

Respondent

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Time to complete

1. Please enter your full name and municipality.

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Darren Hirsch representing beautiful Medicine Hat, Alberta

2. What active role have you played to improve our community prior to running for council/mayor?

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In addition to City Council, I have over 25 years of significant board experience, including First Chair of the MH & District Chamber of Commerce, Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta, Chairman of the Board for Medicine Hat College, a proud Kinsmen member for many years, member of the City of MH Social Advisory committee, Vice President and coach of MH Ringette, and a coach in minor hockey for many years to name just a few. Early in my career I was the Programs Manager of McMan Youth, Family and Community Services, serving disadvantaged youth and families for over 5 years. Back in that day, I spearheaded the development of the skateboard park in Kin Coulee. As you can see, my enthusiasm and passion for this city knows no bounds.

3. What initiatives would you propose to improve tourism, investment attraction and development to our municipality and region and support business recovery during/after the pandemic? \*

Continue to support the great work Tourism Medicine Hat is doing and our award winning investment attraction efforts. In addition to every citizen being "promoters" of our beautiful city, more formally, my dream is to have a coordinated effort of "Team Medicine Hat" derived from all aspects (business, social, tourism) of promoting Medicine Hat. A collective, coordinated response to the rest of the world of what Medicine Hat has to offer would be the ultimate for me. I will paraphrase Jace Anderson Executive Director of Tourism Medicine Hat- "when people visit Medicine Hat, they are drawn to the warmth of the city. When they decide to relocate here, they contribute to the social fabric and economic vitality, which in turn make them ambassadors of this city, and the cycle repeats. That really resonates with me.

4. In Medicine Hat, businesses pay a higher proportion of property taxes compared to the residential sector. Medicine Hat's tax gap of 2.35% is one of the highest in Alberta. What is your position on the current approach to taxation and your thoughts on potential strategies to narrow this gap?

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My thoughts have never changed since being elected on council. Although I did not have a hand on how the tax gap came to be, I am proud that I seen a pronounced shrinkage of that gap during my term on council. Taxes is a zero-sum game, meaning that if business taxes go down, other sector taxes would have to go up like residential taxes. Practically speaking, I do not want to create animosity and a "us vs. them" squabble of residential tax payers and business tax payers. The key to success is economic growth and expense control. Driving new economic growth while supporting our existing businesses, augments our business tax base. This additional revenue results in a lower average tax bill for business owners which spares our residential tax payer. Of course the other side of the coin is keeping city spending in control within the city. What did this past council do about it? An award winning investment attraction effort, coupled with the biggest expense reduction in city history. This strategy is clearly making a positive difference.

5. If elected, what specific steps would you take to encourage & promote entrepreneurship within the region?

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I have been a passionate advocate for business both professionally as a banker and in my volunteer/community involvement for a very long time. Bringing business to Medicine Hat generally needs a "can do" environment. What does that mean? Reduction of the city "getting in the way/red tape", lower taxes, keeping strong partnerships like the one we have with Medicine Hat College, to provide a

strong and skilled workforce to support business. Capitalize on the strengths and diversification of our city, i.e. petrochemical, agriculture, crypto currency, greenhouses. We are the sunniest city, located on the Trans Canada highway, close to US markets. Given the digital economy, we have seen a trend of people working for large corporations anywhere in the world. We are leading the way on new initiatives with carbon capture and hydrogen hub efforts. Why not Medicine Hat for all these reasons?

6. What is your stance on COVID-19 related laws that mandate requirements, including masks and vaccine passports?

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Like everyone, I cannot wait until Covid-19 is in our rear view mirror. It is absolutely tragic that this event has divided us. However, the effects of this pandemic has been crushing; the loss of loved ones, businesses and our mental health. With that in mind, I support any initiatives that reduces these tragedies. Although I do generally support "freedom to choose", this has to be put aside for the greater good.

7. What is your plan for publicly-funded services (examples would include Medicine Hat Public Library, power plant, facilities) if elected?

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Analysis of business is something I do every day in my role as a banker. My plan is to make decisions based on facts. For any service offering, continuation of that service needs to be reviewed with both the present and future in mind. Is that service going to experience headwinds - emerging factors that are detrimental to future success, or tailwinds - emerging factors that will enhance that service. Things like the internet or carbon taxes are not going away. Can we mitigate some of these challenges to continue our success? Do we need to pivot and innovate, or do we exit? We cannot ignore the fact that our world is evolving. We need to evolve as well. Tough decisions lie ahead. I believe my skill sets can significantly contribute to making good decisions for our residents.

8. How important is it for our region to have a local Community College? What specific steps could the municipality do to work better with Medicine Hat College to provide ongoing opportunities for future learners?

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As past Chairman of the Board for Medicine Hat College, I am pretty biased. We are very fortunate to have this institution in our community, and we need to do everything we can to support it. Communication is key, which I demonstrated in both my roles - Chair of MHC and Councillor for the City of Medicine Hat. At the college, we worked hard in providing programs and educational alternatives that enhance our community workforce. That meant constant conversation with businesses and the City. From the City viewpoint, we need to have a strong college to demonstrate a skilled and capable workforce- a key factor in growing our new and existing business. Essentially, we need each other to succeed. What efforts have been done to date lately? I am pleased with the formation of the Strategic Opportunities Team (SOT), comprised of community partners within the community that meet virtually on a regular basis, simply to discuss initiatives and strategize on what each partner can do to support one another. The president of MHC and the Chamber of Commerce are valued members.

9. How will you attract newcomers to the district and address the needs for a skilled workforce? \*

A proud city that entices people to work, play and live is fundamental. We have alot going for us, including being the sunniest city (great climate), beautiful amenities, low taxes and low crime. We need to continue to work on removing our infamous "best kept secret" moniker. We need to tell the world about Medicine Hat. It's not about reckless growth, it's about a beautifully maintained city that has diverse industry and jobs that can support current and future generations. We believe we are telling our story. We just received a prestigious award from the province for our work for 2021; Building Economic Strength Category: City of Medicine Hat, Innovative Approach to Economic Supports. Here is the link: <https://www.alberta.ca/ministers-awards-for-municipal-excellence-previous-award-recipients.aspx> Clearly, we are leading the charge in Alberta.

10. What is your stance on the importance of mental health & wellness support in our region? What ideas, implementations, and initiatives would you put forward to improve the overall mental health & wellbeing of our community?

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As mentioned, this pandemic has been very traumatic to our collective mental health. What it did do, however, was shine a huge light on mental health efforts and fundamentally altered our views on mental health in a positive way. "The community raises a child", is a long used adage. I believe community raises us all. Now more than ever, we need to support each other and community efforts in this regard. As a councillor, I have been very vocal in the need for our services to be complimentary to each other and not duplicative. We need to work together in a collaborative approach in not just dealing with mental health, but other social issues. I saw this first hand as a social worker in my previous role as Programs Manager for McMan Youth, Family and Community Services. I think we have made tremendous strides, with the formation of the internal city Social Collective Committee, which is geared to support and coordinate with existing non-profit service providers. This is a fine example where the city does not have to lead. More importantly, it needs to support. Great work is being done in this area.

11. How will you further diversity and inclusion initiatives in our region, as it relates to each of the pillars in the Chamber's Vote Prosperity Platform: <https://www.medicinehatchchamber.com/voteprosperty2021/> (<https://www.medicinehatchchamber.com/voteprosperty2021/>)

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I am proud of the efforts made in my time as Chair of Medicine Hat College. With regard to our board selection criteria, we created a diversity and inclusion matrix, designed to replicate the geographic, cultural, gender (among other skill sets) which reflects the attributes of this region. We were proud of the document. They say "duplication is a form of flattery", - the Province of Alberta adopted our matrix within the Ministry of Advanced Education. I continue to work towards a inclusive environment, one that celebrates diversity. The best decisions are made by contributions by diverse opinions. Thankfully, we have this in society, and I whole heartedly champion it. Without it, we still would believe the earth is flat.

12. On a municipal level, how do you intend to address climate change and pollution?

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As mentioned before, our world is evolving. Nothing drives me more crazy when I hear "we have always done it this way." I believe if you do not innovate - you perish. Whether or not you believe in climate change, we need as a society to do our part to limit emissions. Carbon tax is coming as well. That is why I am proud of our work in "pivoting" and creating the recently announced Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (CCUS), in collaboration with our biggest employers Methanex and Canadian Fertilizers see here: <https://chatnewstoday.ca/2021/08/13/city-hopeful-as-they-aim-to-become-second-hydrogen-hub-in-canada/>

13. What strategies will you use to communicate and engage with the community and remain accountable to the citizens?

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I will continue to hold town hall meetings. This is something that Councillor Phil Turnbull invited me to and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It does take effort, and is probably considered "old school" but it is well worth it. Additionally, I respond the best I can to the myriad of emails, calls, facebook messages. I am probably among a very few that still has his name in the phone book, but I do not have a problem with accountability. At a city level, I believe we need to leverage our recently revamped City website, to include streamed council meetings AND committee meetings (that is where the work is really seen), and summaries of these meetings for those who cannot devote the time to watch. We need to embrace technology and the city to do its part to inform its citizens. I also believe we need to have more items being debated in "open to the public" meetings. I am proud of the collective efforts of this past council. There should be nothing stopping us from a good public debate - something I enjoy, as evidenced here: <https://medicinehatnews.com/news/local-news/2020/11/04/mayor-councillor-tussle-over-tax-penalties/>

14. Are there any other issues you wish to address or highlight that were not mentioned in the questions above?

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I appreciate the Chamber offering these questions. Deciding on who to elect can be frustrating, especially when you do not know the candidate. I believe I demonstrate proven leadership, long-standing commitment to this community that we all love. Please visit my website at [www.hirschforcouncillor.com](http://www.hirschforcouncillor.com)