

DAVID GONELLA – Incumbent Councillor

Election 2026 - DSA Questions

1. Community priorities and leadership

I believe the three biggest issues over the next four years will be managing growth, dealing with our infrastructure needs, and keeping Salmon Arm affordable for taxpayers while continuing to build a strong local economy.

Four years on Council has taught me that Council has to lead and make the hard decisions about separating wants from needs. We have approximately \$150 million in available long-term debt capacity, but that does not mean we should spend it simply because it is available. The wastewater treatment plant is now forecast at approximately \$99 million, compared with an estimate of \$60 million in 2022. That has to factor into every other major project we consider.

At the same time, we cannot simply stop investing in our community. We need to continue working on housing, food security, economic development and the amenities that make Salmon Arm a good place to live and do business.

I also want to continue the work I started on a Salmon Arm community forest. I believe there is an opportunity to manage local forests locally, address wildfire risk, keep economic benefits in our community and work in partnership with Secwépemc leadership.

By the end of the next term, I would like to see real progress on our critical infrastructure while continuing to move forward on the projects and initiatives that will shape Salmon Arm for the next generation.

2. Year-round economic vitality and resilience

The City cannot create a successful year-round economy on its own, but it can help create the conditions for businesses to succeed.

Salmon Arm has a strong community of businesses, organizations and volunteers that already do a tremendous amount to bring people downtown and attract visitors. I believe the City's role is to work with those groups rather than trying to do everything itself.

Events, festivals, recreation and cultural activities are important because they give people a reason to come downtown. They also make Salmon Arm a more attractive place to live, which helps local businesses attract and retain employees.

I also think we need to look at how community-led investment can complement what the City is able to do. Our arenas are a good example. They were championed by the community, built privately and ultimately handed back to the City to administer. I believe there may be opportunities to use a similar model for future recreational and cultural projects.

Wildfire smoke and unpredictable summers are realities we have to plan for, but we should also be looking beyond the summer season. A stronger year-round economy means supporting the

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businesses we already have, encouraging new investment and continuing to give people reasons to come downtown throughout the year.

3. Growing and protecting our downtown

I want to see a downtown that is busy, active and growing while still feeling like Salmon Arm.

I believe there is room for more residential development and increased density downtown. Having more people living within walking distance of shops, restaurants and services can be good for existing businesses and can help support new ones.

But growth has to be done thoughtfully. We need to make sure infrastructure, parking and other municipal services keep pace with development, and we need to recognize the investment that existing businesses and property owners have already made in our downtown.

My experience on the Council Select Parking Committee has reinforced the importance of looking at these issues together. We expanded the committee's mandate from the downtown core to the entire municipality because parking and transportation issues do not stop at the downtown boundary.

I also believe our downtown's character is one of the things that makes Salmon Arm attractive. We should not lose that as we grow.

For me, the goal is fairly simple: more people living downtown, more reasons for people to visit downtown, and an environment where existing businesses can succeed and new businesses want to invest.

4. Infrastructure, economic growth, and community attractions

This comes back to making difficult choices about wants and needs.

We need to maintain and upgrade the infrastructure that businesses and residents depend on. Water, sewer, roads and other essential services have to come first when we are making decisions about major capital spending.

The wastewater treatment plant is a good example of why. The estimated cost has increased from approximately \$60 million in 2022 to a current forecast of \$99 million. That is a significant commitment for a community our size, and we have to consider that when looking at other major projects.

That does not mean I believe Salmon Arm should stop investing in recreation, culture or other community amenities. These projects contribute to quality of life and can also help attract visitors, residents and investment.

I believe we should look at community-led and private-public partnerships where they make sense. The arenas demonstrate that our community has people and organizations willing to take

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on ambitious projects. An expanded pool, indoor sports facilities or a performing arts centre could potentially benefit from a similar approach.

My priority would be to make sure our essential infrastructure is taken care of while creating opportunities for the community to help build the amenities we want for the future.

5. A safe, welcoming, and compassionate downtown

Homelessness is a complicated issue and there is no simple municipal solution.

The first priority has to be treating people with dignity. People experiencing homelessness need secure housing, and many also need mental-health, addictions and other supports to be able to maintain that housing.

At the same time, Council has a responsibility to make sure our public spaces are safe and welcoming. Our downtown businesses and property owners have invested heavily in our community, and the taxes they pay help fund the services we all rely on.

I believe Salmon Arm needs to continue working with BC Housing, Interior Health, service providers and senior governments to increase housing and support services. We also need more appropriate supervised care and treatment options available across the province for people who require that level of support.

Locally, I believe bylaws need to be applied fairly and consistently. Compassion does not mean ignoring the concerns of businesses, residents or visitors, and supporting downtown businesses does not mean ignoring people who are struggling.

We need to do both. We can treat people with dignity while maintaining reasonable standards for our public spaces and making sure downtown remains a place where people want to live, work, shop and visit.