

Jeromy Farkas responses

Candidate for Mayor of Calgary

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 de-unionized, 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?

Privatization isn't a universal solution for City service delivery. Where appropriate, I support City Hall working collaboratively with front-line and specialized non-government organizations to deliver quality services at a good price; for example, the YMCA's operation of the Rocky Ridge and Seton facilities have been tremendously successful. I am open to exploring non-government service delivery, but it must make sense on the merits. I recently voted against selling/privatizing golf course operations because union employees were empowered to bring forward good opportunities for savings and efficiencies.

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?

Public sector pay should be competitive with the private sector on a position basis.

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?

I will evaluate situations with other levels of government and proposed changes to legislation as they arise.

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?

The narrative spun to Calgarians in recent years that they must choose between tax increases and difficult service cuts is a false one that needs to be put to rest. The reality is that Calgarians are overtaxed and the City has enough revenue to maintain services without making drastic cuts.

Over the past 10 years, the City collected \$1.3 billion in surplus tax revenue. This amount equates to almost \$2800 per property. Only the much larger city of Toronto collected a larger surplus. This revenue goes into the City's Fiscal Stability Reserve, which is supposed to be a fund for operational emergencies. Instead of going back into the pockets of taxpayers, or being used to fund City services, this money has gone to fund Council pet projects.

As Mayor, I will champion a 4-year tax freeze. This is achievable without drastic cuts to service and can be funded through a combination of reserves, efficiencies, and revenue from projected city growth.

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?

Covid-19 is a serious issue and we must all do our part to combat it. I am fully vaccinated and I encourage everyone who is able to do so to get vaccinated. Covid-19 restrictions are a public health issue that should be left to the experts at Alberta Health Services. Council should not meddle in areas where they have no expertise.

Based on the opposition from, and lack of consultation with City unions, I did not support the vaccine mandate for City employees.

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?

A fee you can't reduce by reducing usage is just another tax by a different name. While user fees are an important party of the City's revenue equation, I support more transparency in how fees are charged and how Calgarians can save money by reducing usage on fee reliant services, like water, wastewater, and electricity.