***Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce Candidate Question Three – October 2018***

This Saturday (October 20) is an opportunity for voters to help shape the future of our region through the municipal election. This year’s election has a diverse range of committed community members who have put their names forward to help lead us over the next four years.

In its role of providing important information and advocacy for the business community, the Nelson & District of Chamber of Commerce is helping scratch beyond the surface with candidates to help understand what contributions these candidates would make should they be successful at the polls. The Chamber’s Board of Directors have posed three questions to all candidates for mayor, council and RDCK Area E (Area F director Tom Newell is in by acclamation). The answers to Question Three are provided below.

We hope that this is helpful information in determining which candidates will provide the kind of leadership that you value. And please don’t forget to vote on October 20!

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**QUESTION THREE: What are your views on the current state of downtown Nelson and what can you do as a member of council to have a positive impact on the downtown business community?**

***Jesse Woodward (council)***

I love Baker Street. I have worked on it for 7 years due to being the manager of the Nelson Downtown Local Market, MarketFest and GardenFest and I can say with confidence and experience that it is a very cool and interesting place. We should all be proud that we have such a wonderful and diverse city centre. Many small towns in B.C. do not have anything close to what we have so let’s step back for a moment and count our blessings that we have a city centre like Baker St. and not some giant highway cutting through our town or a huge row of box stores instead of a cohesive downtown. That being said this state of being will not be maintained if it is not cared for and carefully developed. There needs to be more engagement with the Nelson street culture instead of just anger and frustration. There needs to be more outreach and communication with this sector of people. We cannot wish them away, throw them out of town or make it illegal for them to be here. Law and order will only take us so far. The only way forward is to foster real human relationship with representatives of the business community and the street culture community so that there can be a development of mutual respect, education and understanding between both sides. We all want to be understood and valued whether we are homeless or not. Perspective and compassion is what will make Baker St. great not punishment and exclusion of certain sectors of our local society.

***Rik Logtenberg (council)***

- Downtown Nelson is beautiful, lively and friendly. Even the alleys, with the new murals, are fun to walk. I especially love our heritage buildings.

- Infrastructure is an ongoing challenge and Baker Street is due for work, which will disrupt every business on the street.

- Parking is annoying. As council we need to fix it before tourism increases much more and our population grows from new developments. I will help uncover the best ideas and evaluate how new technology can help.

- Panhandling is a problem for Baker St businesses and a few people in our street culture, in moments of crisis, are unsafe. Solutions have been illusive. For example, a recent bylaw proposal that aimed to beef up the SafeStreets Act failed because Council believed it would only make things worse. The thinking was that we can't just shove people around; and we need to cool the temperature, not raise it. I believe solutions start with education. A recent Nelson Cares survey found that over 100 people had experienced homelessness in the past year, and there are roughly 20 – 30 individuals who rely on Nelson’s ‘street culture’ to survive. However, quite a few of these people hang around Baker Street because they want to be near other people. If we want to entice them away from storefronts and, ideally, off Baker St, we need to offer alternatives. To get there, we need to reenergize the collaboration between downtown businesses, the Chamber, Nelson Cares, NCSC, IHA, and the police.

***Michelle Hillaby (council)***

The current state of downtown is not what we want as a tourist town, nor is it acceptable for locals. Why have we let the buskers be chased away by the summer panhandlers? Why are tourists leaving Nelson and commenting on how dirty our city is? Perception is everything and word of mouth is powerful. Our local businesses will not survive if the tourists are chased away. The time and money must be put into maintaining the look and feel of our downtown. Nelson on a warm summer evening is full of people walking from one restaurant to another and enjoying the Nelson vibe. They should be enjoying the ambience of summer lighting, our many talented musicians busking, clean streets, murals, art walks and safety. Anything less is a disappointment. We cannot rely on our views to wow the people. Time and money must be directed to the downtown core.

Actively encouraging and supporting more auditioned busking is one way to bring vibrancy back to our downtown core.

We can also look into alternative options for people to support those in need who are currently aggressively panhandling. For example, many cities are using special Parking Meters that give all the change collected to specific agencies who are able to leverage the money to provide exponentially-more services than can be provided by an individual. We can do something similar in Nelson, creating a “Make a change, don’t just give change” campaign.

***Rob Richichi (council)***

As a business owner, we are obviously disgusted with our downtown core and how businesses are affected by what Baker St. has become. We had our business on Baker St. for about 15 years. We have seen increasing problems with panhandlers, drug dealers, and overall rudeness toward our most valued asset, our customers. We have witnessed an increase in the problems, with no end in sight.

About four years ago, we decided to sell our building. We saw the move as necessary in order to protect our child, to protect ourselves and to protect our customers. It was very difficult to sell a growing asset, but we had no choice. We decided to take less money for ourselves by now having to pay rent. We were not able to control the problems encountered by all business owners on a daily basis.

As a councilor I will try my hardest to protect our children's right, our citizen's rights, and our business owner’s rights. We must also respect the rights of the panhandlers and drug dealers by ensuring that they are treated with respect and dignity as we try to alleviate the problem.

That will not be enough to fix the downtown core, but it will be a start. As a councilor, I will recommend we increase police presence as much as necessary. Visible “beat cops” is the only way to clean up our downtown core.

***Stephanie Wiggins (council)***

I believe that our downtown core is lacking the beauty and pride that I remember it having while growing up in this community. Baker Street has always had it’s struggles, whether it be dog poop or flash floods, and I know we will find the right solutions as a community for our current struggles.

As a member of council I would help insure that the staff we have at City Hall are being given clear direction to help make Baker Street a clean and beautiful place again. Consistent downtown area schedules like street and sidewalk sweeping, garbage and recycling pick up, landscaping and seasonal features (like Christmas lights) would be a great start. Providing a bathroom (or two?) that doesn’t close during the night and in the winter would also insure that all people, no matter time of day or year, can find a place to go and have that need met, so it doesn’t end up in a business’ front stoop. It would also be very important to me that in the creation of these new public bathrooms that we draw from the wealth of knowledgeable professionals that live here in Nelson area to create affordable, functional facilities so we keep the City’s money in the pockets of city residents.

***Cal Renwick (council)***

Downtown Nelson has deteriorated in the past number of years and I believe we can make a change. First I believe we need to create and enforce a panhandling bylaw that will give law enforcement the tools they need to deal with criminal behaviour and to deal with those who live outside of Nelson yet come here to panhandle and engage in other negative or illegal acts. We have a very caring and generous business community that is frustrated, but they need to be a major player in the change. Building and business owners need to take a step back and look at their properties with a fresh set of eyes. What needs fixing, painting, cleaning? There are programs in other communities that have downtown building and business improvement funds that we could adopt. This has to start with a caring and respectful attitude from city hall and open dialogue between business and city. More street events in the downtown core would help make it more enjoyable for visitors and residents alike and spur economic activity. I also think we need to be more accepting of the homeless and mentally challenged that are part of the downtown culture. Last and not very likely I would love to see the streetcar rumbling up and down Baker St.

***Charles Jeanes (council)***

These articles define an issue:

<https://www.nelsonstar.com/news/fifty-two-downtown-businesses-call-for-action-from-nelson-council/>

<https://www.nelsonstar.com/news/nelson-street-culture-group-makes-eight-recommendations/>

Business has a concern about the downtown. It's not the most-important determinant of what Council needs to do downtown. Not for me, anyway.

Baker St. is a major attraction to visitors -- because it's the street where so many *Nelsonites* are comfortable being, shopping, socializing. I'm comfortable there, so are my family, friends, acquaintances. If you aren't, look inside yourself: why aren't you?

The complainers about panhandling, mentally-ill, impoverished, and homeless people are a small minority.

Poverty and homelessness are a *moral crisis*. Are we moral enough to respond?

Give people homes. Finland did it; it works.

I propose **The Nelson Rental Covenant** [ask me; 352-6416].

A home is a human right. The cost of not caring for our poor is high, because policing, hospitals, and crime, are immensely expensive. Much data supports giving the underclass direct support, to lower social costs of poverty.

Every issue I know, for Nelson, can be managed, granted enough resources. Resources cost money.

Our world does not lack money, it lacks justice in sharing wealth. (Eight billionaires own half the world's wealth.)

Non-violent Revolution is needed. It starts by changing a mind, then another, *etc*... I enter elections for the chance of publicity for views citizens might not otherwise hear.

Research: [www.charleseisenstein.net](http://www.charleseisenstein.net/)

I oppose Development/growth! I speak about morality! Who does this? It isn't normal.

Normal has given us this perilous, threatened world. I'm done with *normal*.

I apologize for preaching. **Anti-capitalism** is my religion.

***John Dooley (mayor)***

Nelson has a downtown core that is the envy of numerous communities. However, things have deteriorated over the past 4 years under the current municipal leadership. I have heard:

- from businesses that are impacted by having people sit and sleep in their doorways.

- from senior citizens and tourists that feel intimidated when they go downtown.

- from buskers who no longer play music on Baker Street.

An unacceptable, disrespectful culture is developing. I take it seriously when 52 businesses take the unprecedented step of buying a full page ad in the Nelson Star to express frustrations with the City’s leadership.

If elected Mayor, I commit to taking this situation on in a compassionate but decisive and practical manner. I’ll spend time on our streets to talk to members of the business community about successes and challenges. There are both short and long term issues to focus on when we examine the situation that presently exists: Homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse are complex issues that cannot be resolved overnight. What I will do right away is create a set of expectations based on respect for all citizens and zero tolerance for inappropriate and illegal behaviours. I also want to open conversations about civic pride: I want to see Christmas lights back, streets clean, and people feeling safe, whether they are citizens or visitors. I want to reassess strategies to see what is working, ensure legislation is enforced, and look for new strategies to address the situation. Overall, it boils down to having expectations of a culture of RESPECT.

***Robin Cherbo (council)***

There have been many factors leading to the problems with aggressive ‘street people’ in the downtown Baker Street starting in the spring. Over the summer the state of the downtown streets has improved with Shambhala festival allowing people to stay longer so they were staying less time in communities on their way home. With assistance from the Police Chiefs Street Culture Collaborative, the Street Outreach Workers, by-law Officers and the street ‘beat’ Police Officers there has been a decrease of aggressive incidents.

As Council we added to by-laws with the traffic ‘pedestrian’ by-law to deal with unruly individuals. The City can continue to support these groups by lobbying Federal and Provencal governments for a stable source of funding, especially for the ‘street outreach workers’. Along with all this we also need to find affordable housing and rentals to find solutions for ‘street people’ to get off the streets.

If re-elected, I will lobby Council for an addition full time by-law officer, to enforce our by-laws especially the ‘clean air by-law’ to deal with no-smoking of cannabis after it becomes legal.

Putting all this together along with revitalization of Baker Street buildings etc., should continue to improve the downtown core for businesses, tourists, pedestrians and shoppers alike.

***Laureen Barker (council)***

Downtown Nelson, which I take to mean Victoria, Baker and Vernon Streets and soon Hall Street, is the retail and hospitality core of Nelson. There are plans for updating the streetlighting and making Baker Street more pedestrian-friendly. It is an interesting place; a lively place a comfortable place to visit for residents of Nelson, the Kootenays, and the world. Baker Street has 4.5 stars in 375 reviews on Trip Advisor.

5\* excellent 191 (54%)

4\* very good 117 (32%)

3\* average 40 (11%)

2\* poor 7 (1%)

1\* terrible 9 (2%)

We are known world-wide for our “interesting shops” “restaurants” and “people watching”. I support continuing efforts on behalf of Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism and Kootenay Rocky Tourism to continue to make our city a popular tourist destination.

While I do understand it is disconcerting for some to have people panhandling on Baker Street and some would say that this reflects poorly on us as a city I would disagree. We are seen as a tolerant and friendly city. If we want to make the downtown less welcoming for poor and homeless people to ask for money and hang out with their friends, we will need to make alternatives more attractive to these people than the status quo. Poverty is the problem and it is province-wide, this is where the work is; in poverty reduction, supported housing and supports for mental health and addictions.

***Janice Morrison (council)***

Baker Street is the heart of Nelson. Nelson’s commitment to its heritage buildings, and notable efforts of building owners like Doug and Fiona at Cartolina and the Martin Group’s Hume Hotel and Baker Street Inn restorations/renovations have ranked us #2 on Expedia’s Charming Historic Towns list in Canada. Recent recognition of having more restaurants per capita than San Francisco or Manhattan adds to the cosmopolitan vibe along with our cafés, shops, public art, galleries, murals and Hall Street Plaza events.

Nelson’s success brings with it a strong fabric of diversity to downtown Baker Street: tourists and entrepreneurs, young families and seniors, the well-off and the marginalized.

Our bylaw officers and city police have tools such as our new Pedestrian bylaw, and when necessary, the Provincial Safe Streets bylaw to manage movement of people on our streets according to the law, and ensure our downtown is safe for everyone.

Our city council must continue to build relationships with organizations like Nelson Cares, Nelson Community Services and Anchors to facilitate and advocate for our citizens in need. The Nelson Street Outreach Collaborative latest report indicates the outreach team’s presence on Baker Street is having a positive effect. The city council can lobby the Federal and Provincial governments to properly fund mental-health and addiction programs, healthcare and other social programs, so advocates’ time is spent helping on the street, not searching for next year’s funding.

Our goal should be to develop our commonalities, not our differences, to ensure long term sustainability of Nelson.

***Brittny Anderson (council)***

Nelson is fortunate to have a vibrant, walkable downtown core that draws our community to interact, shop, dine and celebrate. I have listened to community members, including business owners, who are concerned that the street culture in Nelson has made our downtown core undesirable. As a server at Rel-ish Bistro I have experienced the tension that our local businesses face when it comes to serving all members of the community. I believe that we need to work two-fold to find solutions that ensure Nelson is a safe space for everyone and a desirable, and lucrative place to be a business owner.

My approach:

- Be compassionate: Understand that most people that are living on the streets have experienced trauma, often childhood trauma.

- Listen: We need to listen to the experts and this includes the business community, and local service providers who are in direct contact with our marginalized populations to find solutions that are palatable to both communities of experts.

- Housing First: The housing first model which moves people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services is critical to combating homelessness and poverty and will help to mitigate businesses concerns with the undesirable impacts of street culture.

- Equal Service Levels: Ensure communities surrounding Nelson have sufficient service levels so people aren’t forced to travel to Nelson to access these services.

***Travis Hauck (council)***

I worked downtown in retail for over 15 years and have seen a lot of changes. Baker Street is possibly the best downtown in Canada, the shops, restaurants and buildings offer something for everyone. Helpful and passionate business owners take pride in their community and we need to listen and act on their needs.

In the last few years, there has been a considerable influx of street people, homelessness, and substance misuse. The store owners have had enough and want the panhandling and loitering dealt with. The city needs to put in by laws and not allow loitering in front of stores or asking for money. Find ways to move the street people so they are not scaring people away from certain street corners and we never again have a fatality.

The Hall street construction has made for some tough times in the close by retail stores with parking and traffic issues during the construction. On a positive note, the new IODE park and parking are great upgrades. The public washroom included in that project was a nice idea, giving shops in the close by vicinity a break from public use of their store washroom. On the other hand the washroom has created a hangout for homeless, panhandling, and substance misusers, making it uncomfortable for people to walk by and it has created a negative image.

I’m looking forward to handling these tough issues and am excited to bring back the simple things like Christmas lights.

***Margaret Stacey (council)***

As all our citizens deserve to have *pride in place*, I would encourage the following measures to positively support our downtown core and its businesses:

**- Upholding the basic civil contract on our main streets**: the building owners and tenants should manage attractive maintenance on the buildings and storefronts, while the City’s function covers fire safety, policing, plantings, speedy snow removal and street cleaning, an upcoming underground upgrade, along with some street improvement, ambient lighting and interesting signage.

**- For the businesses**: The City should continue to support the NAEDP with its initiatives around business retention and expansion and succession planning, and continue to support the Chamber network; the hotel taxation supports Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism to promote the amenities. The City should encourage more businesses to review available Roger Brooks seminars for measures that enhance our downtown in signage, parking and planning.

**- As visitors, citizens and businesses deserve safety, civility and friendliness**, the City should continue to support the Street Outreach program, and the use of police for aggression and obstruction. Tourists are not the only visitors. So are the transient, and some of the homeless folks and youth; they require a helpful hospitality and a special kind of wayfinding.

**- For ambience, arts, entertainment**, **recreation** **and history**: The City should continue to widely support the business of downtown arts, culture and recreation through the Cultural Development Committee, CDCC, sculptures, alley murals and the key institutions that define us and reflect us.

For more thoughts on many issues, please check out Margaretstacey.blogspot.com.

***Leslie Payne (council)***

Nelson’s downtown is the crown jewel of the Queen City. And like all jewels, it needs to be polished on a regular basis to maintain its allure and value. It’s been 37 years since the Main Street revitalization. And the city engagement with the public and a large number of stakeholders has created a plan for the implementation of that revitalization in conjunction with the infrastructure upgrades that are required.

Our downtown is delightful with a wide variety of shops to cater to every need, restaurants to rival many urban centres. A wide variety of events and festivals that keep the tourist trade increasing with every year.  Most landlords do a good job at maintaining their buildings and its exciting to hear work being done at the former site of the RedFish Grill. Just another indication of the desirability of this dynamic downtown core.

I was very excited to hear at the last council meeting that festive lighting will once again be installed on Baker Street for the holiday season and continue for the full year.

Like all communities in BC and Canada, Nelson has a contingent of homeless citizens busking in town.  The presentations at NCOH’s Forum on Homelessness Wednesday evening explained the structural, systemic and societal reasons for the increase of this population and presented a lot of ideas that will contribute to decreasing their number in a humane and compassionate way with the continued support of city council.

Let’s all keep asking “What’s possible?” instead of “What’s wrong?”

***Deb Kozak (mayor)***

Nelson’s downtown is not immune to the challenges of aging infrastructure; climate change impacts; rising poverty and other social issues affecting communities across B.C. and Canada. Fortunately, the high number of shoppers visible on downtown streets demonstrates that Nelson’s business climate remains healthy and vibrant.

Current Council has actively addressed these issues. Efforts are underway to reduce contributions to climate change and to protect community, including downtown businesses, from its impacts. One example is an upgrade of sewer and storm systems to reduce downtown flooding. The Downtown Urban Design Strategy will further assist the City in accessing grant funding for more underground and street-level improvements towards a more functional and aesthetically-refreshed environment.

Managing increasingly-visible, unwanted street behaviours is another challenge. Working with Nelson Police, Council has enhanced legislation governing street behaviour and reinstated a full-time beat officer to respond accordingly. However, policing is not the solution to poverty, mental health and addiction problems behind these behaviours. Therefore, the City also participates in the Nelson Street Culture Collaborative, which brings community together to identify additional solutions. One outcome of this collaboration is Nelson’s Street Outreach Team, which connects people to access housing and other services.

There is now a solid foundation in place to address the challenges faced by our downtown business community. These strategies require time to be fully realized, but are already having a positive impact leading other communities to emulate our approaches. After all, Nelson is a safe, desirable community and by continuing to pull together in the face of complex challenges, it will continue to be so.

***Keith Page (council)***

As a business owner downtown I put a edible garden in front of my shop every summer I understand it takes both the city and the business community working together to make great things happen downtown.

What I can do is work with the business community to identify problems and listen for reoccurring themes to bring us together to solve some of the issues facing the downtown. From Christmas lights to infrastructure projects.

I think we have a mental health and poverty issue downtown that is made worse by the housing crisis. So improving our housing affordability is one of my top priorities. There are concrete steps we can take to make sure we’re shovel ready when provincial/federal funds come along to build affordable housing.

I also believe that we need to work closely with our regional partners in Trail, Castlegar, Rossland and others to improve the service delivery of basic social services like 2 hot meals and beds in each municipality so people with poverty and mental health issues do not need to come to Nelson just to get the basics.

**What can we do, a few of the things are:**

- A vibrant downtown is a business community working well together and with the city

- Addressing poverty on the street at it’s root not just sweeping it away

- Working with our regional partners to deliver even services across the region so we’re all doing our part for our citizens

**Robbie Kalabis (Council)**

***What are your views on the current state of downtown Nelson and what can you do as a member of council to have a positive impact on the downtown business community?***

I think there are a lot of great things going on in downtown Nelson, i.e. weekly and summer markets, thriving businesses, enhanced amenities and a hive of bustling community.

The street culture that has cast a shadow in recent years however, is an unfortunate consequence of a growing city.

Issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental illness and addiction are very complex and challenging issues we are currently grappling with municipally, provincially and federally. There is no silver bullet.

It will require collaboration between numerous entities to make some positive changes and I believe Nelson can one day be a model for other jurisdictions to follow as innovative, homegrown solutions evolve and are implemented successfully.

With my skillset in project management, I am well versed in bringing the right people together to make a real change!

<https://www.facebook.com/voteforrobbie>

***Ramona Faust (Area E director)***

Nelson has been the centre of business activity for RDCK Area E residents. Some go to Castlegar and Kaslo depending on where they live but Nelson is the place for services for an additional 15,000 people. This provides a vital downtown and more business and service choices than a town of 10,000 might normally have.

I have lived in the Kootenay Lake area for 41 years and briefly in Nelson. Frankly Nelson has ridden the wave of many changes. Institutions left, small business came. We had more retail choices, we had counter culture folks on city streets panhandling but then opening small businesses that grew into successful enterprises. Hockey teams flocked to city stores during tournaments. Now mountain bikers and skiers make a mark while retiring boomers line the street with family.

The mall was supposed to be the death nell of downtown and then it rose from the recession of the 1980’s with a trendy heritage theme that has served it well. I don’t see a large emergency in the state of downtown Nelson so I would listen to retailers to find out their concerns not specifically related to social conditions but rather what would help them. Perhaps a downtown revitalization project would liven up the décor and energy retrofits would make businesses profitability increase and that would be a priority but its still a lovely downtown. Parking needs to be rethought and I know people have struggled for a decade. People need homes and places to go where they fit in. I think a municipality can play a role.