

Scott McKeen
Ward 6 Candidate

QUESTION 1: The City of Edmonton should take more action to make municipal land available for low-income affordable housing development (eg. surplus school land).

My hesitancy in giving this full support is in recognition of the City's limits in solving all problems. The federal and provincial governments have strong roles to play in housing. Having said that, my Edmonton is welcoming and just to all its citizens. Failing to provide housing to vulnerable people, along with proper supports, is not just inhumane, but fosters crime and social disorder. My work with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, as well as the Lieutenant Governor's Circle on Mental Health and Addiction, is a tangible expression of my deep concern for vulnerable people, including refugees, immigrants, the mentally ill and people with addictions. Without proper housing and support these people descend into lives of poverty, despair and victimization. While I believe in personal responsibility, I also believe it is all our personal responsibility to offer vulnerable people a chance at a safe, secure and social life in our community, not separate from it.

QUESTION 2: There is not enough subsidized housing in some neighbourhoods, and the City must ensure a better distribution in all neighbourhoods throughout Edmonton.

This I strongly support, for numerous reasons. Mixed communities offer the leadership and community capacity to support vulnerable families in their journey to health. Communities like Boyle Street and McCauley are over-subscribed with non-market housing and therefore struggle. The recent controversy in Terwillegar Towne is illuminating. Residents view a housing-for-homeless project as a threat. Ideally, they'd view it as an opportunity for the community to join and support some vulnerable fellow citizens. If so, I believe they'd discover the true meaning of community and enjoy the positive side effects of public service — a greater sense of security and happiness in knowing and working with their neighbours.

QUESTION 3: The City should seek to use zoning flexibility (on issues such as required parking spaces) to support the development of more affordable housing initiatives.

Again, I'm only backing off one step from full support because I don't understand fully the consequences of "zoning flexibility." However, the requirements for parking spaces is a dated concept, to my mind. It reflects and perhaps perpetuates the problem of planning for cars instead of people. If Edmonton is to thrive in future — as a city that works — it must accept and promote other forms of transportation, including bikes, but certainly public transit. As an aside, it is bizarre beyond belief when bars and nightclubs are restricted in entertainment areas because of too few parking spots. Note to city: We actually would prefer if bar patrons didn't drive.

QUESTION 4: The City should commit funding to extend the Cornerstones Affordable Housing program.

Without question. Money spent on affordable housing saves communities untold dollars in other ways. Programs like Cornerstone are not merely symbolic of the just community I want to live in, they are astute investments. I'm happy to report that many Edmontonians I've met on doorsteps during the campaign are concerned about at-risk and vulnerable people. Others, though, are happy to hear how evidence-based and preventative social services saves the community money.

QUESTION 5: The City should create a comprehensive plan to address the need for thousands of units of affordable housing in a comprehensive and coordinated way that includes attention to schools, public transportation, and community services.

To be most effective, affordable housing must include social supports and community services. For vulnerable people to thrive, they require more than visiting or on-site social workers, nurses and mental health professionals. They must also have access to libraries, recreation centres, educational facilities and to friends and family. So, easy access to public transportation is vital.

QUESTION 6: The City is doing a good job to end chronic homelessness through the current 10 Year Plan and the work of the Edmonton Homeless Commission.

Mayor Stephen Mandel has been a champion for disadvantaged and vulnerable Edmontonians. I applaud the efforts by he and city council on this issue. Could we still do better? I suspect so. Street addicts and alcoholics are some of the most difficult people to help. First, because society's ability to care is challenged. Second, because some are not simply going to give up their addictions. I strongly believe addiction is a health issue and not a criminal justice issue. It will be politically challenging, but I believe we must use compassion and pragmatism to find ways to house and support these people, even as active addicts and alcoholics.

QUESTION 7: The City must be more active in advocating with the provincial and federal governments for more funding and better policies on affordable housing.

Perhaps I'm naive, but I've grown weary of the bowing and scraping before other orders of government. I think towns and cities must band together to properly communicate urban issues to people across the province and across Canada. In Alberta, counties enjoy an unfair advantage as beneficiaries of industrial taxation. This, despite the fact that much of their infrastructure costs are covered by the province. Edmonton would not have nearly the budget concerns it has today if it was given a rightful share of industrial taxes.

QUESTION 8: The City must develop better ways to gather views of all residents about housing issues and not depend so significantly on input from community leagues and developers.

I completely agree with this statement. It is my hope — perhaps a naive one, again — to create systems to better communicate with a majority of residents in Ward 6. My experience with the community

leagues in this ward suggests they are fair-minded and of high calibre, I realize that's not always the case. I covered city hall for 12 years as a journalist. I saw my fair share of NIMBY opposition. Essentially, they boiled down to: We don't want THOSE people here. As for developers, well, they have a legitimate point of view worth considering. Profit making doesn't erase their right to a voice or position before council. My journalism background reinforced the idea of listening to all sides and representing them.

QUESTION 9: Finally, you may provide any additional comments about any other aspects of housing and homelessness.

To perhaps repeat myself, I think that as a society we often fail to recognize the value of astute investments in social services, supports and housing. First, to reduce crime and disorder. But also to manifest our expressions of justice and community. I truly believe that Terwillegar Towne, for example, represent a potential lost opportunity. If the folks in that Terwillegar Towne embraced and involved themselves with the housing-for-homeless project, the community would be stronger and happier for it. Thanks for reading, Scott McKeen Candidate for City Council, Ward 6