

COMOX COUNCIL CANDIDATE: STEVE BLACKLOCK

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'SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH'

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

1. How will you make child-care everyone's priority and put actions behind statements and proclamations? How will you work with all key community stakeholders to effectively address both the child-care crisis in the Comox Valley, as well as the severe shortage of Early Childhood Educators locally?

A: I am a parent. With two working parents, my partner and I juggle our schedules to make child-care work paying for after school care with 'Wee Care Childcare Centre'. Child-care represents a significant expense in our family's monthly budget.

I was very pleased to see that our current Comox Town council negotiated the provision of a new child daycare space into the new mixed-use development at 695 Aspen Road.

Now operating as 'Aspen Grove Children's Centre' this daycare operated by the Comox Valley Daycare Society has 12 spaces for children up to 36 months in age and 16 spaces for children 30 months of age.

The Town of Comox supports child-care facilities in Comox each year by approving 'Permissive Tax Exemptions'. I would certainly continue this municipal support as well as look for creative solutions like Aspen Grove Children's Centre in appropriate future development opportunities.

2. How will you promote the development of non-market housing for people who cannot pay market rental rates?

As a property valuation professional, I understand the myriad of complex issues associated with development and land use planning.

The Comox Valley needs to add supply of all types of housing, including both market and non-market units. Partnering with or assisting our existing, well-established, non-profit housing organizations in building more affordable social housing and senior housing is desperately needed throughout the Comox Valley.

New proposed developments in Comox will need a careful examination of existing infrastructure capacity with respect to parking, traffic flows, and tree retention.

I will work with Town Council, staff, and the non-profit sector to select a site to donate for non-market housing. I commend the current council for approving the new multi-unit subsidized senior's housing development now under construction. When complete, this building at 1482 Balmoral Avenue (Cypress Gardens) will provide 52 high-quality, accessible units for seniors and those living with disabilities.

3. What policies would you support to increase food production, distribution and awareness locally? Please include policies related to urban food production and how you would collaborate with other levels of governments to increase our communities production, storage and distribution capacity. What are three priorities that reflect your commitment to a healthy food system for Comox Valley and your constituents?

A: I am a supporter of LUSH Valley and all the great work they do. As a member of the Rotary Club of the Comox Valley I have participated in great volunteer opportunities and been active in fundraising to support their initiatives.

I attended last week's presentation on Food Security Systems presented by the Watershed Sentinel. Maurita and James from LUSH are doing great work in our community and I support small scale growers in the Comox Valley via regular visits to our Farmer's Market.

I love and support education initiatives around Urban Agriculture; however, I do not believe our town requires by-laws to regulate these activities.

I am excited that the CVRD is undertaking a new 'Agricultural Plan' and I fully support it.

4. How will you support applying an equity lens in all policy development? How will you weave in the principles of Reconciliation into policy development? Please be specific.

A: In our community we need to recognize that every individual has a different perspective and lived experience. Learning more about our under-represented groups is something I am personally committed to. As a member of my own professional body's national board, I was part of the team that integrated EDI policy into our organization's policies and standards.

As a councillor, I would:

- **Work with Comox Council to review and ensure the Town's policies meet EDI standards.**
 - **Advocate for all councillors and senior town staff to utilize Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion materials to our continuing education as leaders.**
 - **Apply an equity lens when considering accessibility requirements for new buildings, infrastructure, transportation routes, and in our planning of community events.**
5. As an elected city councillor or local area representative, how will you effectively work to reduce childhood vulnerability in the Comox Valley? What role do you believe your municipality or area holds in supporting children and families in the early years to thrive?

Comox Town council can continue to advocate and work with the province when possible. I truly believe the citizens of Comox Valley are caring and generous people. We collectively support so many great charitable organizations and non-profit entities that serve and support children and families in need. I am personally proud of all the donors, great volunteers and staff members doing the work to support vulnerable youth.

Town Council should support the work of these organizations and look to build on great community centre programming for children and youth.

Unlike the province, our municipality can not run an annual deficit budget. Adding specific programs and policies costs money.

Any future proposals to commit the Town of Comox to supporting programs that address childhood vulnerability should obviously include a plan for funding.

6. Please speak to what the municipality is already doing, and whether or not you commit to bringing forward and supporting motions for council decisions that will significantly accelerate the reduction of GHG emissions? More specifically, do you support a green new deal, climate action planning and how you will help prepare your community for climate related disturbances?

I attended our town's 'Climate Change Open House' and read with great interest the City of Courtenay's new OCP that was approved and ratified right before the municipal election campaign period.

Courtenay's plan is heavy on climate action ideas; however, the plan is vague on funding the proposed initiatives. Rising fuel costs, food costs, and general macro-economic inflation have many in our community seeking alternative cheaper transportation. I see daily (especially on sunny days) the increase in citizens using bikes, e-bikes, electric scooters, e-skateboards, and mobility scooters on our roads, sidewalks, and existing bike lanes. I will support well planned and funded continued improvements to multi-modal transportation, including transit, in Comox.

As a seaside town with aging infrastructure, we must prepare for the effects of future severe weather events (heat waves, drought conditions / increased fire risks, rising ocean levels, disappearing glacial ice / snowpack). Our systems are interconnected, our town's resiliency must be improved. I look forward to working with our new Mayor and council, the CVRD, and our many community groups and passionate citizens on figuring out the best ways to ensure the infrastructure needs of our citizens are protected from the on-going changes in our local climate.

7. Will you advocate for legislation to decriminalize personal possession and collaborate with provincial and federal governments to create a system to provide an accessible safe supply of drugs in the Comox Valley? How will you advocate to, and support, Island Health to create an accessible, welcoming, non-stigmatizing supervised consumption site in the Comox Valley?

Drug addiction is a complex issue. People are dying in the Comox Valley due to the consumption of toxic drugs and I have compassion and empathy for those struggling with addictions and for those family members and friends who try and support them. Addiction is not confined to low-income earners or those on social assistance or disability. Research supports policy and legislation aimed at decriminalizing personal possession.

It is important to recognize many who battle addiction do so in plain sight holding jobs and hiding their drug use from others.

It is unclear to me specifically what role the Town of Comox Mayor & Council is supposed to be providing, with respect to toxic drug supply; however, it is certain that the Island Health and the BC Ministry of Health have not been able to find sufficient answers to our problems. I would support the creation of a supervised safe injection site in the Comox Valley; however, this facility should not be located within the Town of Comox.

8. Within the next four years, what will you do to ensure an adequate supply of senior specific housing is approved, built, and occupied in the Comox Valley? What will you do to ensure that municipal services for all seniors are free, not discounted, but free, within the next four years? Finally, what do you want to say to Comox Valley seniors who are currently living at the Pidcock Shelter, at the Travelodge, and in their cars?

Free services are great for low-income seniors, but it is important to understand the budgetary constraints involved with free services. Each proposed free service must be examined prudently with respect to our Town's existing revenue and expense budget.

BC Housing has implemented a program of purchasing existing low barrier housing (purchasing the Washington Inn Apartments, and perhaps (hopefully) in the future, the Travelodge and/or Maple Pool Campground). With the province owning these units, I support the leasing of these facilities to experienced housing providers who can continue to work on housing those in need.

We have so many great organizations within the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness. I have personally supported the We Can Shelter Society for several years and I am a big proponent of tiny homes or container homes to house people in need.

I was very happy to see the Town of Comox secured 6 brand new apartment units from the developer of 695 Aspen Road. These units are now owned and operated by the M'akola Housing Society providing rentals to seniors in need for below \$805 per month.

9. If elected, what actions will you take to ensure that people have access to nutritious food? For example, Would you help support a universal meal program in schools? If your municipality has not already, would you sign the Island Food Charter? Do you support a basic income and living wage to reduce poverty? How will you work with the federal government to implement a basic income for Canadians?

I support local food growers. I would love to see a weekly farm-type market within Comox. I have seen presentations to Comox Council proposing a regular 'in town' local farm product market.

I would certainly support this initiative if it made sense to the town from a financial feasibility standpoint.

We have so many great non-profit agencies working with SD71 to ensure children in our schools who are not getting nutritious food at home have access to good foods within schools. I commend the school PAC volunteers, the Comox Valley Food Bank, and all the hundreds of community volunteers who work each and every day to ensure those in need do not go hungry.

Universal basic income and living wage are not things that fall under the mandate of the Town of Comox. I applaud those businesses within our Town who have declared themselves 'Living Wage Employers' but I believe such programs should be at the individual discretion of business owners and not mandated by government beyond existing minimum wage legislation.

10. If elected, what plans will you immediately begin implementing to keep the homeless population in the Valley warm, safe, and dry through the coming winter, set to begin within weeks?

Good question. Emergency shelter funding from the Province of BC must continue to ensure those vulnerable individuals who want shelter at Connect Warming Centre, Pidcock House, or the Travelodge have access to warm and safe spaces.

11. What are your municipality's current greenspace and tree policies? How will you ensure that forests and greenspaces are protected when development is requested and/or underway?

The Town of Comox also has a robust Tree Retention Bylaw in place. Future development in Comox should seek to retain as many trees as possible. One way we do this is to encourage higher density forms of development to increase # of units per hectare on the few remaining parcels of land within Town boundaries that are currently zoned for residential or mixed-use. Smaller development footprints increase the potential for tree retention during development.