiated solution to resolve the issue of expropriated oil and gas assets.
 - o What is the status of the \$48.6 Million purchase price?
 - o Is the field operating in any capacity, if so, what are production levels?
 - o What is the total of legal fees to date and what is the projected cost of legal fees?
 - o What is the probability the suit will be decided in favour of the City?
 - o How long and at what cost will the City continue in litigation/negotiation?