

Garth Hewitt responses

Candidate for Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Ward 1

1. Will you oppose privatization of municipal services and infrastructure, including Public-Private[1]Partnerships aka P3s? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house? I believe that P3's are a viable strategy with the right partner for the right project. I would not discount a P3 partnership out right. An example could be partnering with a First Nations Company in our Region to build and operate a needed piece of infrastructure that the Municipality could not finance on it's own. This example also illustrates one of the 94 recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Report to find opportunities for First Nations to share in the economic benefits of a region.
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? Wages have been stagnant in all areas of our economy, both private and public, for a number of years. Inflation has reared it's ugly head over the last few month's with no sign of letting up, and energy poverty is a growing worry. With all this being said the average persons discretionary income, if you had discretionary income to start with, continues to shrink. I support collective bargaining, the Union will present it's case for increasing wages, full-time hours where desired and job security. The COA will bring their case and the two should negotiate in good faith. As a Councillor I will not prejudice the collective bargaining process, I believe strongly that if both sides truly bargain in good faith and with mutual respect that agreements can and will be signed.
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 am not familiar with a proposal by the Province to do this. I will not comment on assumptions, I will address concerns like this after understanding the facts as they are proposed in legislation and then lobbying the MLA(s) as required. I will commit to doing what is right for the RMWB and it's residents, not what may be Politically expedient.
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 live within our means, I do not support cuts to programing or staffing as a default. Our MDP has a lot of fluff built in and I believe in the concept of "Keep it Simple". I would look to lean out Departments and reassign staff to where they are truly required before laying anyone off, this would include training if those moved required it. I am also an advocate for finding different ways to fund Municipal services. One idea that I have been trying to work out in my head is "How do we get the Province and Fed's to sign an accord allowing us to collect fuel taxes in our region and we agree to take on the maintenance of Provincial highways?". The idea comes from the Canadian Federation of Municipalities where Municipalities in Southern Ontario want this type of "Taxation and Responsibilities" in a signed accord. I might just be looking to far out but this would be my future state. So to answer the question, I am not in favor of blanket spending cuts not am I in favor of increasing Municipal taxes.

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 following AHS Public Health Orders and I take CMOH’s recommendations under “personal” advisement. I do not support Municipal By-laws as imposed in Calgary which disproportionately target small businesses while exempting Box Stores, which target low income earners vs those who have means as governmental supports are supports in name only. There are many reasons people might be vaccine hesitant and that does not make them an “Anti-vaxxer”, labeling people has lead to the polarization and division within our communities. I will NOT divide our community further with ideological rhetoric, Public Health belongs in the jurisdiction of the CMOH and NOT with Municipalities. If a community wishes to spontaneously and collectively go above and beyond they do not need Councils approval, they can do this together as a community, just like after the Wildfire and after the Flood... The community supported each other, the community protected each other, the community came together, WITHOUT any level of Government telling us we should!!!! No, I will not support Municipal mask mandates, Municipal vaccine passports in the community or mandate vaccinations for Municipal employees via a Municipal By-law!!
6. Do you support measures to reduce municipal reliance on services fees and fares, such as eliminating transit fares? The majority of people who use transit are the ones that can least afford to pay user fees. I would support measures that seek to reduce or eliminate fees/fares