

Lance Bussieres responses

Candidate for Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Ward 1

Question 1 – Privation

I have outlined in my platform my concern with the use of private contractors in place of the existing skills and talents of existing employees. I believe the RMWB relies too heavily on outside contractors. This strategy devalues our existing workforce and is most likely more expensive. Municipal service delivery is enhanced when those services are provided by municipal employees.

Question 2 Municipalities as Employers

Without a question I support employees right to earn a living wage, full time hours, security of pension and collective bargaining rights. I also support their right to a safe, secure, supportive and healthy work environment. I am told the morale of the municipal staff is disheartening. The recent release of the employee survey is a statement that screams dissatisfaction in the workplace. Improving working conditions, equitable opportunities for advancement, and safety from discrimination is crucial and have been identified as significant concerns among the staff. These are important issues that must be addressed.

Question 3 Funding

Our Municipality is in an enviable position of having close to 95% of our tax base coming from industry. This allows our Municipality to provide exceptional services at a lower cost to the tax payers than almost any other community in the country. That said, with the tax ratio dropping from 18:1 to 5:1 we will be faced

with decreased revenues. While some say we need to make cuts or increase taxes, I do not believe this. Having the experience of a term on council previously, I am aware of the multitude of areas in which efficiencies in operations will more than make up the shortfalls. As an example, there have been situations where sidewalks were repaired and replaced only to be torn up the following year to replace pipes. Proper planning and Fiscal responsibility are paramount. As noted previously in my response, the reliance on outside contracts versus our own employee resources, is both a waste of money and a morale killer for municipal staff. I have heard, repeatedly, from municipal staff they feel undervalued. Finally, I know the Municipality has not maximized grant opportunities available. I know there are certain grants applied for on a regular basis however I also know there are a multitude of grants that are not accessed. As an example, there was a one-million-dollar accessibility grant available from the Federal Government. There will be an ask from Administration for money to complete an accessibility audit during this budget process. Not capitalizing on such opportunities is irresponsible stewardship of our citizens' tax dollars.

I genuinely do not believe we need to be in a position to make cuts or increase taxes if we improve our operational efficiencies; even with a decrease in our tax revenue.

Question 4 Covid – 19 Safety

This is a great but extremely difficult question. I support an individual's right to choose what they do with and to their own body. Personally, I believe the vaccine is safe and effective and I am double vaccinated. But I also believe that Government intervention into citizens' lives should be minimal. As an employer, the Municipality has a responsibility to ensure employees are provided with a safe workplace. I cannot state that I would or would not support such mandates without seeing proposed policies. There are valid reasons why people are not vaccinated and this would apply to some of the Municipal staff. As such, any policy around a mask mandate or mandatory vaccination would need to satisfy a long list of considerations including alternate work opportunities and protection from disciplinary action. I would be willing to consider any potential measures but it would have to be weighed with current, relevant and reliable data available at the time of debate.

Question 5 Affordability

Ironically, I discussed waiving transit fees for all residents during my past council term but I was advised it could not be supported. I intend to address again and push harder if elected. I believe the revenue earned from transit fees is negligible with respect to the Municipal budget. The Municipality currently waives the transit service fee for seniors and it makes sense to extend this to the whole of the community.

With a history of excessive spending, the Municipality must look inward at improving efficiencies before ever considering impacting any of the citizens.