

Respondent

< 29 Anonymous >

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Time to complete

1. Please enter your full name and municipality.

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Kelly Gayle Allard Medicine Hat

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

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20 years ago when the school board tried to bring in busing fees, I protested along with my family. I suggested that the MHSD #76 buy city bus passes for the high school kids – they would save a ton of money, the city would have a ton of new riders, it would get school buses off the road and the kids would have a lot more freedom. It was a win-win-win situation but Tot-em had a ten year contract at that time so nothing was done. I picketed the provincial building about my husband's substandard care at MHRH. We met with the Powers That Be and got procedures changed so it did not happen to anyone else; they now use his story as a teaching tool. I volunteered at my kids' schools, helped fund raise by working casinos and bingos, participating in school activities and making presentations to their classes. My late husband Carl worked out of town so I was operating as a single parent to the four children we raised much of the time. There was very little time to spare for activities that took me away from my responsibilities at home. Our priority as parents was to raise good humans and I like to think Carl and I did that very well. They are all contributing members of society with varied careers; best of all they are kind and compassionate.

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? *

Covid taught us we can work from anywhere so I would actively advertise to those people working from home. They can work in Calgary and live here. I would encourage the film industry to come here – we have a great location and if we could land a TV series (Such as Angel Dust that recently filmed here), we would become a tourist attraction. I would also support events such as the Gas City Entertainment Expo. Comic books, superheroes, anime, cosplay, sci-fi, fantasy – it all attracts a big crowd and big bucks. Let's make science front and centre – I'd love to get that telescope back working again. We have an incredible amount of motorcyclists in Medicine Hat, likely more per capita than anywhere in Alberta, probably more than anywhere in Canada. Let's have a motorcycle trade show, a tattoo show, a motorcycle rodeo. We're a great stopping off point for people heading to Sturgis in August, lets welcome the riders. People with money to spend on motorcycles are people with money to spend. Let's show the world Medicine Hat is more than hockey, gas and old people.

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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The City has been keeping taxes artificially low for homeowners for a hundred years with the revenue from oil and gas. Now that's gone and it's not coming back The City failed to diversify when they could. Ted Clugston is cited in a Dec 2019 article in the Financial Post - "You know, there's a saying in Alberta: just one more oil boom, I promise not to waste it," he said, a hint of resignation in his tone. "Everybody in Alberta knows diversification. We all know we should be doing it; it's just hard when things are going so well and you're making money. But we've been hanging out with our fingers crossed for five years now, and we've finally accepted that it is not coming back." We must uncross our fingers and get to work. Single family homes benefit the most, multi family homes and manufactured homes pay a higher rate which pushes rents higher. Businesses pay even higher rates. It is long past time to rework the tax rates, everyone should be paying their fair share. This is going to be unpopular but taxes may have to go up unless we can bring in new investment and do it without financial incentives (like the \$6 million the Aurora property got to build a plant that never opened).

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

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I'm willing to lower the tax burden on businesses that upgrade their buildings downtown over a period of say 5 years so their revenues can catch up to their increased tax burden. Increase walkability of neighbourhoods. Encourage certain businesses to invest in the Waterfront District. I'd like to have some sort of dock people could fish off of. Wouldn't it be nice to have a bait/tackle shop near the river and maybe a spot where people can fish or rent a boat?

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

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These are far better than shutting down the economy or having our hospitals overwhelmed. I am double vaccinated but have been staying home until the vaccine passport was brought in. My money stayed in my pocket. Now I am going out again. I have been extremely critical of our mayor and how he mishandled this, he should have been a leader and been publicly encouraging people to do the right thing. Medicine Hat dropped the ball, always deferring to the provincial government. We have failed our residents. Now Alberta has the highest case count in Canada, far more than twice the number of any other province. We are having to ask for help to transfer our ICU patients out of province. People are dying and their loved ones are far away. At the time I wrote this we had 58 deaths from COVID in our city and not one word of condolence from our mayor or council. Calgary brought in a bylaw requiring all non essential businesses to go to the vaccine passport. That levelled the playing field and re directed the anger from the individual businesses to City Hall. It united people against government instead of each other. I got broad shoulders, I can take the heat.

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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Certain services will never make money like the library and transit but they are necessary and vital services. They must be funded well enough to service the residents of Medicine Hat. Transit is one of my major platform issues. I have spoken with employers whose employees cannot get to work on time or have to leave early because our service stops shortly after 7m on weekends. They can not work on holidays at all as we have no holiday service. Tourists are stuck using taxis or having to rent a car on holidays, that is unacceptable for a city our size. Frankly, it's embarrassing. Our growth has stagnated for the last 10 years. You can bring in all the industries you want but workers need to be able to get there. I was recently asked "If you have one dollar to spend, are you going to spend it on transit or recreation?" I replied "To me it's a question of whether someone goes to work or play. The answer is pretty simple - people must go to work before they can play." (Of course there is a third option, we can spend on both!)

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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The college brings in a lot of students who may choose to live here after. Immigrants come here because our college is cheaper than going to Calgary or Edmonton. Now we have to figure out how to make them stay. More and more young people are eschewing private vehicles, they want to use bicycles and transit. Right now our transit service is awful – it takes forever to get across town and stops running far too early. Our bike lanes are a joke, they are dangerous. Young people will go someplace that makes it easy to live without a car. Affordable housing is necessary to keep them here. A friend was looking for an apartment lately, 20 people were competing for it. Subsidized housing has a waiting list of well over a year the last time I heard.

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

Covid taught us we can work from anywhere so I would actively advertise to those people working from home. They can work in Calgary and live here. As I said before, we need more affordable housing, people are on the list for subsidized housing for well over a year. Rentals are highly competitive, often with as many as 20 people looking at one place. We need to change the perception of Medicine Hat, we are thought of as a retirement community. An old marketing axiom states - Perception is Reality. I would work with immigration services to attract new residents – immigrants are younger than the average Canadian. They tend to have larger families thereby needing more goods and services.

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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Post- COVID we will need mental health supports like never before. My late husband nearly died from flu 4 years ago, he was on life support for 30 days. It was months before he could come home, months more before he could throw away the walker, months more before he was back to sort of normal. He had Post ICU Syndrome – nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, depression etc. He remembered nothing of ICU, I still have Caregiver PTSD 4 years later. I am currently lobbying for our local Primary Care Network to change the funding model for BHCs Behavioural Health Consultants. They're not psychiatrists, they're not psychologists, they don't prescribe meds but they work with your doctor who can. They're free to access, covered by Alberta Health Care, unlimited appointments with a doctor's referral. Right now a doctor must give them time dependent on how many patients the doctor has and if they have a nurse or not. That funding model needs to change, the service should just be there, especially in these times. My BHC helped me get me through my husband's stay in ICU and I was able to be with him every day, I can only imagine how the families feel now.

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

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Council has to be front and centre at cultural events, they have to be seen to attend more than Robbie Burns Dinners and golf tournaments. We have people from more than 40 different countries here in Medicine Hat but we only offer documents in English. Celebrations like Pride Week should be promoted, city wide. Wouldn't it be fun to see council members be part of a drag show? Our city seems to focus on hockey and football but i would like to see events such as the Gas City Entertainment Expo - anime, sci-fi, superheroes, cosplay, video games, board games... the list is endless. Let's make science a major focus as well as fun.

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

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I'd start with the transit system. We have the potential to create a bus riding culture so we can get more cars off the road. That would also help with our parking and traffic problems. Make neighbourhoods more walkable, locate recreational facilities in neighbourhoods so they don't have to drive the kids to swimming lessons. I've been in contact with Bike Medicine Hat, improved and safer bike lanes are a great idea. Reduce our fleet of city vehicles and when they are replaced, replace them with greener options.

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

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We have plenty of ways to engage – e-mail, social media, newspaper, radio and TV ads as well as utility and tax bills, almost everyone gets one. We also need to make sure people can understand it – we have people here from over 40 different countries here, they may not all speak English very well or if they do, their reading comprehension may not be the best. (This is not an insult, they are WAY

ahead; I only know one language). I would look at having some documents translated into the most common languages. We need to go to where they're at – go to schools, social gatherings, places of worship and make sure the message is getting out there. Lately some engagement sessions were held at Echo Dale and Kin Coulee Park *(Police Point?), our buses don't even go there. The recent Parks and Recreation survey was fatally flawed. I took it myself over 10 times; that in itself is a huge failure. Questions were ambiguous and complicated, another failure, especially for someone who does not have English as a first language. Some of the questions showed an obvious bias, another failure. Then they did a follow up survey? Who does that? As for accountability, I have heard complaints that some incumbents were too busy with their day jobs to respond to them. I once sent an e-mail to all council members on an important issue and only got a response from 3 offices; two were personal, the mayor's office said he would get it. I'd like to see standards in response times when contacted through official channels (office phone or e-mail), council member to respond within X number of days. If they don't know the answer, they should pass it on to someone who does and follow up on it.

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

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Incumbents are saying we need experienced council members. No, we don't. Council doesn't run the City, they set policy. The employees run the day to day operations. The oil and gas money is gone. Council knew it was going and did not diversify when they could, now they're scrambling to make cuts. It's time for fresh eyes. We do get training, we're not thrown to the wolves. If the training is inadequate that would be the failure of past councils for not noticing and ensuring the training was amended. From "What Every Councillor Needs To Know" "It is mandatory for each municipality to offer orientation training to each councillor, to be held within 90 days after the councillor takes the oath of office. The orientation training must include: the role of municipalities in Alberta municipal organization and functions key municipal plans, policies and projects roles and responsibilities of council and councillors the municipality's code of conduct roles and responsibilities of the chief administrative officer and staff budgeting and financial administration public participation policy; and any other topic prescribed by the regulations." I found most of this online; I've studied on my own since January. I've watched every council meeting. I'm a voracious reader, a thousand page book is a lazy weekend. I've set policy and made tough decisions all of my adult life as the matriarch of a large family. When organizations/institutions fail me or my family, I make my own path. If I don't like option A or B, I look for Option C.