

Ken Johnston (August 4th response to the questions on his Facebook page)

Hi Lori and thank you for the opportunity to comment on an issue that I am passionate about and pushed forward in my first term on Council. As to question 1, I introduced a Notice of Motion with Councillor Harris calling on the Province to repeal the Payday Loans Act. I wanted to see equity not exploitation with this product delivery. I worked with our local MLA Kim Schreiner who was invaluable in engaging her Provincial colleagues. A new Act was passed that prescribed fairer interest rates, substantial fee reductions, disclosure and terms. I continue to discuss lending innovations with our local Banking community and at Provincial level. I have also spoken at community events on the need for education and programs for our lower income, student and immigrant groups among others. I could offer additional examples if needed. As to Question 2....Municipalities have ability to regulate density and location under the Land Use Bylaws. Restrictions exist on density and location of drinking establishments for example. A total review of our Bylaws is being brought to Council in late 2017, early 2018 and I will ensure that this issue is reviewed. The regulatory improvements as noted in Question 1 are a step forward in equity and access but must be strengthened by the Land Use and other regulatory considerations at Municipal level. This type of regulatory action was a part of my Motion in 2015. As to Question 3.....Fee Assistance programs are available to all Red Deerians on AISH, Income Supports or Red Deer Housing tenants to name a few. Transit and Recreation fees were also frozen this year to help costs in this downturn in our economy. As it relates to utilities specifically water and waste water we continue to strategically lower fixed costs as this is the fairest option. A thorough review is being conducted on all our fees and charges and should be in Council's hand by Feb/18. If elected I will very diligently examine utility hookups, transfers, termination etc to ensure low income citizens are not disadvantaged. I was very honoured in my first term to help initiate the Social Policy Framework. This document ensures and sustains the social well being of all Red Deerians. It will be foundational for the work we do around poverty alleviation, equity and opportunity in all facets of City business. As to Question 4.....The Social Policy Framework will guide us as I alluded in Question 3. Under that Framework the City can choose to play a direct role, an advocacy role, a capacity builder etc. I see Council directing Administration to build capacity in organizations and also ensuring our website/Social media has educational content. Collaborating with School Boards and the College (Donald School etc), also present literacy opportunities. Internally we are utilizing our Financial Leadership strategy to equip all citizens to thoroughly understand our Financial Statements, Capital and Operating budgets. There are other literacy opportunities where Council can direct Admin to develop strategy around literacy. Examples are public engagement/dialogue opportunities such as "Let's Talk", "Budget Open House", "The Budget Bus" etc. There is great potential here. Thanks Lori for the opportunity to weigh in on this issue. If elected I look forward to continuing working with you on this and other CAPRA initiatives. All the best