

# Downtown: Let's Get Started Mayoral Debate

## Mayoral and City Council Candidate Answers to Questions

Downtown Prince George offered each of the Mayoral and City Council Candidates the opportunity to respond to the following questions (in approximately 200 words):

1. What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?
2. How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the city?

Attached are the responses we received, and are presented in the same order as the ballot.



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# Dane Greenwell

## Candidate for Mayor

The immediate issues of downtown can be boiled down to three main issues. Lack of support/interest for creating new business in the core, a feeling of uncleanness on the streets and in the air and lastly a large population of street persons; some of whom are promoting pan handling, crime and on street the street drug use.

To address the first issue, a lack of support for new business, I have several propositions. An even greater tax break for new business in the core and even up to a ten year grace period on property taxes for certain business'. Also by improving safety in the downtown we will encourage interest in new prospectful business owners and improve the business of current business owners.

A lack of cleanliness in the streets and air is becoming a rising issue for all of Prince George and I think by addressing them downtown living as well as downtown business conduct will become more enjoyable. The current task force put into place by His Worship Colin Kinsley, is most certainly improving air quality at a regular rate and not hurting our industries, however, the streets have become heavily littered, weedy, bird dropping ridden and there are many other contributors which I will create a task force on controlling.

Lastly the problem of particular homeless people influencing our citizens to not come downtown because a level of fear or simply refusing to deal with them. Some, but not all, of these people are promoting crime and drug use on the streets of our downtown and this does in fact have some possible means to an end. By moving our needle exchange to an area where it is not located by what should be a major business and our judicial area; and providing a police presence there at all times we will weed out the persons that can be helped and deserve some support and deter the crime promoters.

Thank you for a chance to propose some of the ideas I have to improve the downtown of Prince George and in turn improve the entire city in business in pride.

# Dan Rogers

## Candidate for Mayor

Downtown remains the heart of the city with millions of tax dollars invested in infrastructure. In order to maximize that investment, the city must take action on building a better city centre with a strong people focus. Dan's plan focuses on three key areas; safer streets; investment; and an improved physical improvement.

### **Safer Streets**

- Support foot patrols & community policing.
- Priority for bylaw enforcement.
- Pursue new powers to deal with unsightly premises.
- Pilot video monitoring project.
- Develop Community Court.
- Ensure funding for those with mental or addiction challenges.
- Develop and implement plan to eliminate homelessness.

### **Investment**

- Leverage city property for development in the downtown.
- Refocus revitalization tax exemption to encourage specific development such as seniors housing, hotel or retail development.
- Strengthen city policies to make sure downtown is given priority for development.
- Implement Smart Growth on Ground recommendations.
- Pursue development of opportunities through partnerships with Aboriginal organizations.

### **Cleaner & Greener**

- Provide public washrooms.
- Streetscape improvements with business partnerships.
- Ensure people focused streets (wide sidewalks, two-way traffic).
- Increase public art.
- Support Performing Arts Centre and year-round Public Market.
- Support green corridor concept.

# Don Zurowski

## Candidate for Mayor

I am running for mayor of the City of Prince George, because I have the passion, experience, and leadership capacity to do the job.

My plan for downtown includes three levels of housing, land assembly, relocation of health services and enforcement. Many of the downtown solutions to problems such as homelessness should not be funded by the city; however we must take ownership of the issues and manage the solutions, with the downtown business community, and service agencies and provincial and federal government.

I am committed to a “housing first” strategy to provide homes for the homeless and 24 hour care facilities for those suffering from mental illness. We need to get back into the land development business, to increase residential living downtown.

Law Enforcement is also part of the downtown solution, but we must take care of housing first, so that we focus our enforcement strategy on the right people. Our RCMP need to be less tolerant of how some folk downtown conduct themselves. I am quite interested in a new policing initiative called “Gang Task Force” that targets gang violence that impacts public safety through proactive, intelligence-led enforcement strategies. It is currently being implemented in Vancouver.

I envision a confident Prince George that is celebrated as preferred place to live!

# Mary Anne Arcand

## Candidate for Councillor

*What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?*

Public perception of the downtown as unsafe and undesirable is the immediate concern. That takes in homelessness, public safety, and the “look and feel” of downtown.

We’ve heard several candidates outline “their” plan for downtown- that’s not right, or fair. No one person can impose their ideas. It takes collaboration, cooperation and a strategy that includes all stakeholders (businesses, residents, social service agencies, the police).

There are two well recognized models that I recommend looking at:

1. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which looks at lighting, accesses, appearance, mixed use, etc. There is federal funding for this model.
2. Crime Prevention Through Social Development (CPSD), which addresses the social issues that contribute to crime and public safety. There is also federal funding available for this model.

*How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the City?*

Our downtown core is the heart and soul of the City. The downtown reflects who we are, not a string of big box stores. We want it to become a “destination” place”, where we gather to enjoy Prince George itself- a vibrant cultural and business hub, a place to be proud of, that Prince George residents will want to take their guests to, instead of telling them to stay away from.

# Don Bassermann

## Candidate for Councillor

I too, share the goal of improving our city by improving the downtown. In offering a broad statement of my vision for our downtown, I will try to respond simultaneously to the two questions presented and follow-up by focusing on specific actions within the length of response limitations.

Broadly speaking, over the next three years I see a Downtown that boasts of appealing entertainment venues; varied residential developments; expanded niche retail; improved real and perceived safety; a formal commitment to a year round Farmer's Market; an all partners commitment to building a Performing Arts Center in the downtown and a range of dining options. This will be supported by a city having a strong business climate and high levels of employment both based on a diverse economy.

The immediate issues that will help achieve the vision presented include:

1. The city taking a more "hands on" role in developing housing options in the downtown – including housing for seniors, students, persons with accessibility issues, and those who have an interest in "downtown living".
2. Addressing the needs of the homeless allowing for these persons to not have a negative presence on our downtown streets.
3. Address safety concerns by working with the downtown interests to build the ambassador program and working with the RCMP to establish a more vigorous response to the criminal elements in the downtown.
4. Advance the decision making processes for the establishment of the Performing Arts Centre and a year round Farmer's Market.
5. Make strategic infrastructure adjustments including two way traffic flows, traffic slowing strategies and appealing parking options.

Attractions of private capital investment will continue to be important.

# Ellen Cranston

## Candidate for Councillor

*What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?*

The homeless issue facing Prince George needs to be fixed, because if we can fix a part of that, we will also help fix the downtown. Once the Friendship Lodge is completed, many of the 30 – 35 people in the downtown who are not able to live in a “normal” environment will be cared for. One of the best plans I would bring forward, is to offer a 24 hour drop-in centre attached to a CPAC. The drop-in centre would be a safe place where a person could use the washroom, have a cup of coffee. The centre would be staffed by outreach workers and RCMP members which would help form better relationships.

Gang Turf Wars have got to be stopped. We need to first of all work with the new RCMP Inspector and get a sense of performance management around our expectations with relationship to the number of arrests compared to the number of convictions.

*How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the city?*

Let's develop the green corridor into a mini Granville Island below Patricia Boulevard that could house a permanent Farmer's Market, a Performing Arts Centre and a green space that would tie in to the parks and trails systems we currently have.

# Shirley Gratton

## Candidate for Councillor

*What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?*

Downtown is a complex and not simple issue. What should we do first? A committee of many players must take on this task and see each part of the most important issues be completed and then go to the next. Community leaders be included in the development planning stages with their expertise. To answer your question there are many concerns to our downtown as you all know from street people, shops attracting stolen articles to the services of taking care of the homeless and needy.#1-

*How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the city?*

We are proud to be living in Prince George. It is time to make our downtown a clean, safe and a shopping district of a must see place to “Explore Downtown PG.”

# Shari Green

## Candidate for Councillor

Addressing the homeless population downtown and restoring a sense of safety are key first steps for anyone to want to invest in downtown development. Working with social service groups and the provincial and federal government for resources and funding, we need to help house the most chronically homeless people into safe housing including supports needed to regain independence. It is proven that the cost of housing and support is about 1/3 of the cost of maintaining the status quo we have today. The City can provide land, waive fees, offer staffing assistance and grants.

We can restore a sense of safety with a community court, proven to dramatically reduce re-arrest rates, good neighbour agreements proven to reduce crime and nuisance behaviours, and public safety officers funded by business with partnerships, so the police can focus on the real predators, gangs and drug dealers.

The downtown needs a long-term vision, a picture of what downtown will look like in 20 or 30 years, so we can plan for change instead of reacting to it. When the downtown is a thriving and safe neighbourhood we can be proud of, the entire city will benefit economically and socially.

# Gregg Kauk

## Candidate for Councillor

The biggest challenge that exists for the downtown at present is that people don't feel safe or comfortable when they visit the downtown.

Unless we can create an inviting environment, our opportunities for revitalization will be defeated before they begin. What is the incentive for a property owner to invest in beautifying his building if the next day he'll find a rock thrown through his display window, homeless sleeping in her doorway, or addicts shooting up in his alley? In my opinion, we must relocate the social services that are currently in our downtown along with their clientele.

Following a plan that I will champion, property can be made available in the VLA for these social services, an area of the city in which many people who require these services already live. Consolidation of services will allow those seeking assistance "one-stop-shopping" and for one area for the RCMP to patrol.

At the same time, this plan will make it more difficult for organized crime to operate in our City, will make more homes available for seniors and low-income families, and will rehabilitate unsightly property.

An inviting and vibrant downtown is essential for a healthy community and I believe strongly in increasing property values in the downtown and contributing the success of business owners and property holders. It is my belief that this plan will contribute to that success.

# Murry Krause

## Candidate for Councillor

Downtown Prince George needs to be revitalized and rejuvenated to truly become the heart of our city. Although issues facing our downtown have been long standing, we are not different than other cities in North America. Big Box retail located on the outskirts of the city, lack of sense of neighbourhood due to lack of residential development and growing social issues have contributed to the decline of our downtown.

The Big Box stores have been built and were in response to consumer demand, however its been reported that some of the retail trends are moving away from that in favour of a return to boutique shopping and some of the traditional Big Box stores such as Winners are relocating to downtowns.

Most cities are exploring ways to bring residential development into their downtowns, and all appear to be exploring the provision of both social and market housing.

The trends are also to look for progressive ways to respond to social issues. The provision of housing with strong social supports is the current trend and in my mind makes perfect sense.

My strategic plan for the revitalization and rejuvenation of our downtown is for all of us to work together. We all have a stake in a thriving, attractive, clean and safe downtown. We can use best practices from elsewhere and use collaboration as opposed to confrontation to achieve success.

# Debora Munoz

## Candidate for Councillor

We want people to live in Prince George, encourage businesses to invest here, enhance quality of life in all areas, and make our streets safer. To do this we must have political leadership and a willingness to make substantial investments into the 'heart and soul of our community' our downtown. I am committed to using the tools available to local government to ensure a vibrant and livable downtown with:

- Pedestrian friendly designs, such as the green corridor proposed by Millar Addition, Smart Growth on the Ground, etc.
- Affordable housing for everyone
- Encourage development with tax exemption bylaw, greening initiatives, tourism grants, street beautification initiatives, transportation and energy efficiency grants.
- Creating a vibrant mixed-use zoning for downtown i.e., blending the University with downtown development
- Support expansion of downtown central business district to include more downtown businesses
- Support a year-round farmer's market
- Support having a performing Arts Center
- Reduce crime through environmental design, increased police presence and better lighting
- Explore expropriation laws for building owners who have neglected the upkeep and safety of their properties
- Examine the Community Courts system

# Diane Nakamura

## Candidate for Councillor

*What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?*

- Numbers of street-involved folks congregating around business establishments, sleeping in or around dumpsters, doorways, panhandling. Although most of these people are harmless, to the average citizen they may appear frightening and deter people from coming downtown.

Strategic plan – Lobby and advocate for provincial funding to establish day programming so these folks have somewhere safe to be as opposed to being out on the street all day until the shelters open at night. Also advocate for a continuum of housing options. Certain services and businesses cannot be in close proximity. These options will need to be explored and a concrete plan developed and follow through ASAP with assistance from the city in terms of business incentives and available city properties. Engage a third party mediator to work with businesses and service providers to develop a plan of what would work for downtown.

- There are certain businesses that have allowed their establishments to deteriorate – unkept exterior, behind in their city taxes, no insurance on the building, fire safety not up to code, etc.

Strategic plan – Provide more attractive incentives for business improvements, enforce bylaw infractions.

*How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the city?*

Despite contrary beliefs, downtown has and always will be the heart of Prince George. To make significant improvements to the downtown core will boost the morale of our community, attract investors, new residents, infuse our tourism industry and encourage people to reside downtown.

Even though critics argue that downtown cannot be the sole focus, any improvement in the downtown core will trickle benefits to other parts of Prince George. A healthy heart will keep the body moving ahead.

# Brian Skakun

## Candidate for Councillor

*What do you believe are the issues of immediate concern to the downtown and what is your strategic plan to address these issues?*

Public safety and homelessness. To effectively deal with crime, the City need to clearly spell out what our short and long term expectations are of the RCMP. With a new council and a new Superintendent of the RCMP soon arriving, there needs to be meeting to discuss what the City expects of the RCMP. To get additional funding, the RCMP needs to be rated on their performance for the downtown. I would rate their performance based on, additional foot patrols, eliminate open drug use and public drunkenness, as well as a reduction in gang violence and panhandling.

The City needs to also state what the expectations of the service providers are. If you are serving meals to the homeless, clean up your area after the meal. Northern Health needs to move the needle exchange and ensure needles are not given out until one is returned, do not allow drug use in or around their operation, and do not give out crack pipes. Shelters also need to be more accountability as well.

*How do these issues tie into your overall vision for the city?*

The long term plans are for a safe, vibrant downtown that is clean and appealing. This will not happen if there is not real leadership from the Mayor's office down.

# Dwayne Stene

## Candidate for Councillor

I truly believe the immediate concern for downtown is safety.

People need to feel safe at all hours whether shopping or visiting after hour establishments. Furthermore homelessness and the needle exchange is also a serious problem.

What I would like to see is more RCMP presence; this may include but not limited to, a drug and gang task force. This would be viable in making our streets safe again for all.

As for the needle exchange I have mixed feelings on this. The need to keep users safe as well as stopping the spread of disease is good; however this also encourages use of illegal substances.

What I think is extremely important is communication, and would be willing to sit and listen to your group (or any group) and see what could be accomplished and then fight for this beautiful city of which I was born and raised. I could not dream of living anywhere else.

# Dave Wilbur

## Candidate for Councillor

My partners and I built a building at 6th and George Street in 1981. We still own that building. We have seen up close and personal burglaries, vandalism, falling property values, long term vacancies, homelessness, dumpster diving, OD deaths and litter including drug paraphernalia.

The first priority is safety. In the face of a decaying downtown infrastructure it is hard to rationalize that the regional RCMP have relocated to suburbia and our city is planning on spending over \$30 Million relocating the city RCMP outside the area most in need. We should demand better decision making of both the RCMP and our city. Perhaps it is time to really consider whether creating an independent police service is economically viable?

I advocated for a downtown ambassador program since 2005.

We need to return to the days when the downtown action committee had a broad inclusive membership. At least then we had planning from the likes of Dr Currie whose vision appreciated the need for big investment by all levels of government as the nucleus for success.

The creation of CCV and a limited funding of Downtown Prince George has allowed the city to marginalize the need for big plans and big investment in our downtown which must be driven by a multilevel government contribution agreement. It is wrong to deflect criticism for inaction by saying that downtown businesses should shoulder substantial investment.

The new proposal for a Performing Arts Centre must remain downtown. Construction capital needs a multilevel government contribution agreement. The \$400,000.00 a year operating subsidize may be solved by allocating some of the annual Terasen Gas repayment.