

## Jerry Firth 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?**

In short, yes.

I have always been a supporter of public services, which of course requires public sector employees. Of concern to me, privatized services can hinder public interest, accountability can be blurred, and associated costs can often increase the cost of P3s as opposed to a public option. But what is most concerning for me is that using P3 models usually replaces long-term public sector workers with contract workers, which can result in low loyalty to the municipality.

**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?**

My understanding is that the only employee of City Council is the City Manager. However, Council should work with the City Manager to be a leader in the community for employee rights, and I would be in support of this.

I have been a long-time advocate for living wages and I will continue to be. The basis of a living wage is so that individuals and families not only survive but thrive. This is not only good for workers, but also good for the economy, as there will be more disposable income to spend on products and services.

It is also valuable for a healthy and strong work force for employees to have collective bargaining rights with their employer, as they know their needs and what it takes to get a job done.

#### **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 would oppose any interference by the provincial government in municipal affairs. The MDA intrusts municipalities to operate their own governance and the province should respect this. As for the LAPP,

employees have worked hard to invest in this plan and rely on this investment, and this must not be jeopardised.

**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 provincial cuts on municipalities are an unfair deal and places communities like ours in a very difficult position. To be honest, I do not have a full answer as this is a significant decision that would require a lot more information and discussion. However, intuitively I do not favour job cuts, especially in a time of financial hardships for individuals and families.

I believe that there are responsibilities to living in a society, and part of this responsibility are taxes. I believe the most equitable tax systems are progressive taxes. Unfortunately, municipalities have little options for revenues through taxes, especially progressive tax systems. Increasing property taxes, which is regressive in nature, will affect lower income households, which would not be favorable.

Other than cutting jobs or increasing taxes, there is a potential third option, which is delaying infrastructure projects. This would not be ideal either, as strong infrastructure is necessary for the vitality of a community that also helps pull in investment into the community. However, this may be the best option when we consider supporting the maintenance of livelihoods in our community for the short term until we can recover economically.

**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 support scientifically proven measures, such as masking and vaccine mandates, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 that is significantly affecting the health of our family, friends, and neighbours, as well as overwhelming our health system. I support them because I care about my loved ones, as we all do, and I extend this care to the community. I also believe that by implementing these bold measures will allow us to get back to some resemblance of normalcy sooner, without the fear of another wave. What is key, is consistency. Despite what the

province implements, municipalities can and must be leaders in taking the right steps to slow the spread of COVID-19.

**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 am in favour of a transit system that is low-fare or fare-free. As we grow in our population, as well as people looking for other transportation options, we will continue to see a growth of reliance on public transit. As stated by the authors of this survey, transit is essential to working class equity, thus eliminating, or reducing fees will provide greater opportunity for these individuals and families.

As I mentioned in a previous comment, municipalities have few options for revenue, but I believe that caution must always be heeded when implementing any fees to ensure accessibility and affordability. I realize that this position will likely run a deficit for transit budgets, but when we consider a balance across all municipal budgets and revenues, other areas of revenue can help sustain a transit system to allow for a fare-free system to exist.