

# Municipal Election 2018



The Chamber of Commerce is supplying responses to four questions that we sent out to candidates so that you can get a better feel for their vision and platform. We sent out questions 1 and 2 and three on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. (Today) we have the fourth and final question sent via our regular member email correspondence. It's a great opportunity for you to find out how candidates stand on business issues

## Question Four

**73% of business respondents say their ability to recruit or retain employees is affected by housing issues making housing a top issue in local campaigns. Whether its affordability, availability or attracting developers to create more diverse housing options, what are some of the creative methods you'd support to address this issue?**

## **SMITHERS MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTION RESPONSES**



**Taylor Bachrach...** This is a big issue facing a lot of communities in the North. I appreciate that the Chamber, as part of the Labour Market Network, brought forward some housing ideas earlier this year. Two initiatives I support are amending our building bylaw to allow houses to be built on 25-foot and 33-foot lots, and amending bylaws to encourage more carriage house development in residential zones. Also, I am hopeful that our recent tax incentive program will result in more rental suites as part of new commercial buildings. Beyond housing, I believe that enhancing our community's recreation, arts and cultural amenities will help attract new families and fill the demand for employees.



**Randy Bell...** I think some of the problem with development is the similar the rest of our policies: 1. clean-up the policies, simplify the process as much as possible; 2. listen to the business community ideas and partner with them to reach those goals. I suggest a continued push of selling Smithers as a place to live, play, work and visit. This means a broader focus that is not just 'downtown'. We need to work with organizations of all shapes and sizes to make a unified message. Land use changes for smaller housing structures would be a start.



## SMITHERS COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE QUESTION RESPONSES

 Gladys Atrill... Council has taken steps to help, by permitting and encouraging carriage houses; property tax breaks for those who add residential to commercial buildings downtown; and providing the land for the supportive housing project currently being constructed at Railway and Queen. I support Council addressing this issue further with the community through a council committee or task force. Then new ideas could be discussed fully and the best of them recommended to council for action. One question is with the current shortage of housing, especially rental housing what is preventing the private sector from developing new apartments or multi-unit housing?

 Colin Bateman... I feel we need to encourage people to make the move to northern BC. We need people to sustain our growth and also to support our amazing amenities. If industry is going to continue to grow in the north, it will be an ongoing issue to find people. Accommodations seem to be the main barrier to this, and looking at new ways to entice people from the Lower Mainland and other areas to look at the north as the great place to live that we already know that it is. We could look at revising our zoning bylaws in the Official Community Plan to allow different types of housing. Duplex, Carriage houses and skinny houses are all great ideas that have been mentioned. A tax break has been approved for our downtown businesses to add accommodation rental suites. I feel this should be applied again to all of our businesses not just in the downtown area. All of this aside. I do feel that the best way to retain employees is to treat them well and with respect. It is the employees that make our businesses successful.

 Lorne Benson... Success in recruiting and retaining skilled labour comes with having 1) a vibrant local economy and 2) affordable housing. For the former, it is essential that the Town of Smithers works in partnership with the Smithers District Chamber of Commerce, open to all business interests and potential for economic development. For the former, real estate stats show housing costs in the Smithers are competitive with housing in similar amenity communities. To ensure this trend continues, the Official Community Plan (2010) should be revisited during this next term. With the engagement of the community, Council can assess the benefits of permitted higher density housing, including the continued use of carriage houses and rental suites in residential zones, and more development of strata and co-op housing options.



**Phil Briennesse...** This council had the forethought to work on affordable housing over the last several years so when the province announced funding we were ready to go. But supportive housing is just one aspect of affordable housing. Adding laneway houses and multiple small houses on a single lot is one way we have increased options for builders. The new revitalization tax exemption for second floor downtown residential also holds promise. Moving forward I think addressing minimum lot frontage to allow “skinny houses” has potential as well as expanding the area where laneway housing is permitted. Altering the OCP for flex housing zones is another possibility.



**Greg Brown...** I agree that housing solutions are needed. I propose a three pronged approach to housing: First, create a Housing Task Force that would have series of meeting (with support from Town Staff) and would make recommendations to council. I commit to a fulsome consideration of all solutions proposed. Second, work proactively with not-for-profit housing groups based in Smithers to help them secure funding for housing projects. Currently, there are historic funding opportunities from both the Federal and Provincial government, and we would be wise to take advantage of them. Third, review and renew our zoning bylaws and the OCP so that one, the two documents support one another, and two, we ensure that changes integrate well with the overall vision and values of our community.



**John Buikema...** Housing affordability is an issue right across BC. There are few simple solutions because market forces are one of the key factors in determining the price of both renting and owning. Town Council has recognized the importance of flexibility in zoning so that creative housing solutions can be found. High-density housing and smaller lot size are potential solutions. Having conversations with developers is crucial. Perhaps, the offering of incentives to developers who come up with creative housing alternatives could also be part of a solution. All in all, it’s a complex problem that municipal politicians have limited control over.



**Tim Sharp...** Smaller lot size for new housing development could be something that is looked into along with tax deduction (for a period of time) for those who build new rental properties (The property would also need to be rented and occupied for a minimum of 10 months out of the year). I would form partnerships with local agencies who might be willing to build some affordability and accessible housing. This would include options for seniors housing and for those with pets.



**Casda Thomas...** We need to increase our housing capacity in our residential and commercial areas. I would like to see us update our zoning bylaw to better capture our vision for development within our Town and remove some barriers. Many good ideas exist and should be considered, such as smaller lot sizes, higher density areas, expanded carriage house boundaries, allowing a suite in conjunction with an appropriate home-based business, ‘flex’ space development in the downtown, exploring

funding opportunities, etc. The key is that we need a plan so that we can consider all options and be strategic instead of implementing one-off changes.

 Frank Wray... Housing has always been a priority issue throughout my ten years on council. There is no “magic bullet” solution. The next logical step would be to consider the Chamber’s proposal to allow housing to be built on “skinny lots” by studying how it has been implemented elsewhere. I would also support revisiting past initiatives (legalizing laneway homes and secondary suites) to see if we can increase the usage of these two tools. As always, Council must continue to work with BC Housing to diversify the housing stock in Smithers, including affordable market housing projects.

 Ryan Zapisocki... I strongly support the initiatives and ideas of carriage houses, and narrow homes. These are helpful in addressing our affordable housing shortage. I am keen on looking into more opportunities to improve our housing issues. We will need a multifaceted approach as any one of these current solutions will not suffice on their own. Public, and business input will be invaluable in creating new solutions to this ongoing issue. We should be prioritizing our focus on new developments in housing for our community. No one yet has come up with an effective solution, so we need to collaborate and address this issue

## TELKWA MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTION RESPONSES

### *Question Four*

**73% of business respondents say their ability to recruit or retain employees is affected by housing issues making housing a top issue in local campaigns. Whether its affordability, availability or attracting developers to create more diverse housing options, what are some of the creative methods you’d support to address this issue?**

 Brad Layton... If I had the golden answer to this I am sure I would be in high demand. I believe that availability plays the biggest role in affordable housing. Telkwa is currently starting the process to build a new water reservoir that should be complete within the year. This will allow us to green light housing development projects that have been patiently waiting for us to solve our water issue. We will need to continue to work on improving our infrastructure to keep the development going or we will be right back to unaffordable housing.

 John McDivitt N/a

## REGIONAL DISTRICT CANDIDATE QUESTION RESPONSES

### **Question Four**

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**Mark Fisher...** Housing (and related transportation issues) must be looked at differently in rural areas. Higher urban density creates a more effective 'central business districts' but discussions with the ALC about number of dwellings and complimentary farm activities must be had. Rural character, increase demand for services (e.g. fire protection), potential for increase conflict, and safety and practicality of rural water must be considered. Interface areas have potential for higher density (in partnership with the municipalities) if impact to agriculture is minimum and perhaps cluster model housing for agriculture workers on working farms. A Regional Growth Strategy should be done at minimum.



**Leah Germain...** I will be looking into densification – more people per hectare of existing property and/or the development of more residential areas. Work to help alleviate the pressures on Smithers and Telkwa for more affordable housing and thus generating more employees for businesses.