

Respondent

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Time to complete

1. Please enter your full name and municipality.

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Shila Sharps Medicine Hat

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

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For the past 17 years I've been a downtown business owner and I have played an active role in trying to increase and improve our downtown area. It is incredibly challenging attempting to do a referendum to remove an organization that was actually impeding the growth of our downtown versus enabling prosperity. In order for growth to happen, sometimes you have to remove the barricades. And it's sometimes a role that people don't want to play as they are not comfortable with the conflict that can ensue. I continue to speak to stakeholders and involve them in all information that I could find so that we had a cohesive group ready to move forward. In addition I have sat on various boards and committees throughout my professional life. I work with a particular church group on weekends providing a Sunday lunch to the more vulnerable as well as offering them clothing to assist with day-to-day living. I have volunteered on several boards and committees none of which I will mention as I don't volunteer for the purposes of adding a line item to my resume but rather because I enjoy the association or cause that I am volunteering with.

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? *

I believe some of the initiatives that we can do as a region to improve tourism would be to include events that are at least multiple days that drive traffic to our hotel and restaurant industry. If we are going to do this, we need to ensure that our buildings are in good order and do not appear derelict or abandoned. Our brand is what will attract and keep business, as such I would ensure that we have business support in place to ensure that we can in fact fix dereliction and create a minimum standard for landowners who currently are not engaged in the renewal of their properties. I understand our Events & Tourism committee was making good headway prior to COVID and I would like to see them have the ability to continue to provide solid support to organizations throughout SoE Alberta. There are a lot of opportunities to recognize the area we live in and how we can participate to raise awareness to important topics through events we host. We also have had great success in the past with some of the events we have attracted and I would want the council to continue to support admin in their efforts to find opportunities like we have had in the past to engage our community and enhance businesses that directly benefit from tourism. We need to utilize what we already have such as the military base and the defense research. Quite possibly we have missed an opportunity with bringing other world-class defense or research organizations that can work in conjunction with the defense research teams. In regards to business recovery, there was a lot of support for home-based businesses in terms of shop YXH but we need to do more to provide local recovery stimulus and have more of a focus on helping employers that are invested in our community through being strong employers, contributing through property tax and giving back. We need to help our current business community with their own growth. We have employers in our community that have the capacity for large expansion if they have the necessary support. I also understand there was a significant amount of work invested by the previous Economic Developer that was at City Hall to engage businesses and learn more about what they needed, this was found in the BREWD study. This study was not used in the way it could have been when the new management came into IMH and I think it would be worth our while to study that data and re-engage a diverse business group on how their needs have changed and where they see their future growth.

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 Medicine Hat tax gap of 2.35% it's just under the provincial average of 2.49 populations over 5000 which means we have one of

the highest tax gaps in the province. What that means for business owners is that we're paying almost 2 1/2 times more in property taxes than our residential counterparts on the same assessed property value. If an entrepreneur is paying 2 1/2 times more than a residents it's really not that difficult of an answer to find why we're not attracting new business to our municipality. In order to reduce the tax gap the situation becomes more complex and difficult as now we're talking about miscible reductions in order to minimize or shorten this gap. To control municipal spending there's various options that one can look at, Primarily we need to look at all overhead costs and before we jump to people we should be looking at infrastructure. If we can restore some of our infrastructure versus replace that should minimize the overall spend. The problem with always building you is that now we have two buildings one which is potentially debilitated and went down which doesn't bode well for appearance but there's still maintenance that is required and those costs need to be considered when comparing gnu versus restore.

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

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I think we need to do something different when it comes to entrepreneurship. Potentially people that are looking to venture down an entrepreneurial path; we allocate them a mentor within the city that's gone through the process and understands some of the subjective processes when first establishing. Like a one stop shop. And using the question above, if the property tax rate is 2 1/2 times we are going to struggle to bring in the type of business that generates large amount of jobs and revenue to cover that tax gap the other problem with the tax gap is that we encourage people to be home based businesses which although it has its place we lose the tourism of brick and mortar stores! In essence we need to solve or work on one problem to encourage the second step of increasing entrepreneurship.

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

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This is an incredibly heated topic and a debate but here is my stats as a city councilor, we must leave our personal decisions at the door and you must look at the greater good for a community not just individuals within a community. We are not health experts but I believe we need to take direction from our provincial or federal medical experts and ensure that we step up and manage the restrictions versus our provincial and federal partners. I would much rather ensure that we pass a bylaw for masking, then we are

leading versus following the province. It is imperative that we looked at the greater good so if wearing a mask protects a child or someone that potentially immune compromised then that is something we need to do. I believe Vaccine passports are going to be provincially mandated however the funny thing about choice is that it goes both ways so for those of my peers and family and friends that choose not to have the vaccine that is the freedom of their choice what we must all understand is businesses and government also have the choice to ask for proof of vaccination. The only concern with this is how could this also impact our health care system, will they be able to support the desire for proof of vaccination as I understand that is also a heated debate and one that as an HR professional and candidate, I am watching carefully and trying to navigate with the almost daily changes.

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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Man I love this question! I think we need to keep the publicly funded services in the community. I recently read that we are looking to close many of the rinks/recreation centers and build yet something else in box springs... That place in the community that has no bus service. It is beyond me why we would pull away from our communities. These are the areas that we need to spend our money on making sure that community gyms and recreational facilities are in good working order that our library is utilized to its fullest which may require more funding much like the power plant we need to look at the cost benefit analysis but we also need to look at what it takes away from our our sense of community.

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 we are incredibly lucky having a community college. However I do believe that we could have better partnership opportunities. We talk about building a new conference center in an existing event center and trying to raise money but yet medicine hat college has amazing facilities that we should be looking at. We as a Municipality need to showcase our college, and ensure that all high school graduates a Medicine Hat consider this college before any other. We will need to look at all the diverse curriculum but maybe even shorter certificates for entrepreneurs being offered locally especially now that most everything in the post Covid world can be done via distance. Investing into our college ensures that we increase a demographic that we are currently trying to attract.

However once we get them here, we need to ensure that there is an attraction to stay.

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

Well it doesn't matter how good the sales pitch once we get a newcomer to the area if we don't have communities that are thriving people don't stay. When we are searching or recruiting for professionals otherwise known as a skilled workforce many are looking to establish families and therefore are looking for safe communities that have fitness facility, Parks, walking and dog paths. Well if we're removing our parks and fitness facilities away from communities and moving them to one end of town then we need to understand we are losing some of our attraction. In order to attract a migrant workforce we need to be more culturally aware and I think the best way to do that is to have cultural events such as heritage days with showcases different cultures and heritages which educates people The community on the different cultures that's really highlighting our similarities not our differences.

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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My stance is as such, this is OUR region we need to ensure that the community resources are in fact available locally. I believe there has been a few sources pop up as of late but I found it difficult to navigate who does what. I would also like to ensure that we are not duplicating our efforts as funding gets spread amongst organizations all doing the same thing. I would like to see our community start "The Medicine Hat Mental Health Monday Check In" and whether there are free seminars, webinars or just coffee with a friend to do a check in. We then post on social media , #thehatmentalhealthcheckin (or whatever) we start a movement...but we start. One initiative we should start is mental health boot camps for families. Maybe weekend events at Kin Coulee or one of our other city parks or recreation centers.

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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This topic can be quite lengthy to discuss, however I will provide some thoughts on each. Innovation and Competitive Strategy- There are several components to this, but to begin with we need to create an environment that is inviting to new business. First glance however we have a high tax rate, so we need to make appropriate actions to move this downward. Once we start making movements in the right direction, we can actively pursue industry to reconsider. We also need to intensely review our education system and work with our provincial partners to ensure that our educational curriculum competitive to the world market. Infrastructure Development- I would attempt to work with our federal partners to bring in a Western Canada Internet service. Based in MH (like shaw is to Calgary) we can create jobs and diversify into another industry other focusing heavily on oil and gas. As this is a completely different skill set to what we have currently this should bring in a diversity in education and experience. Image and Branding- Such a contentious issue currently with some of the proposed upgrades. I agree with expanding our waterfront and utilizing and expanding what we have, I just feel like we need to balance "bright, shiny and new" with "warm, restored and renew" It will be near impossible to create and warm inviting environment that is mostly concrete with no heritage buildings Workforce Development- I believe Medicine Hat needs to have a job fair. Instead of just the local employers, we should do an actual fair of employment, housing, sports and organizations. Why should people move here? Lets provide them a 360 reason to consider Medicine Hat and its advantages. Business and Financial Support- We need to aggressively reduce the tax gap. I would like to see existing grants and benefits go to existing business not just luring new business. We also need to ensure that any benefit we do give to new business, such as Aurora is given after they meet certain objectives and milestones.

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

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We need to set the standard on what we want our citizens to emulate. There's several things we can to do to address climate change and pollution, first we can ensure that all new buildings have smart heating and cooling, we can also combine that with an incentive for any upgrades to landlords that have significant grants associated. The city should lead the change and ensure all city properties have made efforts to address the climate change. We could encourage rooftop gardening as they have been proven to bring temperatures down provide shade and clean the air. Rooftop gardens also retain heat in the winter time bringing down heating bills. Solar rooftops

would be even better, but possibly a mix would be something to review. It is extreme but maybe we could be the first city to completely ban plastics. Or start an initiative to ban plastics within the next five years.

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

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The 2021 election is proving to be one crying for transparency and communication. I believe one of the promises we as Council should make going forward is to not just post on our website but to ensure that social media is being engaged by all counsellors as well as monthly town hall meetings throughout the city. Possibly start a FB page, where we as councilors create updates after council meetings.

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 believe this was a very comprehensive questionnaire and I cannot think of any thing to add