

Questions for a Better Langley: Council

Dear Township of Langley Councillor Candidate,

I am an independent voter who operates the betterlangley.com website and associated Facebook page, advocating for economic and environmental sustainability in the Township of Langley. I am also a registered third party advertising sponsor under LECFC.

I am a father of 4 children as well as a local business person. I believe in the future of a truly walkable and progressive Langley and will help promote and endorse candidates that share a similar vision.

The following series of questions are heavily focused on Langley's growth and resiliency. They are intended to address the challenges you will experience in the next term should you be elected.

Please note that your unedited answers will be shared on betterlangley.com and social media over the week of September 26th to 30th, prior to the first advanced voting day.

I greatly appreciate your participation.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS SEPTEMBER 25, 2022 at 11:59pm. Late entries will not be published.

Email *

transformit@shaw.ca

Full name on ballot *

Petrina Arnason

1. Do you believe growth pays for growth in the Township of Langley? Explain.

No. I believe that the rate of growth in the Township of Langley has outstripped our ability to pay for the necessary infrastructure that are required for existing and future residents as we continue to densify and build out. By contrast, communities that are already developed and are in the process of re-developing have the requisite infrastructure such as roadways, sidewalks, and other improvements which do not generally have to be redone when new development or infill takes place. Greenfield development requires extraordinary funding which has not historically been calculated into our formulas that support urban expansion. In order to address this deficit, the Township of Langley has belatedly developed community amenity charges which provides funding for such things as recreation facilities, fire halls, as well as earmarked monies for an affordable housing reserve fund. The Township has the authority to update the existing CAC program target contribution amounts. If re-elected, I would support a review of the current rate and categories in order to address the growing gap between the true cost of development and the revenues required to pay for these services in real time.

2. A number of 1-1.5 storey strip malls with significant surface parking were approved in the last 5 years. Is this the style of development you see as resilient, economical, and sustainable? Do you support the further development of such projects?

No. I strongly support mixed use developments which create walkable communities and promote alternative travel modalities. This requires communities to be designed to enhance opportunities for people to receive local services within a 5 to 10 minute walk of their residence. Travelling shorter distances through the effects of urban design reduces car usage based on the "compact cities" model approach. Our newly adopted climate action strategy also requires a large reduction in transportation-related GHG's in order to limit temperature increases beyond the recommended IPCC limits. Changes to land-use planning to reduce cars, develop more public and active transportation, and a more evolved generalized transportation strategy leads to more carbon neutral and liveable cities. If re-elected, I will continue to prioritize mixed use development as well as live work and other opportunities to reduce travel and to further contain urban sprawl.

3. The Township currently has several of its first high rises under construction in Willoughby. Recently, an application for a 45-storey tower was also submitted, but has not yet moved forward. Do you believe such high rises are appropriate in Willoughby?

No. I do not support the development of a 45 story high-rise within the context of Willoughby. This is particularly true as there has been no detailed planning to inform such a departure from the current standards and norms for the area. Any consideration of enhanced height must include public engagement, transit projections, density analyses, potential environmental offsets, and traffic congestion studies related to the introduction of such a tall residential structure into the community. Although the Gateway Corridor along 200th Street has been designed for higher buildings given its proximity to the Carvolth Transit Exchange, I do not believe that adequate consideration has been given as to how such a structure would fit into the over-all plan which has been adopted by Council and relied upon by the community. Going forward, endorsing such a departure would also transgress the principles of a “planned community” and would effectively create a negative example of spot zoning in the area and most likely lead to other development proposals based upon such a precedent being established. If re-elected, I would not support this application but would instead direct staff to update existing plans for the 200th Street Corridor to include new transit opportunities along with potential updates to the existing plan arising from the SkyTrain extension to the Langley’s and the redevelopment of the Willowbrook Neighbourhood Plan.

4. Higher density in Langley is suggested as a means to increase housing affordability, pay for amenities/infrastructure and protect ALR land. Agree or disagree? Explain.

No. I do not believe that increased density is necessarily a panacea for housing affordability as there are a number of external factors which drive escalating costs leading to a lack of affordability. These include land economics, inflationary pressures due to demand, exaggerated internal and external migration to the area, as well as offshore investments which tend to further inflate the housing market. The need for new amenities and infrastructure are also correlated with higher densities as more residents and cars create costly road infrastructure requirements, new facilities, and social infrastructure that would otherwise not be required. And finally, the ALR is protected through the Province, whose jurisdiction supersedes that of any local government to determine the use or exclusion of any agricultural lands. In consideration of all of these conditions, decisions regarding density must be carefully considered and weighed around planning principles which can strike the right balance between the provision of more affordable housing and the overall management of growth. If re-elected, I would support a review of our current development strategies in order to enhance affordable housing options. These could include but would not be limited to, an enhanced focus on the non-market sector, as well as the adoption of an inclusionary zoning policy in order to add more rental housing for both below market and the “missing middle” cohort.

5. In the past term, the Township adopted a new Tree Protection Bylaw in 2019, which was further updated in 2021 following recommendations from the Tree Protection Advisory Committee. Do you believe that Langley is going too far or not far enough in protecting our trees?

Not far enough. I sat on the Tree Protection Advisory Committee as a Council appointee and was part of the informed discussion with respect to amendments to the existing Bylaw. The amendments were ultimately adopted based on the recommendations of the expert TPAC task force. Despite these improvements to the Bylaw, I believe that more needs to be done in order to protect our tree canopy based on the accelerated loss of mature trees due primarily to new development. One of our largest challenges with respect to tree canopy protection is that 75% of our land is in the ALR. Provincial legislation currently allows for the removal of trees on agricultural land based on the "Right to Farm Act. As a regulated community, this tree canopy is not subject to the amended Tree Protection Bylaw which only covers our tree canopy within the urban containment boundary. I therefore support the recommendation of TPAC with respect to the review of the Township's Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw in order to protect more trees throughout the development process. If re-elected, I would support the creation of a committee that would be tasked with reviewing and make recommendations with respect to all aspects of tree management in the Township of Langley on an on-going basis based on the framework of our advisory committee model.

6. In past terms, Council has generally recommended most ALR-exclusion or non-farm usage applications to the ALC, often for suburban residential or industrial development with some sort of community benefit in exchange. Is this a practice you agree with? Why or why not? Are there any examples you believe that property should be excluded from the ALR?

No. As an incumbent Councillor for the last eight years, I cannot recall but one instance of personally referring an ALR exclusion or non-farm use application proposal to the ALC except for a few applications based on verified evidence meeting the criteria of the homesite severance provisions embedded within ALC policy. As a strong generalized principle, I do not believe that agricultural lands should be subject to development applications or industrial development based on the fact that we have a very limited amount of arable land within our community which is required for food security. However, I have made one exception in the recent past which supported the conditional removal of lands adjacent to the Gloucester Industrial Estates based on a prior unilateral decision by the ALC itself to remove the properties. In my opinion, the merits of the associated community benefit which is worth many millions of dollars will be extraordinarily beneficial to both the environment and to the agricultural community, as a whole. The project could also likely attract significant funding and grants from senior levels of government given its alignment with climate objectives and the planned protection of wetlands in conjunction with salmon habitat restoration, which is of a very high priority both provincially and federally. In this specific instance, a very degraded property within the ALR just outside of Fort Langley in and around the Salmon River will be rehabilitated based on input and planning from qualified environmental professionals in addition to local watershed stakeholders. The strategy also includes an educational and agricultural component to be designed with local Kwantlen First Nation participation. Overall, I believe that this amenity would prove to exponentially valuable to the community in that it is solidly grounded in our desire to both enhance local food security objectives through both education and demonstration, as well as advancing the interests of reconciliation.

7. Do you believe that the Township of Langley should official adopt Vision Zero? If so, what would be some specific ideas of the program you would like to see implemented over the next 4 years?

Yes. I believe that this programme would be extremely beneficial if implemented in the Township in order to reduce the incidences and severity of accidents. Anecdotally and statistically, the programme has proven to be very successful in reducing the amount of traffic accidents and fatalities between pedestrians and vehicles in a number of neighbouring jurisdictions. For example, I believe that the City of Surrey has set a positive example based on the implementation of its Vision Zero Surrey Safe Mobility Plan. The framework of this policy promotes safe road design, appropriate vehicle speeds, creating a culture of safety for all road users, promoting safe and well-maintained vehicles, and effective post crash care. Some of the key elements which I would support which could be initiated over the next 4 years could be:

- 1) reviewing street lighting standards in order to improve pedestrian visibility
- 2) implementing a timeline for the roll out of fully protected left turn lanes which involves installing a separate set of signal timings for left turning vehicles
- 3) budgeting for safety improvements such as leading pedestrian intervals
- 4)the scope and timing to instal special crosswalks, where warranted, for safer crossing.

If re-elected, I would support direction to staff to review and bring back a high level report to Council outlining costing and an implementation timeline to adopt a tailored Vision Zero strategy for Langley Township.

8. Traffic is a common complaint in several neighbourhoods of Langley. Where do you see this issue being the greatest problem and what are some solutions our local government can provide?

Willoughby. There are a number of congested areas in the Township of Langley based on the piecemeal approach to the historical development of the roadway infrastructure that has developed in the Township. A number of Willoughby neighbourhoods demonstrate the lack of planning and budgeting foresight with respect to focusing on the completion of the roads and sidewalks prior to the introduction of residents and increased traffic into a neighbourhood. This decision-making has resulted in a number of problems regarding public safety, walkability, and a generalized sense of frustration from the public regarding travel times and undue delays related to incomplete roadway infrastructure. In order to address the issue, one of the measures that could be undertaken is specific borrowing based on the public's willingness to approve of an amortized debt repayment strategy for the purpose of completing strategic sections of roadway in a more timely basis. Another approach is the development of a special levy such as in the City of Surrey which devotes an annual fee to specific roadway infrastructure. A supplementary policy that could be considered is the negotiated turn over of statutory rights of ways by landowners to the Township to ease the cost burden of acquiring property adjacent to development for roadway infrastructure requirements and sidewalks. If re-elected, I would explore all of these options in order to complete the roadway infrastructure in Willoughby in order to satisfy safety, efficiency, and congestion concerns.

9. A lack of parking is a significant issue in some of Langley's neighbourhoods. Yet, in other areas, there is an overabundance of half-empty parking lots in other areas. Do you have any ideas to improve either of these issues? Do you support parking minimums in new development?

Yes, I have a number of ideas regarding enhancements based on best management practices to support parking policy objectives and sustainability goals. Many of these ideas come from jurisdictions outside the lower mainland that have already created robust policies in order to make parking policies more strategic. Parking management frameworks for urban areas are necessary in order to create clear and predictable long term objectives and also act to enhance overall urban mobility. One of the initiatives I would like to undertake is to seek public participation and engagement when developing parking policies for the Township. This is especially true as the implementation of standards for parking requirements in new developments such as in our burgeoning neighbourhoods has a big influence on mobility behaviours and decisions around car ownership. A refresh of our overall parking management strategy should also be predicated on an integrated approach to a multi-modal strategy which includes parking alongside the encouragement of opportunities for more sustainable and carbon neutral travel. For example, any parking strategy must include bicycle parking and also consider parking for service vehicles such as delivery trucks and other delivery modes such as e-cargo transportation. Policy revisions must also include provisions that consider older individuals and those with the disabilities that need to be accommodated within close proximity for both on-street parking and within a residential context. If re-elected, I would support the development of a policy review that would focus on such issues as land-use and zoning criteria, building and new parking infrastructure regulations, and mobility needs and patterns designed to address evolving parking standards within our existing, and projected, built urban environment.

10. In 2014, the WalkScore organization rated the Township of Langley a score of 39. In 2022, it was down to 33: "Langley is a Car-Dependent City". Why do you believe this is? Do you believe Langley should be less car dependent? What sort of policies would you support to reverse this trend?

Yes. The geographical circumstances in the Township which have created urban centres of population within a larger rural area has truncated our ability to become less auto dependent given the historic paucity of ridership for mass transit. The negative consequences of auto oriented development include effects on public health, the financial burden of car ownership, social isolation, and failing to meet our climate change objectives. There is also the generalized cost to the public related to sprawl, traffic infrastructure costs, and road paving which continues to subsidize the use of vehicles. Fortunately, our current planning goals and urban design policies have somewhat reduced our reliance on vehicles and redirected our aspirations towards residing in more walkable communities. Some of the strategies that have been utilized elsewhere include:

- 1) abolishing minimum parking space requirements for new developments
- 2) Review of land-use planning that hinders compact development
- 3) Development of transit oriented programmes which could include policies such as waiving setback requirements and bringing buildings closer to the road for development within a specific radius relative to mass transit
- 4) The development of a robust walkable streets programme to enhance pedestrian safety for all users.

If re-elected, I would support a review of our policies across all relevant departments in order to consider a wide variety of similar options to ensure that we are accelerating the reduction in the use of single occupancy vehicles in our community.

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