

## **Dianne Wyntjes responses**

### **Candidate for Red Deer City Council**

1. Will you oppose privatization of municipal services and infrastructure including Public-Private-Partnerships, aka P3's? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house?

Yes I oppose privatization of municipal services.

Privatization can take many forms such as selling off public utility services, contracts with organizations such as the YMCA to operate recreation facilities, or parks and public works services. During this past term, I did not support the operating agreement between the City of Red Deer and the YMCA to operate the Northside Community Centre. While I certainly support the YMCA and their valuable community work, my worry is that this decision may open the door to potential contracting out of future recreation services in the City of Red Deer. Time will tell.

Privatization means municipalities lose local decision making at the Council table.

Privatization can mean secrecy, reduced quality of services, low ball bidding by a contractor, higher costs for the municipality and tax payers, greater risks in the community, e.g. if the contractor goes bankrupt and less job security and compensation for employees, and less transparency to community citizens.

It is important to recognize these impacts affect us as tax payers and citizens.

Decision makers may see privatization as a way to offload services and reduce responsibility by outsourcing services. I have learned - be wary of the privatization pitch and the pitch to contract out services. It's also important to look at services that have been contracted out and see if they can be contracted in. Council should ask administration to "do the math" to see if it's cheaper and can bring improved services to the community with contracting in. Councillors should meet with and/or review anti-privatization information from organizations such as public sector unions who have first hand knowledge and experience of the detriments of contracting out and privatization.

Nor am I a fan of P3's; in fact they should be called P4's - Public Pays for Private Profit.

Unfortunately, sometimes Federal or Provincial projects look to P3's to finance projects and link available government funding to P3 projects. With a lens to the deficits of federal and provincial governments and needed or wanted municipal infrastructure projects, I am concerned about contracting out, privatization or P3 projects being promoted for Federal, Provincial and Municipal infrastructure projects or services in the coming years.

Councils can and should rely upon important research and published studies that demonstrate public investment/ownership of infrastructure is preferred compared to privately contracted services. Public sector unions working in municipalities, like AUPE and CUPE provide valued information and studies about privatization and P3's.

It's important

- for elected officials to do their research,

- connect with the unions and organizations who have data and research about contracting out and P3's,
- it's important Councillors do their research and reading,
- know the questions to ask when making these budget infrastructure decisions, and
- recognize the value of investment to financing, owning, operating and maintaining public infrastructure assets.
- and to be ahead of these decisions before they come before Council for any decision.

2. Will you support your employees and your community by ensuring the municipality employs staff with living wages, full-time hours where desired, job security and collective rights?

Yes; having negotiated collective agreements in my previous work, I respect the importance of the collective bargaining process, the negotiated collective agreements, and the value of respectful labour relations with municipal staff unions/all staff unions.

I also recognize the value of unionized members in a community and the economic contributions they make when compensation and benefits and job security can add to the local economy.

A living wage policy - not only with the municipality but within the community - impacts people, young to old, who work full time, part time or casual employment. A living wage brings take home wages/compensation that is enough for a healthy lifestyle that meets basic needs (food, shelter, transportation and other household costs). A living wage helps bring one out of poverty, brings dignity to one's life and can give a citizen/family more opportunity to participate in community social participation and inclusion. A living wage policy is an important conversation in Red Deer; it was happening in the previous Council term, but this Council term, lost momentum and was set back with pandemic. It's also an important conversation in all central Alberta communities as we are all seeing rising costs of living and inflation. In a previous Council term, I supported a notice of motion supporting a living wage in Red Deer and a living wage policy. I also appreciate the work the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) has done who released a living wage report and living wage calculation for Red Deer.

The next Council can link the living wage and conversations to the City of Red Deer's Social Policy Framework, with the reminder of the vulnerable in our community and that a living wage can bring citizens out of poverty. There is also important relationship work and conversations with the local Chamber of Commerce and their members to encourage a fair living wage rather than just the minimum wage, along with recognition a living wage can bring less turnover and less training costs to a business.

The City can also ensure there are measures in the City's procurement policy that any contractor/supplier pays a living wage.

3. Will you oppose attempts from the provincial government to legislate against Municipal staff including cuts to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, or restrictions on their right to strike?

Yes I will.

Public pension plans, like the LAPP as a defined benefit pension plan, have been under attack for years and I worry the current provincial government will continue their attacks on municipal/provincial government employees' pension plans. I do not support any provincial actions or municipal actions that diminish the LAPP or having public employees having to work longer before retirement or a reduction in one's retirement benefits. I do not support contribution holidays for employers. Keeping the pension plan healthy is significant. And it is critical the government recognizes that pension funds are not provincial government funds. I'll be there to support the LAPP, if re-elected or not re-elected as Councillor.

Pension joint/shared governance is also important so the employee representatives working with employer representatives are able to determine any pension benefit changes versus a unilateral employer/government change of policy that would affect pension plan members and retirees. Or decisions such as Bill 22 that removed LAPP's ability to select the providers for investing plan contributions, that removed administration decisions of the plan, and removed seats on the Board to non-union employees.

I've been on picket lines (the infamous Calgary Laundry workers strike), supported other unions on the picket line and I haven't and won't cross a picket line. I support the right to strike that is protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Standing together - as co-workers, as Alberta union members, as community citizens, as Albertans - is necessary to stand in solidarity together, which hopefully brings better change for working Albertans delivering public services in our communities.

I also recognize there are now Essential Service Agreements negotiated or being negotiated through the changes made to the Alberta Labour Relations Code, so when future strikes occur in Alberta, that brings additional challenges to Alberta picket lines.

4. How do you propose your municipality deal with funding shortfalls, cuts, and downloading of responsibilities from federal and provincial governments? Do you favour spending cuts over tax increases?

This past year, in the City of Red Deer's first two-year budget process, and recognizing the economic challenge of residences and many businesses, Council determined a 0% tax increase for 2021 and 0% tax increase for 2022. That meant trimming all city administrative budget lines, delaying actions such as maintenance, or cutbacks to services that needed to be enhanced, or changes in delivery of services, along with City staff reductions - temporary layoffs and permanent reductions. Operationally, there are ways to do things different or through innovation and ideas from the staff delivering services. It's also recognized over the last few years, City of Red Deer administration has been reducing, eliminating and revising services in our community. Eventually, that catches up to all of us as Red Deerians.

And there has been downloading from the provincial government as well, with worries of what's yet to come from the current provincial government. For instance, with the recent compensation increase to all Canadian RCMP officers, Alberta municipalities are awaiting decisions from the Federal and Provincial government on how that will affect our City's financial statements. A

prudent action Red Deer has taken, is to set aside some dollars to address this impact as we were aware a compensation increase would be provided to the RCMP; the questions are have we set aside enough and will the Province or Feds pick up the costs from the overall Canadian and Provincial tax base?

Do I favour spending cuts over tax increases? When making budget decisions, for me it's always about respect for our tax payer dollars. It's important we are keeping pace with inflation and with maintenance needs to current infrastructure, and delivering public services that are relied upon for a good quality of life in Red Deer.

I don't like cuts to services as they affect delivery of services that Red Deerians have come to rely and expect. But depending on the local and provincial economy, sometimes, difficult decisions have to be made. With the 0% tax rate in 2021 and 2022, I worry (as a potential re-elected Councillor and a taxpayer), about the expectation of continuing with 0% rates as soon or later there is a catch up time - whether through a large tax rate increase, or where services delivered are not up to quality standards, or if maintenance is neglected and a City never catches up.

Through any budget process and consideration of a tax rate at the Council table, Council can look to removing projects, delaying maintenance work, reviewing fees and charges for those using the services and recognizing the impacts of any increases to fees, charges or taxation through the affordability lens. And it is important the city of Red Deer be comparable and competitive with other Alberta municipalities. Through the Regional Collaboration Committee with Red Deer County, perhaps there are also efficiencies to achieve through joint initiatives.

5. Do you support measures such as mask mandates, vaccine "passports" and vaccine mandates for staff to limit and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your municipality?

Yes to mask mandates, for these reasons:

- the pressures upon Alberta hospitals, capacity issues of ICU beds and hospital beds, delayed surgeries, challenges and pressures at the Red Deer Regional Hospital, potential or real medical decisions about critical care triage, along with the ongoing stresses on the medical teams and support staff working in hospitals and the Red Deer Regional Hospital, along with the learnings, to date, of senior homes care during the pandemic, isolation and families not able to connect with a loved one in senior care or hospital care, loss of a loved one for many families, and the need to call upon the Federal government to provide military aid and Red Cross support with the regional and provincial covid19 surge and the delta variant
- I supported the City of Red Deer mask bylaw as we awaited Provincial leadership on this health matter

Regarding vaccine passports and vaccine mandates, I recognize these are difficult and divisive times - whether one is supporting the provincial Restriction Exemption Program and vaccinations - or not. Families are split. Friends have been lost. Differences of opinion among co-worries.

The decision of implementing a vaccinate passport rests with the provincial government. We have seen other nations and other provinces in Canada implement a “passport” with different models. The recent technology glitch that allowed Albertans to revise their covid19 vaccination record wasn’t helpful. I do anticipate and hope over the coming months, that Alberta will be comparable to other provinces who have better systems in place. Through the Restriction Exemption Program (REP), proof of vaccinations is currently required at all City public facilities. The decision for Red Deer businesses and organizations to implement the provincial REP has been left up to each business and organization.

The decision of the covid19 vaccination within the City of Red Deer staff will now be an operational/City Manager decision, as the City of Red Deer is currently under a State of Local Emergency for sixty days - effective September 17th, 2021. I don’t use the word “mandatory” vaccination and while some individuals are currently able to work at home, there are ways to work through this process, e.g. requiring proof of negative PCR test at individual cost. The City of Red Deer, as one of the City’s larger employers, has a responsibility in providing leadership, procedures and measures.

I recognize a vaccination program for the covid virus creates concerns; individually, in organizations and administratively in the City of Red Deer. The City also connects with other Alberta and Canadian cities and their learnings on how best to proceed. And this decision and action continues to evolve through the science, e.g. a nasal spray versus a vaccine, along with the considerations through workplace collective agreements, workplace law and legal implications.

For the record, I am vaccinated. And I don’t want to be on a ventilator.

We must also use the combined actions available to us to reduce the spread of the virus: wearing a mask, social distancing, staying home if having any symptoms, regular hand washing, reconsider large social gatherings, and vaccinations.

6. Do you support measures to reduce municipal reliance on service fees and fares, such as eliminating transit fares?

A City receives revenue through City taxation, City fees and charges, and provincial and federal government grants which are often competitive. I think we all recognize reduced revenues through the past 18 months with impacts and challenges to many families and businesses who may be living with less revenue. Municipalities have also experienced downloading from the provincial government to municipalities, e.g. policing costs, environmental management costs, or delays in infrastructure projects.

There have also been different treatments to municipalities, eg Edmonton and Calgary received Alberta government funds for low income transit passes. While the City of Red Deer and other mid sized cities asked for the same opportunity, the Provincial Government did not support Red Deer’s or other Alberta mid sized cities requests. City transit is a subsidized community service so if the City eliminates transit fares completely, any revenue received would be lost and needs to be made up/received from another area. During the past two years, the City of Red Deer revised many transit routes. Council and administration and the transit drivers continue to receive

feedback about the changes; some good and others that still need revision. What's important is we focus on routes that meet citizen needs; we find ways to increase transit usage, and if there is opportunity through transit grants from the provincial and federal government, look to reducing transit fares to keep transit affordable. Or ultimately eliminate transit fares; however, at this time, I see taking other actions, as described above, as important next steps.

Another piece related to transit is Action Bus services for those with disabilities or physical needs who rely and depend on the Action Bus. As the City's demographics change with an ageing population, additional and replacement of Action Buses are also a priority.

In looking to reliance on City fees and fares, it is important that Red Deer's fees are affordable to the residents and businesses. A priority focus over the next few years, as we live through covid, is economic recovery. Any development fees must be competitive to other Alberta municipalities as we encourage economic development in Red Deer, which brings jobs and services. And the next City of Red Deer Council must ensure affordability and quality of life for the residents and businesses in the year(s) ahead.