



Reid MacDonald

14. Is downtown business re-development a laudable alternative to another public edifice located in the Westwind development at the furthest periphery of the city?

This is an important question for the future of our city, as I believe a thriving downtown, full of vitality most days - and particularly evenings - of the year is an important part of what makes us a true "community", that connects with one another, in a central location/area. The unfortunate reality is that, notwithstanding the admirable efforts of the City Center Business Association, to date, our downtown is severely lacking, particularly in relation to our neighbours down the road, in Stony Plain. Time and again I hear from residents "why can't our downtown be more like Stony's?". The quick answer to the question, in my mind, comes down to commitment, both in terms of real dollars, and in terms of real leadership, from Council, on how to revitalize our downtown. I recognize that there is a Downtown Revitalization Committee, but, with the exception of the public markets (which have been successful), most I've spoken with would say the results are still waiting to be seen, from this committee.

A thriving downtown is crucial not just to help preserve the existing businesses downtown, but to help attract new ones and, most importantly I feel, to help create a "gathering place", where people in the community can spontaneously meet with one another, and be in spontaneous community with one another. This will help drive and foster a better "sense of place" for the people in Spruce Grove, which has become even more crucial, as we grow so big, and so fast. These things, of course, will help drive business downtown, and will help preserve existing businesses, as well. My goal, as I stated in my forum comments on Monday, October 2nd, is to help preserve Spruce Grove as a "special place", where people choose to raise their families, or where they choose to remain, after their children have left home (perhaps to return later). All of these things combine to promote a mental and physiological sense of well-being, particularly during the cold winter months, when our inclination is to "hunker down", and retreat to isolation in our homes. A thriving downtown would help to alleviate this tendency, as it would give people a place to meet.

I believe City Council needs to take a strong(er) leadership role on the Downtown Revitalization Committee, rather than allowing it to be steered by the many diverse, and disparate voices on the City Center Business Association. I think the way in which Council can do this is with both financial resources, but also through bylaw and zoning/planning decisions, such as ensuring the right business mix exists downtown (e.g. more restaurant/foodservice/entertainment/retail, rather than professional services), with the right aesthetics (open to foot traffic), and the rights kinds of hours (i.e. evenings & weekends). I also think that, as part of these initiatives, serious consideration should be given to the construction of a new arts/culture/library hub, in downtown Spruce Grove - a central "draw" for the downtown.

I think this is just the beginning steps toward downtown revitalization, but if I'm on Council it's an important concept, that I'd like to help promote and advance.

Reid's answer to **How do you plan on improving public participation and real engagement in what the city will look like in the future?** is continued on page 2



How do you plan on improving public participation and real engagement in what the city will look like in the future?

I'm prepared to commit to pursuing real, proactive engagement with residents, and going to meet them "where they're at", if I'm elected to Council. Some have suggested this is only done during election time, but I know that only 3 or 4 candidates - myself included - have consistently gone out in our community, and engaged with residents, by knocking on their doors, throughout the entirety of this campaign period. I encourage residents to challenge their candidates on this, and to carefully reflect on which candidates have truly, honestly taken the time - and considerable effort - to consistently get out in our community, going to people's homes and making the effort to connect with them in conversation, and consider how this bodes for how a prospective member of Council will engage with residents after October 16th. Facebook may be "a" way to engage with the public, but I don't believe it's the best way. Hosting an event may be easier for a candidate, but it still requires the residents to "come to them". I don't see either of these as sufficient engagement efforts. I see no reason why our elected officials can't regularly knock on doors in the community, throughout their Council term. I'm extremely hesitant to make promises, for fear of being labeled as a "typical campaigning politician", but I will commit, if I'm on Council, to getting out in our community, on a regular basis, and meeting people "where they're at", in an effort to engage better with residents, and to hear their true feelings about how our city is doing. This is something I am passionate about, and it's a promise I will keep, and expect to be held accountable for, if I'm on Council.

Aside from all of these "old school" engagement efforts, I'm also excited about increasing Council transparency, including "opening up our data", which I feel will help residents to engage with Council, and the operations of our city, in new, exciting, and fascinating ways. We've seen myriad examples in Edmonton, where they're doing some very cool stuff with open data, of how opening up all of the vast data and other information a city houses can help empower and engage residents, through the building of online tools, apps, and other concepts that a city's administration, alone, can't possibly hope to develop on its own. Open data is the foundational piece of what makes a "Smart City", and my plans for Spruce Grove, which I call 'Grove Forward', are about making us a "Smart" 21st-century city, that engages residents through the provision of open data, and then, in turn, leverages our engaged residents' collective collaboration and contributions, to help us eventually become a city that is both highly engaged, and also makes its major, future-focused decisions data-driven ones.