

Kirsten Goa responses

Candidate for Edmonton City Council Ward papastew

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?

I find the current model of P3s lack transparency and routinely leave the municipality carrying the risk while private interests reap the benefits.

There are contexts where we need to work with private corporations, but in these situations, we need to share risks and benefits in a way that is transparent and accountable and there should be minimum requirements such as those often found in a CBA included in our public procurement processes.

There are a number of areas where it makes far more sense for the City to be coordinating and providing services. As I mentioned above, if services aren't currently in-house or we don't have capacity at the time to bring them in-house, an interim step is to improve our procurement standards, implement CBAs and over time move towards reintegrating into the public service.

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?

Yes. We only retain excellent public servants if we value their work and contributions to our City and provide them with living wages, job security and the hours and flexibility they need to thrive. I support collective bargaining rights and believe that investing in people and valuing them and their work is central to our effectiveness as an organization. It supports our well-being, improves our services and supports our economy.

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?

The provincial government has no place meddling in the employment relationship municipal staff have with their employer. They may have significant authority over municipalities, but the independence of local government needs to be supported and protected, and this includes protecting municipalities and their workers in terms of labour relations and pensions.

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?

We need to align our budget with our stated values which may mean a redistribution of our investments, but we don't cut our way to prosperity especially in a crisis. Too often we are cutting the services, and the people who provide them, who are meeting the most important and immediate needs of our community. This is backwards. We need to prioritize our investments in those who need it the most and in the people and services who make this possible.

There are ways we can make our property tax structure a little bit more progressive, and we need to maintain investment in our infrastructure and services, so that our children don't end up paying for today's austerity, like we have been paying for austerity in the 90s over the last many years.

There is also a need to expand the revenue opportunities for Edmonton and municipalities in general. I've followed some of the conversations happening at the FCM and elsewhere about how to renegotiate the relationship municipalities have with higher orders of government. These are challenging jurisdictional issues, but other levels of government at some point have to reckon with the fact that housing, healthcare, education, social services, meeting our climate goals and more all rely on strong local governments. This is an area of significant interest for me and I hope to help move this forward with our federal government, and maybe someday, with our provincial government as well. At the local level I have been involved in work on alternative funding approaches for certain types of projects, such as recreation centers. This has not been, and shouldn't be about privatizing these services. There are ways for us to generate capital with our current assets that don't involve privatization or downloading costs onto those who can least afford it. I look forward to working with labour, communities and other jurisdictions on how we can establish a more resilient economic foundation for our City while protecting and enhancing the public services we all rely on.

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?

Yes to all of the above.

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 support free transit in principle, but I know our budget won't accommodate this change right away. There are a number of incremental steps I want to take to make transit more affordable, attractive and accessible.

With the introduction of smart cards, I will propose a fare free zone that consists of approximately 3 stops (or a certain distance -- this will need to be determined through piloting or other research), in order to reduce barriers to using transit within a “15 minute” neighbourhood, pick up groceries etc. We used to have a fare free zone downtown on the LRT, which privileged downtown workers but not really most other people. If we make the zone contingent on where you get on and off, we can extend this to any part of the City.

As a side note, I am concerned about the issue of smart cards being stolen, especially for people who are unhoused or living rough who don't have safe places to store their personal belongings and I will be asking about how we can address this as soon as possible after the election.

I don't think we should be raising fares any more and I would like to start decreasing them over time as we make adjustments in other parts of the budget.

I am pleased that ETS is now piloting Outreach workers on our transit system and I am hopeful that this will make transit more safe and welcoming to all Edmontonians. I

would like to see this expanded. I was also pleased to learn about their transit “mentorship” program which provides a mentor to help people learn how to use transit and get more comfortable with transit. I think this is an excellent program.

I also want to expand our outreach to people who don’t “have to” take transit. Most of the time those who aren’t regular transit users opt for transit in a crisis and at the last minute. This is not conducive to a positive experience even if everything goes smoothly and if buses are late or you don’t know where to go it only exacerbates the feeling that transit is something that’s the last resort. So combat this, I want to encourage free transit and create a “transit festival” where taking the bus and LRT is an integral part to activities and fun for all ages. Keeping routes regular for that day/time, we could create scavenger hunts, kids activities, concerts or other ways to make taking transit the event and destination. If this includes opportunities to learn new routes, understand the schedules, and also improve ETS’ wayfinding/ease of use and test new ideas it could help shift the story we tell as a City about transit. In turn, this will help increase ridership, which will help make our transit system more resilient and efficient.

Finally, this isn’t always popular, but public transit is in direct competition with private vehicles. As a City we provide a lot of public services and amenities to private vehicles and private vehicle owners (myself included) for low cost or free, while continuing to increase the cost of transit and other important services. Over time, if we are going to encourage more transit riders, reduce costs to riding transit while investing in improved services, we will need to reduce our subsidies of private vehicle ownership in order to shift the competitive landscape in transit’s favour. Currently it’s quite lopsided the other way around. I would encourage anyone who wants to move more quickly towards free and high quality transit to push for examination of how we currently subsidize the most expensive, least accessible form of transportation in our City.