



# 2021 Municipal Platform

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Calgarians will have the opportunity to decide the future of Calgary. It is important for the electorate to understand the issues to make informed decisions at the polls. This election is perhaps the most important one because of the changes in our economic environment and the fact that so many incumbents have decided not to seek re-election. Calgarians have the responsibility to choose a new Council that will respond to their needs and move the City forward to continue the growth that has brought many citizens prosperity and the desire to live here. The Pandemic has shown us that we can do things differently and that technology can help us to achieve our goals. It will require a Council with the wherewithal to learn from the past adapt and execute a platform that will serve the citizens in the best way possible.

## About Lead Calgary.

We are a group of Calgarians who are passionate about our city. We come from many different backgrounds – we run small businesses, teach in schools, work with charities and not-for-profits, and are active in our local communities. We believe that Calgary needs to be led by a City Council who will set aside rancour and division, tackle the very real challenges our city is facing, and plan for a strong and vibrant Calgary for decades to come. We will be advocating for new ideas in the 2021 Calgary municipal election and will support candidates who offer what Calgary needs most right now: Leadership.

## 2021 A Watershed Election.

For the past ten years Councils under the leadership of Mayor Nenshi has seen Calgarians paying higher taxes. The continued excessive expenditures which fuelled higher property taxes and the buildup of large surpluses could not have been done without the support of a majority of Council.

The past four years have been even worse for Calgarians. The continued tax and spend policies of the current Council were exacerbated by two important factors; the collapse of the energy industry and the Covid 19 Pandemic. As a result businesses and ordinary taxpayers have been severely affected, albeit in different ways. Nevertheless Calgary will recover but it will require a totally different approach to City Management, more specifically its financial management.

The current Council has been described as a dysfunctional body, with Councillors regularly attacking anyone who questions business as usual at City Hall. Demonizing those who want to pursue new ideas and end the influence of special interests at City Council has frequently prevented the outgoing City Council from making the difficult decisions they were elected to make by voters. The constant reason put forward is that some Councillors would not collaborate. The issue is that one cannot collaborate, if one is not allowed to have a different opinion. The majority of Councillors, notwithstanding their political ideology through their decisions 'to go along; to get along', have in many cases caused severe divisions on Council.

As a result Calgary has seen more spending, higher taxes and worse no transparency and therefore no accountability.

**Lead Calgary** believes that this election offers a real opportunity to bring fundamental change to our local government. We have proposed a series of seven values and key issues upon which a new City Council should build its policy agenda.

### **Our Values and Key Issues:**

1. Restore fiscal responsibility to Calgary.
2. Cut property taxes for homes and businesses.
3. Real accountability and transparency at City Council.
4. Reduce the size and cost of local government.
5. Focus on core services for everyday Calgarians.
6. Promote safe communities which protect Calgarians.
7. Create a climate of economic growth and entrepreneurship in Calgary.
8. End the influence of special interests and political insiders at City Hall

### **Transparency and Accountability.**

At the heart of good governance stands transparency. For a long time Council has held too many 'closed door' meetings to decide on major issues. Calgary, unlike other cities, has held hundreds of in-camera meetings. Without transparency, we cannot have accountability. When citizens do not have the right information, Council cannot be held accountable. City Council must end the practice of making decisions behind closed doors and trusting everyday Calgarians with the information they need to form their own opinions on important issues. That will require a reversal of outgoing Mayor Nenshi's changes to Council procedures, which are at the root of most of the controversies and acrimony at City Council meetings. It also means that Council must end the influence of special interests and political insiders at City Hall.

### **Economic Growth.**

In reality Council does not have control on economic growth; it is true that they can contribute to local growth by cutting Red Tape to promote entrepreneurship in the city. Too often rules and regulations get in the way of economic growth; making it harder and more costly to do business in our city. We need a Council that will respond to the plight of small businesses caused by the pandemic. Council must make better use of Calgary Economic Development to develop policy which puts small business at the centre of our economic development strategy.

Calgary Economic Development must also be more accountable and transparent in their business practices since they are funded by Calgary taxpayers and businesses. While they can promote Calgary to the external world, they must not become a slush fund for political insiders

and special interests. Rather than pursuing pie-in-the-sky goals such as Calgary's failed 2026 Winter Olympics bid, they should be focused on creating the best possible economic climate for Calgary's small and medium-sized businesses, which are the lifeblood of our economy.

### **Restore fiscal responsibility to Calgary.**

For many years, City Council has not been responsible with our tax dollars. Calgarians have been kept in the dark because they do not have a clear understanding of the accounting standards used by municipalities, and the annual financial reports produced by the City's bureaucracy hide the true story of how much spending and taxation has grown at City Council. Far from being broke, as both the bureaucracy and City Council would have us believe, Calgary has amassed an incredible amount of money in reserve funds and surpluses that they have subsequently used for political legacies.

For example, the 2020 annual report shows the following: Reserves \$2,743,827,000 and Accumulated Surplus \$21,817,531,000.

Ending corporate welfare for politically well-connected sectors is an important first step in restoring fiscal responsibility in Calgary. Better financial reporting and disclosures would provide a more complete picture of our city's finances. A careful review of existing programs should be performed

We believe that there are better ways to entice new businesses and philanthropic donations for art projects. It would be better to incentivize new businesses through future tax holidays/credits, and art projects should be funded by philanthropic donations which would allow funders to get a reduction from their taxes in future years.

### **Reduce the size and cost of local government.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown globally that there are new ways to deliver programs and services – frequently in a more cost-effective and convenient manner. We must use more private/public partnerships wherever it is possible to leverage private sector investments. Many services, including golf courses and recreation and sports facilities, can be provided by private and non-profit sport associations. We must also ensure that 'pilot' programs are put into place and done before the implementation of any service, and not the other way around.

The size and cost of our local government is not sustainable. Salaries, wages, pensions, and benefits have grown disproportionately with those in the private sector and has resulted in large future liabilities for the city. A difficult but necessary process must occur to reduce the size and cost of government including bringing salaries, wages, pensions, and benefits in-line with those offered in the private sector.

Budgets are the basis for future expenditures and therefore taxes. The use of the so-called Zero-Base Review Budget has been a smokescreen to hide the true costs of services at City Hall. We propose a Zero-Based Budget for Calgary. A concept that will see a complete review of services on a yearly basis and, any surplus resulting from savings (after a portion being placed into reserves for contingencies) be returned to taxpayers immediately in the following year.

One of the most important roles of Council is oversight. To this effect Council should demand that the Administration produces a Quarterly Variance Analysis, to keep them abreast of the execution of the budget.

### **Promote safe communities.**

Crime levels are rising in Calgary, especially around public spaces like the LRT, parks, and urban neighbourhoods. It is important for City Council to support a police force which prioritizes public safety. Ensuring our police have the resources to effectively protect our families and communities is essential for a safe Calgary. City Council must also ensure that our police are aggressively attacking gang and drug crime in Calgary, along with the use of illegal guns in criminal activities.

Moreover, the recent trend to spend limited police dollars in pursuit of so-called social justice initiatives is a complete misuse of taxpayer funds. The victims of crime in Calgary are overwhelmingly from communities who have faced discrimination in the form of racism, or bigotry because of their gender or sexual identity. Protecting these individuals from criminals should be the priority, not what is being advocated for by Defund the Police groups.

A safe community also means the provision of green spaces for public use. We must ensure better use of our green spaces (the lungs of a city). This includes encouraging more recreation facilities, allow and support communities to manage the green spaces, and not change the laws to use the 10% of green space to be developed for residential purposes,

### **Cut property taxes for homes and businesses.**

Reforming the property tax system is critical if we are to ensure sustainable and reasonable levels of funding for core city services. The current broken model has pitted homeowners against businesses, and suburbs against the city centre. Rather than simply increasing the tax burden on Calgarians year after year, City Council should work with the provincial government to craft a new approach to taxation.

Moreover, City Council should cut the red tape which is preventing developers from increasing the supply of new homes in Calgary. Many of the requirements now in place needlessly slowdown the process of building new homes, while driving up their costs for purchasers. Again, ending the power of special interests and political insiders down at City Hall will remove many of the barriers which have been erected to slow down or stop growth in Calgary.

All of these proposals have for goal the reduction of spending and therefore taxes. It has been said that Calgary has a spending and not a revenue problem. Despite many Councillors' claim that there exist a 'tax room'; this may be the biggest fallacy used to raise more taxes. The City is a collector of property taxes for the Province's education portion. Any transfer of the collection process to the Province will not create a tax room, because taxpayers' will still have to pay the tax. The current Market Value Assessment process is flawed, and at the request of the Alberta Municipal Minister a report was prepared and submitted. We urge the new Council to negotiate with the Province to reform the current property tax system to make Calgary a more competitive

place to do business, and make residential taxes more reflective of the cost of services provided by the City, not the unrealized value of the property.

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