

KARI TOLIVER WILKINSON – Council Candidate

What do you believe are the three most significant issues Salmon Arm will face during the next four years? What role should City Council play in addressing them, and what specific progress would you hope to see by the end of your term?

I believe Salmon Arm faces three significant challenges over the next four years: upgrading essential infrastructure, investing in recreation, and addressing homelessness, addiction and public safety. These issues affect our quality of life, our local economy and our ability to plan responsibly for growth.

1. Essential infrastructure

Our water and wastewater systems need major upgrades to keep pace with growth. These are essential services, and this work can't be delayed. Council has already committed millions to critical projects, including the Stage IV Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade and replacement of the Zone 2 (Canoe) Water Pump Station, which is 54 years old!

With project costs escalating, we need to keep these upgrades moving while closely monitoring budgets and managing costs to minimize the burden on taxpayers and utility ratepayers.

By the end of my term, I want to see these major projects progressing on schedule, within budget, with clear timelines and a long-term plan to maintain the essential infrastructure our growing community depends on.

2. A pool and multi-use recreation facility

I'm hearing loud and clear that residents want a new pool and indoor recreation facility. Recreation is an investment in healthy families, active seniors, youth opportunities and a vibrant local economy. These facilities can also attract sporting events and visitors who support local businesses.

We need to work with the CSRD, explore public-private partnerships, pursue grants and involve local organizations in finding an affordable way forward.

By the end of my term, I want to see a clear plan for funding, building and operating a facility, with a realistic timeline and hopefully, be on the path toward making it happen.

3. Homelessness, addiction and public safety

This is complicated, and responsibility extends beyond the municipality. But this is our community, and Council has a role to play.

We need to bring together the Province, health services, BC Housing, police, businesses and community organizations to develop a coordinated approach that connects people with housing, mental-health care and addiction treatment. We also need practical measures to address theft, vandalism and the impacts on public spaces, businesses and emergency services.

Compassion and accountability must go hand in hand.

By the end of my term, I want to see a coordinated local strategy, clear responsibilities, measurable goals and tangible improvements in access to support and safety in our neighbourhoods and downtown.

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Council's job is to set priorities, make responsible decisions, work collaboratively and hold itself accountable for results. We will not solve all the challenges in four years, but we should be able to show our residents real, measurable progress, not just plans and reports.

2. Year-round economic vitality and resilience

Wildfire smoke and increasingly unpredictable fire seasons can significantly affect the summer economy that many Salmon Arm businesses rely on. At the same time, local spending alone may not be enough to sustain a diverse small-business community throughout the year. What role should the City play in building a stronger year-round economy, attracting customers and investment during the spring, fall, and winter, and supporting partnerships, infrastructure, events, and community amenities that help local businesses remain viable in every season?

I think Salmon Arm needs to look beyond the summer tourism season and build an economy that works year-round. Wildfire smoke and unpredictable fire seasons are a reminder that we can't put all our eggs in one basket.

We need to support the businesses we already have while attracting new investment and creating good local jobs. That includes encouraging manufacturing, knowledge-based businesses and agricultural processing facilities that add value to the food we grow here. Processing more of our agricultural products closer to home could create jobs, support our farmers.

We also have tremendous assets to build on. From Larch Hills and our outdoor recreation opportunities to arts, culture, sporting events and community festivals, we have reasons for people to visit in every season. Council can help by supporting partnerships, promoting events and investing in amenities (like a recreation centre with a new pool) that attract visitors and make Salmon Arm a great place to live, work and do business.

The City provided \$673,427 to the Salmon Arm Economic Development Society in 2024, so I believe residents should expect to see clear, measurable results from our economic development investments. We should be tracking things like new businesses and investment, jobs created, business expansion and economic activity outside the traditional summer season. I believe residents should expect to see clear, measurable results from our economic development investments.

Council needs to be proactive, open to new ideas and willing to work with others to turn opportunities into results. By the end of my term, I want us to be able to point to real progress: more good local jobs, new investment, stronger existing businesses and a more diverse economy that isn't as dependent on a few months of the year. If we are going to invest in economic development, we should be able to show our residents what that investment is accomplishing.

3. Growing and protecting our downtown

Downtown Salmon Arm is one of the defining physical attractions of our community and continues to be an important draw for residents and visitors. Protecting its character and long-term vitality requires a healthy balance of commercial activity and thoughtful, higher-density residential development. What is your vision for growing our downtown, and what actions would

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you support to attract investment, increase housing, strengthen existing businesses, and maintain the qualities that make the area distinctive?

I believe we can grow our downtown while protecting the qualities that make it special. That starts with encouraging thoughtful higher-density residential development where it makes sense, with a mix of apartments, condos, rentals and smaller units for young people, seniors and those looking to downsize. But density should mean more than simply adding buildings. New development needs to consider parking, traffic, sidewalks, accessibility and green space, particularly for seniors and people with mobility challenges.

We also need to make it easier to invest downtown by reducing unnecessary barriers and delays and looking at incentives or partnerships for projects that provide needed housing or bring vacant and underused properties back to life. At the same time, we need to support the businesses that are already there. Our independent businesses are a big part of downtown's character, so business retention and succession should be just as important as attracting new businesses.

A vibrant downtown also needs to be safe, clean and accessible. Our sidewalks and public spaces need attention, including a better lens for people using mobility aids. We need to address vandalism, litter and property damage, while continuing to work with businesses, police and social-service organizations on homelessness and public safety.

Growth shouldn't mean losing our character. We should encourage good design, walkability and interesting storefronts, while continuing to make downtown a year-round destination. The Downtown Salmon Arm Association's quarterly activations—from the Hot Chocolate Tasting Tour and Spring Festival to Roots and Blues concerts and the Forage General's Yuletide Village and the Rotary Christmas Parade (which I helped create 4 years ago and still co-chair along with fellow Council candidate and Rotarian, Morgan Turland)—help bring people downtown, and I would support continuing to build on that momentum.

4. Infrastructure, economic growth, and community attractions

Maintaining and improving municipal infrastructure is essential to the success of existing businesses and the broader community. At the same time, Salmon Arm must continue investing in amenities and attractions that enhance quality of life and help draw visitors, residents, investment, and new businesses. How would you approach these priorities, and what infrastructure or community investments do you believe should be advanced during your term?

City Council is going to have to keep a close eye on our finances. We already have a major investment going into the water treatment plant, and we have other infrastructure needs that can't be ignored. Roads, water, sewer and sidewalks are not exciting projects, but they are the foundation that our residents and businesses rely on every day. We need to make sure we are maintaining what we have and planning ahead so infrastructure keeps up with growth.

At the same time, I think some community amenities should be looked at as investments, not just expenses. A properly designed recreation centre and pool could attract visitors, help retain residents and give us the opportunity to host larger sporting events because we would have the right-sized facilities. Sporting events bring people into our community who stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants and shop at local businesses. That is good for our economy and builds on the tourism we already have.

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I would like to see the recreation centre and pool moved higher on our priority list, while being realistic about what we can afford. We need to look at grants, partnerships with the CSRD and creative ways to help fund these projects rather than putting the entire burden on City of SA property taxpayers.

My approach would be to prioritize the infrastructure we need to support a growing community, while also making strategic investments that make Salmon Arm a great place to live, work and visit. We can't do everything at once, so we need to make thoughtful choices about where our dollars will have the greatest long-term benefit.

5. A safe, welcoming, and compassionate downtown

Salmon Arm's street solicitation bylaw was controversial when it was introduced. In our experience, Bylaw 4273, together with an increased bylaw presence, has helped reduce persistent solicitation and loitering downtown, concerns that have become more pronounced across many BC communities. People experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, addictions, and poverty require appropriate and compassionate support. At the same time, a healthy business and property base is essential to the municipal tax base and our community's ability to fund services. How would you pursue compassionate solutions while ensuring that downtown businesses and property owners are supported when dealing with these challenges?

As a member of the Salmar Community Association Board, I have seen first-hand the impact that vandalism, mental-health challenges, addiction and persistent property damage can have on staff, customers and an organization's bottom line. I'm frustrated by the costs our association has had to absorb, because every dollar we spend dealing with these issues is a dollar that can't go back into our community through scholarships, grants and programs.

This is a complicated issue. Homelessness is not technically a municipal responsibility, but this is our community, and we can't simply sit back and wait for another level of government to fix it. We need to be part of the solution and advocate for the support our community needs.

Homelessness is not one issue. It includes people who are unhoused, people struggling with serious addictions, and people dealing with significant mental-health challenges who have nowhere to go but the street. We need solutions that recognize those differences.

At the same time, we can't ignore what is happening around us. Small businesses and non-profits are dealing with broken windows, vandalism, theft, human waste and increased security costs they can't continue to absorb. Our police, paramedics and fire departments are also dealing with the fallout, and those costs ultimately affect the whole community.

We are talking about human beings - daughter, son, sister or brother—and I believe we need to approach this with compassion. But compassion also means getting people the appropriate help, and having reasonable expectations around behavior.

At the municipal level, I would support bringing local partners together through a task force to identify immediate gaps, pursue supportive and transitional housing, and advocate strongly to the provincial and federal governments for the mental-health and addiction services our region needs. We also need practical municipal measures that improve safety, protect public spaces and support the businesses and organizations that are helping make our downtown work.