

Respondent

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Time to complete

1. Please enter your full name and municipality.

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Justin Wright

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

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I own and manage a local catering and food truck business, where we put supporting local as one of our core values. We do this through community donations/sponsorship, while purchasing from local small business and supplier. Currently we support the business efforts of the region by purchasing our supplies and maintenance services from many different local businesses. Before starting my own business, I spent the last 15 year in a retail management career, which started here in the Hat. Volunteering is something that is near to my heart. I volunteer within the community with multiple organization. One organization I volunteer with is MyCityCare, where we set up a street store for members of the community to come and get clothing, food hampers, kid's packs, and personal care items at no charge. In addition to volunteering with the street store, I also donate a free meal from my food truck business to all volunteers and community members who come through the street stores. For the past three years I have also volunteered as a hockey coach with Medicine Hat Minor Hockey. I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to impact children's lives by developing skills, character, and teamwork which they will use on and off the ice. Last year I started a small mental health support group called The See Tomorrow Project. I put out videos, posts, and interviews with guest who share their story with mental health or how they are impacting those around them. We also support members of our community with in person meetings where individuals have a safe space to share, grow, and heal.

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? *

We need to start by diversifying our current economic scope, looking into new industry that can future proof our community (ie Carbon capture, small reactor nuclear power). I believe the city is taking the right first steps for tourism with the waterfront district, but I believe we can do better and will need to make some changes to the plan. The WFD is a long-term plan that can have positive impacts on tourism and the overall brand of Medicine Hat. I also believe we need to champion for the full twinning of highway 3, as this will increase safety and tourism at the same time. To support our local entrepreneurs and business recovery, I believe the city needs to do a better job reducing permit costs and red tape and increasing transparency through the inspection process. Having started a business during the pandemic, I found the process to be rather troubled. Attempting to contact the right departments and getting the right answers became a rigorous affair. Departments within the city seemed incredibly siloed, making it difficult to get the correct answers. While I do believe the city has made strides to improve this, there is still a long way to go. I believe we need to simplify the process, cut permit costs for residents, and empower our municipal employees with the knowledge and information to

streamline the process. Working towards converting the Medicine Hat College to a University should also be viewed as a priority. University towns, see an increase on nearly every front of prosperity, from tourism, population growth, social programs, and economic investment. Addressing these points will ultimately show to potential new residents and investors, that Medicine Hat is taking the right first steps to be the most relevant and competitive market to live and to build a healthy sustainable business.

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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Given the changing economic outlook and status in the province and country, I believe municipalities are becoming increasingly competitive with one another. Medicine Hat should be no different, we need to change our brand. Geographically speaking we are within a three-hour drive of one of the most aggressive entrepreneurial markets on the continent, Calgary. They have positioned themselves as a go to market for business development, and economic growth. All while current and existing council failed to change course to adapt to the increased competition for investment and population growth. As a city, we've scared away new investment with outdated tactics, stagnant population growth, and high taxation. If elected, I would explore reducing the tax gap of 2.31% by 50% within two years and eliminating it within three. I would also move to review all fees the city currently charges, such as but not limited to permit costs for locals, utilities administration fees, etc. With the current heading, Medicine Hat is expected to have its population growth decrease from 0.8% to just 0.6% by 2050, and only a 0.5% YOY growth rate. The old mantra of "slow growth is good growth" I believe has stifling our mindset as a city towards population growth and by consequence, taxation vs. services. Meaning the population and businesses we have, pay more, thus making the Hat less desirable. This creates an infinite loop that plays out worse every time the loop completes itself. To stay relevant in the Southern Alberta Municipal landscape, Medicine Hat needs to be growing at a rate of 1.3 to 2.1%. Local examples of this are Lethbridge, Brooks, and Calgary which are growing at rates of 1.5, 1.64, and 1.9% respectively. We need to show we are open for business, and we are worth relocating to. Population growth is the key to making this possible, and vital for the Hat to change its brand when it comes to prosperity and growth.

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

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If elected, I would look at a "support local" permitting and grant program for the next 3 years to spur economic investment and recovery. This program would offer decreased permit costs for Hatters looking to start or continue operating the local businesses. During this time, I would also look to develop a one-time start up grant to help support local entrepreneurial growth, partnered with the previously mentioned closing of the tax gap, would encourage, and promote entrepreneurial investment in the Hat.

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

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I believe municipalities who introduce local mask bylaws open themselves up to jurisdictional challenge, which could result in additional cost in potential court challenges. In our current governmental structure, the provinces hold the ultimate governmental jurisdiction on these types of decisions. Municipalities must work closely with the provincial authorities to lobby and fight for their constituents' wishes. With regards to the vaccine passports, ultimately due to the contradiction between the new measures and the law that was passed stating the government cannot force someone to be vaccinated, I am against it. Contrary to the notion made at the candidate's forum, that this is the same situation as the smoking bylaw that the city introduced, it's not. There was no law at the time that states it's a right to smoke. Rather it was your choice to do so, whereas with the vaccinations it is covered by law. Due to this contradiction, I believe this approach opens potential new court challenges that could play out over an extended period. I feel vaccine passports are a very slippery slope with long-term implications, which partnered with a law that states "their body their choice," will end messy.

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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These are our advantages, and we must protect them. I am staunchly opposed to the selling of our utilities and when partnered with the seemingly endless closure of our rec centers, creates an environment driving potential family-aged residents away. We need to change the mindset and branding of our city. If elected, I would push to move away from the multiplex ideology for city amenities. While multiplexes do have a place in the ecosystem, it is not as the prime focus, neighborhood-centric model does provide an increase to

community accessibility and engagement. This is especially true with the at-risk demographics in our community. With neighborhood centers, community stakeholders tend to select healthier modes of transportation to attend the facility, are more likely to use them due to travel times of a few minutes vs 45 minutes+ (one way in some cases) via transit to the FLC. I believe the city needs to stop looking at the publicly fund services as money losers and start looking at them as community builders.

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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I believe the college is vital to our community. I'd love to see an even greater impact though, which is why believe we need to partner with all stake holders (college, province, etc) to explore the possibility of converting the college to a university. This would help with a multitude of issues the city is currently facing, more specifically branding. Cities with universities, low cost of living, and a strong portfolio of municipal amenities often see an increase in population and workforce retention due to an increase in graduates planting roots. I believe the university advantage is being seen in Lethbridge where they have nearly tripled our population growth last year alone. When communities have a university transition there is an uptake in students, tourism, population growth, and economic growth as stated previously. In addition, university graduates are more likely to consider staying in the community afterwards, depending on jobs and amenities. This could be another piece that can help secure a stronger future for the Hat.

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

As mentioned in a few of the previous point, we need to change our brand. Council needs to show Medicine Hat is open for business, open for immigration (foreign and domestic), and that we are future proofing in our policies. Let's start with taxes. Medicine Hat has a tax gap of 2.31 as of 2018, and this gap needs to be closed to show we are viable place to locate. If elected, I would explore cutting this by 50% within two years and eliminating it within three. Now this is an ambitious plan, but I believe this is possible. Long term projects such as the Waterfront District have shown increased tourism and economic prosperity in municipalities where they have done similar projects. The biggest boost from these projects tends to be an increase in tourism, and subsequently many of the other local industries. Tourism is a gateway to relocations, due to potential new residents falling for local differentiators, such as economy, social programs, amenities, taxation rates, and local advantage. Lastly, I would look to explore increasing entrepreneurial grants to support local entrepreneurs and bring in new ones. This would create new jobs, increase desirability to relocate, and expand city revenue

streams.

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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Mental health is vital to the overall health of a community. In August of 2020, I started a mental health support network called The See Tomorrow Project, which consists of 125 members, made up mainly of locals, with some international members. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in any given year, 1 in 5 Canadians experiences a mental illness or addiction problem and by the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 have—or have had—a mental illness. This has shown to be so true in our community and surrounding area. The south zone had 132 mental health related deaths in 2020 alone. As one stake holder in this issue, I believe the city needs to partner with the province and community partners, such as but not limited to the Canadian mental health association, where mental health experts could join in patrols and mental health call. I have witnessed a great number of situations where our police officers went above and beyond to help individuals with addiction and mental health issues in our downtown core, but they are not mental health experts. Having that expertise to begin laying the foundation or planting the seed, if you will, of healing is a vital step towards addressing these root challenges as a community. I would also look to partner with stakeholders to open up greater access drop in Mental health clinic to support our community.

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/voteprosperity2021/> (<https://www.medicinehatchchamber.com/voteprosperity2021/>)

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Population and economic growth, I believe, are the key issues facing the new council. I am a firm believer of immigration (both foreign and domestic) as it can lead to an increasingly innovative social and business climate. These innovations help to shape the branding of a community, making it more desirable. New immigrants to Canada drive economic development and innovation through their participation in entrepreneurship. In Canada, immigrants represent a significant percentage of the country's entrepreneurs, and their

companies are more likely to serve export markets. Tackling population growth issues will allow for the city to expand on income revenue to help with our infrastructure development project funding, while creating a strong workforce backfill to support our existing businesses and entrepreneurs. This direction helps us to support our business, increase our local economy, and expand our publicly funded service.

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

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One way the city can make an impact on climate change is also a way to turn a challenge the utilities have and turn it into a strength. Carbon capture. Attracting this new industry would be paramount for the city to impact may different focal points all at once. This industry can offset the carbon tax costs of utilities, create new good paying jobs, and be a factor in expanding our population growth. I would also investigate continuing our expanding trail and path network into the downtown core and creating dedicated bike lanes on all major thoroughfares into downtown. As seen in other southern Alberta communities, this has led to an increase in usership and helped with economic development.

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

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I believe there is simple yet powerful ways to communicate, engage with, and remain accountable to the city. One option that has come to the forefront of the covid age is digital forums or townhalls. One to two times a quarter, Council as a whole or individually can hold a moderated town hall digitally or in person to ensure that the community can share their thoughts, views, and concerns on issues. Another way to solicit feedback is quick 3 question surveys residents could take. These micro-surveys can be targeted to specific topics and can be used by council to address specific issues in a quick turnaround. Lastly, we need to start sharing the why on decisions. Having frank and transparent conversations on important issue builds trust and rapport with the community and with stakeholders, whereas closed door debates with minimal community involvement builds distrust.

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

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Two Bylaws I'd like to review would be the skateboard and school bus bylaws. Both are outdated and need a thorough review. Looking first at the bylaw that prevents school buses from using their full safety light systems. I believe sacrificing child safety in favour of traffic flow is unacceptable. I have seen too many close calls over the years but could never figure out why the bus drivers wouldn't use their full light system. Now, understanding if they did, they would face consequences is something we need to change. Lastly, I would like to see a review of the skateboard bylaw. Much like the school bus bylaw, I believe this one is outdated and disenfranchises youth within our community. I believe, with acceptable safety terms, this bylaw should be repealed and the downtown core be open to those who wish to use it.