

## **Jenn Schmidt-Rempel responses**

### **Candidate for Lethbridge City Council**

#### **Privatization, including P3s:**

AUPE members know very well that privatization regularly fails to find “efficiencies” and any cost savings are often off the backs of workers who become deunionized, with lower pay and benefits.

They also work on the front lines of service delivery and see the problems caused by high-turnover low wage private providers, and the bureaucratic burden caused by having to deal with a third party instead of an in-house provider.

1. Will you oppose privatization of municipal services and infrastructure, including Public-Private Partnerships aka P3s? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house?

As a public sector employee, my priority would be to strengthen public services in Lethbridge. I’m committed to supporting our public services, such as firefighters and other first responders, and ensuring they receive the resources necessary to delivery the services we are asking them to provide. We need services focused on primary health care and mental health. We require services that will support a coordinated and integrated needs-based social services strategy. We also need to ensure that City staff are able to maintain the infrastructure and nature spaces we have grown to appreciate in our community.

As with all economic tools that could help our community, P3s around capital projects can offer some opportunity. For example, a performing arts centre has been on our community’s radar for some time, but the City doesn’t have the funds. A P3 with a local developer could create a wonderful centre that also offers housing, retail and commercial space, or a hotel and conference facilities. Partnerships that can benefit the community and spark local investment ought to be explored.

Like any resident, I would like to see our city operating as efficiently as possible and would like other residents to see that happening as well. The City of Lethbridge is facing some immediate challenges, and we will need to have some honest conversations around level of service and fiscal management. It will mean find cost-effective ways to manage, support, and advocate for the services our physical community, people, and businesses need, and also look at long-term investment in our community which can grow these services without cuts or additional tax burden.

#### **Municipalities as employers:**

As our economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, good jobs are an important factor. Public sector workers spend in their communities, and many households impacted by private sector recessions have been able to keep the bills paid thanks to a stable public sector job.

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 bargaining rights?

I am committed to exploring and supporting ways to develop and retain our local workforce and jobs in all areas. I want to keep our talent in Lethbridge. This includes working with the City of Lethbridge and educational institutions to identify what career opportunities would be available at the City of Lethbridge and how students and other job seekers in the city can access those

positions. This would include advocating for local practicum placements, internships, and co-ops. I would like to see the City of Lethbridge become a partner with our post-secondary and other training organizations to offer employment opportunities that are competitive to those in the private sector, and I would like to see the city of Lethbridge build a stable workforce in all areas.

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?

While the provincial government has jurisdiction over some public service and pension plan legislation, any changes that affect municipal employees need to start with a conversation between the province, unions, and municipal representatives. However, if the province acts unilaterally (without a conversation with the affected parties), Council should be a partner with our associations and advocate on behalf of our employees.

**Funding:**

For decades the trend on public services has been cuts and defunding, with fees downloaded onto workers, and the tax burden shifted away from the wealthy and corporations to the working class. At the same time, workers in the public sector know that tax freezes and cuts mean cuts to services and jobs. Any promise political candidates make can only be realized through proper revenues.

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?

I believe if we focus our efforts on economic recovery and development, we can begin to stabilize spending cuts and tax increases.

It means a concerted focus on continuing to make Lethbridge an attractive place to invest and do business by supporting current businesses and committing to business attraction and retention with out-of-the box thinking. Focussing on economic recovery and development is key to our city's future. Economic Development Lethbridge returns \$104 dollars to our community for every \$1 in City funding it receives. Economic development is business investment attraction, business retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship and innovation, which lead will lead to job creation, and can also help pay for the services we need to create a vibrant community.

We are off to a great start with our Exhibition Park project, as well as the future plans for the airport.

**COVID-19 Safety:**

With the negligent provincial response to now three preventable waves of COVID-19, municipalities have been put in an awkward position of needing to take measures to protect their citizens throughout the pandemic. Many are introducing measures of their own, but not all have.

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?

I'm committed to advocating for public health care supports for all people in our city. That includes holding our provincial and federal governments accountable and ensuring that our city and region are receiving appropriate and necessary funding, supports, and information for all health care services. Our residents shouldn't fall into crisis because they can't get the services needed here or because there's a delay in receiving/accessing services or information.

Regarding any future city mask bylaw, under Section 7(1)(a) of the Municipal Government Act, "A council may pass bylaws for municipal purposes respecting ... the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people and property..." Passing a bylaw would depend upon the information and data presented, and the actions of the provincial government. It would also require the City of Lethbridge to have enough bylaw officers to enforce and respond to any bylaw complaints.

The City of Lethbridge now has a policy mandating vaccinations for all employees. The intent of the policy is to ensure a safe workplace for staff and a safe environment for the public. I support this policy. Our goal should be to protect the safety and health of City staff and our residents in our community. Data currently shows that vaccinations and masking are two of the most effective ways to do that.

There's no question it's been a rough couple of years, and we have a lot of work to do. What we need to start doing now is setting ourselves up for success and recovery and look forward to what we want our city's future to look like. Working together we can do that; we can move forward.

**Affordability:**

With workers squeezed by increasing costs, municipal fees add to the burden. Service fees are a form of flat tax that require the same payment from a CEO as a low income worker.

Transit affordability is an important piece of working class equity. Fees add an extra burden for many people who can not afford the costs of private transportation in the first place. The reduced emissions on increasing transit ridership can also be a part of how cities take positive action on climate change.

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

I'm committed to working on the tasks outlined by Age Friendly Lethbridge, a designation that recognizes age-friendly cities and communities that promote healthy and active aging. That includes helping our city to move forward in the areas of transportation, social inclusion, and accessibility (among other areas). Examining fees in relation to the costing of the current transit service would be a part of that. Integrating multimodal transportation is a great way of meeting carbon reduction targets and promoting health. Additionally, Lethbridge Transit just introduced a new service called "cityLINK" that combines High Frequency Lines, Neighbourhood Lines and Rides on Demand. I support these changes as they are aimed at improving the physical, economic, and social mobility of our community.