

JO MCDERMOTT – Council Candidate

1. *Community Priorities and Leadership*

Although there will be quite a few important issues that are going to be coming up in the near future, the three that I have identified as the most significant are as follows:

A. Climate Action, our carbon footprint, and how these issues directly impact our city and the surrounding areas. This issue has long been a topic of discussion, in the political arena and out. Unfortunately, as time has gone on, we've been seeing greater repercussions from our impact on the world around us. We've seen warmer winters, hotter summers, a shift in growing seasons, and many other environmental consequences. The City Councils that have been in place over the last few terms have all done their best to help reduce our carbon footprint, and the next council will not only need to continue this effort but also increase it. We've all seen the impact that wildfires have had in the last few years, along with many other environmental issues that keep popping up. As the new City Council heads into their term, it will be vital for them to recognize tasks and initiatives that need to be pushed along. Thankfully, our city has several groups/organizations that can provide the Council with ideas and initiatives to guide them. A few specific things that I would like to see addressed are:

- Glass recycling – although there are places that glass can be taken for recycling, it isn't a service that is provided by our curbside recycling program, and as such, a lot of glass ends up in the landfill. In my experience, most people will not go out of their way to recycle glass by taking it to the various depots, etc., but if they were able to leave it at the curb alongside their other recycling most people would take part.

- Easier access to composting programs for businesses – The initiative taken by the city a few years ago to implement a green bin composting program has proven to be successful, even though there are currently issues with the providing compost facility. I would like to see this program become easily accessible to local businesses. There is still a lot of green waste headed to the landfill from businesses, because they are not included in the composting program.

B. Expanding the resources and infrastructure of our city to support the influx of new residents – Salmon Arm has seen significant growth recently, and our general demographic is seeing a slow shift to a younger population. This growth is putting more demand on all of our resources – from visible issues such as the need for more housing, parking, and other such tangible items, to the less visible resources such as more health care providers, more teachers, bigger and better facilities to handle the increase in waste, and an expanded public transit system, to name a few. As a city, we must be able and willing to expand these resources now, before the strain on the current systems cause major problems that will then have to be fixed urgently. As budgeting, borrowing power, and resource allotment are discussed by our municipal government, every decision needs to be made with the longevity of our resources in mind.

C. Communication – The main pillar of my campaign is built on the concept of communication. I strongly feel that there is a general disconnect between the average resident of Salmon Arm and our municipal government. Although anyone can go to the city's website and find a lot of information about services and such, there isn't a lot of

JO MCDERMOTT – Council Candidate

easy information available about current issues that are being discussed in council, recent decisions that have been and why they were made, or how the city plans on implementing these decisions. The information is there, but it is difficult to find, and sometimes even more difficult to understand. The agendas and minutes from every council meeting are all online, but if you've ever tried to read these documents to glean practical information from them, you know how complicated they can be. If elected, it will be my goal to find a way to disseminate this information in a way that is easy to access, easy to understand, and easy to provide feedback on. Some early ideas that I have are to use my current website (www.JoMcDermott.ca) to highlight and explain some of the topics that are being discussed; and to implement a type of open-forum gathering every so often, where residents and council members can mingle in a relaxed atmosphere that welcomes honest and respectful discussion.

2. *Year-round economic vitality and resilience:*

I think as our city sees a growth in population, and that growth brings with it a shift in demographics, the biggest things that the city can do in order to foster a strong year-round economy come down to marketing, capital support of our strong small business community, and providing our many groups and organizations with the specific support that they need in order to be successful. Right now, when people think of Salmon Arm, and the Shuswap, a lot of them go directly to thoughts of boating, camping, hiking, and other such warm-weather activities. While these activities are an important part of our economy, there are a lot of activities that can be enjoyed year-round that are not as well known to visitors. Salmon Arm and the surrounding area provide for great winter activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, hockey, skating, and many more. The spring and autumn months are ideal times for hiking, biking, climbing, and other outdoor activities that can be more enjoyable when it's not 35 degrees outside. If the city can promote these activities, we can start attracting more visitors in what have been traditionally known as the off months. In terms of our successful small business community, the city needs to keep up with the 'shop local' campaign and set good examples by utilizing these small businesses first, before going to the larger corporate businesses. Creating and marketing an online resource where visitors (and residents) can find information on our small businesses would go a long way to providing more exposure. As for providing support to our many organizations that host events throughout the year, it's important to keep in mind that most of these organizations are volunteer-run, and access to working capital, helping hands, specific supplies, and other needs can be difficult. But again, if the city can help supply these organizations with the help that they need, or by directing them to other sources of support, it would go a long way to make public events more successful. As someone who has taken on the organizing of large events in the past, I know that one of the main hurdles is always getting the word out there. City support in advertising opportunities, collaboration opportunities, and networking support between local groups would be a good start. By ensuring that public events are set up for success, we, as a city, would be helping to encourage visitors to take part in these events.

3. *Growing and protecting our downtown:*

JO MCDERMOTT – Council Candidate

Our downtown core is indeed a special place. It plays host to some fabulous events, there is a wonderful variety of shops and eating establishments, and of course the services that people need to utilize on a regular basis. But, growing pains are going to be inevitable as Salmon Arm flourishes.

Parking will always be a problem, due to society's dependence on vehicles. While there are parking solutions such as building parkades, and bigger lots, these are not going to solve the problem on their own. I think the focus needs to be on providing better means of public transportation, in the sense of making sure that our bus routes and stops are convenient for commuters to use. We also need to focus on making it safer for residents to use other means of transportation, such as bicycles, scooters, and similar vehicles. Personally, I have an E-bike that I love to ride, but it can be quite nerve-racking to ride along busy roads, especially if there isn't a shoulder. As we grow our infrastructure, I believe that we should be providing more bike lanes, paths, and trails that make the use of such transportation modes easier. If more residents would use these alternative modes of transportation, we would be able to free up a lot of our downtown parking for visitors without having to resort to large parking structures.

One of the largest issues that new small business face when they want to set up shop in the downtown core is the availability of appropriate premises. Although there isn't a lot of excess space in the downtown core for new buildings, there are places that have sat vacant for years, and should be utilized. Some of these empty locations have stayed empty due to the need for major repairs and/or renovations (I'm thinking the old 7-11 site – there is a lot of work that would have to be done in order to make it a viable commercial site again), or because the land hasn't been appropriately developed for one reason or another. These locations should be assessed for viability, and if there are issues with the properties that the city would be able to fix, this should be done.

I'm not a big fan of constructing new high-density housing in our downtown core. I think what keeps our downtown so attractive is the small-town charm that it has. If and when high-density housing needs to be built, it should be built away from the downtown core. If the transportation and parking issues can be addressed, occupants of the new housing structures would still be able to access downtown easily.

4. *Infrastructure, economic growth, and community attractions:*

Balancing capital investments within the city is a complicated issue. Proper infrastructure is vital to the success of any community, but if the community is lacking in amenities and attractions, is there much of a community to begin with? There must be a delicate balance between providing the city with the proper infrastructure that's needed to support the general population and visitors, while also providing interesting and enjoyable attractions. I think that the new council will have to look at the priorities that were identified in the city's Corporate Strategic Plan, and re-assess the order of importance, now that we are four years into the life of that plan. We also need to be mindful of our borrowing power and make sure that we are appropriating funds to items that serve a long-term goal. In order to keep up with the growth the city is seeing, we will need to invest in a new waste-water system soon. The current facility simply isn't adequate for the growth that is expected over the next few years. Unfortunately, that project will eat up a lot of capital and borrowing ability. But if we have to delay the start of other projects to make sure that our infrastructure can handle the growth of our city, it's a sacrifice that might have to be made. (Yes, I'm talking about the proposed new recreation centre. It would be a great addition to our city, but personally, I don't feel like the time is

JO MCDERMOTT – Council Candidate

right. There are other vital resources that need attention first.) One thing that the city can do on a limited budget is to invest in activities and festivals that take place in easily accessible locations. We already have a many events that take place downtown, like the Farmer's Market, Wednesday on the Wharf, various Roots and Blues activities, and more. Events that have the backing of the city draw visitors in from the surrounding areas and provide a boost to our local economy. Events also encourage residents to come together, which fosters a greater sense of belonging and community. With our extensive cultural diversity in Salmon Arm, it would be great to see more culturally based events take place on a regular basis.

5. *A safe, welcoming, and compassionate downtown:*

There is not, nor will there ever be, an easy answer to this question. There will always be members of our community who are currently experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, addictions, and poverty. As I have said in other, similar interview questions, I don't believe that there is a blanket answer to this challenge. Every person who is experiencing any of the above situations has come to that situation by a different route. Therefore, each person in these situations needs to be treated as the individual that they are, and not as part of a larger group. Organizations that are set up to help these individuals have the training and (sometimes) the resources that are required. I believe that the best way for a city to help these individuals is by supporting existing organizations. By providing more than just financial support, we would be setting these organizations up for more success. As for supporting the business and property owners that are impacted by this crisis, the municipal government needs to make sure that they are listening to what the business and property owners are saying and taking their feedback and suggestions to heart. Just as I believe that the city needs to provide support to the organizations that are set up to help the individuals who are in crisis, I believe that the city needs to provide support to the businesses and property owners who are having difficulty with these individuals. Providing businesses with resources that they can use regularly will help them feel safer and more at ease when having to address these individuals. Phone numbers for aid organizations, in person connections with people such as the bylaw and RCMP officers, and the knowledge that they don't have to address this problem alone is vital to providing the compassionate care that is needed.