

Victoria Downtown Residents Association:  
City of Victoria Municipal By-Election – December 12  
Questions for Candidates and Responses  
Candidates are as follows:

SA - Stephen Andrew  
RD – Rob Duncan  
RG - Riga Godron  
SH - Stefanie Hardman (Together Victoria)  
BH - Bill Heflin  
JH - Jason Heit  
SL - Sean Leitenberg  
HM - Hailey Mcleod  
KR - Keith Rosenberg  
AS - Alexander Schmid  
RV - Roshan Vickery

### **1 Housing:**

There is rapid densification with new residential buildings going up all over downtown. This has led to rising housing costs in both the sales and rental markets. The provincial government has taken some steps to mitigate the lack of affordability but there are still 21% of Victorians who are said to be in Core Housing Need. This includes an increasing number of people who are homeless or are stuck in the shelter system for years which has led to increasing tension within the city. What, in your view, should the City of Victoria do to ensure there are affordable housing options for those in Core Housing Need downtown?

**SA:** *According to CMHC, housing starts are down 64% this year over last year. So, while it may seem that there is “rapid densification”, the reality is that not enough housing is being built to meet demand, which is driving the price of available housing up. We need more varied housing, not just single-family homes, or condos. We need to address the missing middle of our market which are attached homes, small plexes, townhomes, and stacked townhomes. We need to densify transportation corridors and create incentives to build housing that is affordable by ensuring an affordable component in developments and explore alternative housing structures, such as co ops and non-market or partial market builds. We can moderate price pressures by adding to inventory, as we’re seeing in the rental market now as there is a slight oversupply of rental housing coming online.*

**RD:** *In order to address problems in the rental market, I support (1) persuading the provincial government either to implement vacancy controls (preventing landlords from making large rent increases between tenants) or pass legislation allowing the City to implement them, and (2) expanding the city’s current inclusive zoning policy to include a wider range of residential developments. I don’t think there’s a lot that the City can do to alleviate the sales market situation, particularly given the lack of land for increasing supply. I believe the homelessness crisis should be addressed with (1) purpose-built supported housing that avoids the various dysfunctions inherent in the practice of converting old motels, in part with funding from the federal Rapid Housing Initiative fund, and (2) for the small number of homeless people who don’t want housing and have come to prefer living outdoors, a supervised and regulated municipal campground with washrooms, showers and maybe even an outdoor cookery (thereby avoiding the need for cooking fires in tents and other dangerous places). In an affluent community like Victoria, people should not be resorting to living in parks.*

**BH:** The fact is we owe it to our own citizens to provide temporary, affordable housing to those who need it. We need to keep our poor segregated from the substance abusers and mentally or emotionally challenged people who so often prey upon them. The City should tend to these people first. The mentally and emotionally challenged may be considered to be the weakest members of our society. The Province has long failed them by clinging to the model that they are better off free than in housing with proper supports. The City should start these programs and arrange for funding from the province. A third group is those who have organic brain or physical issues that make it impossible for them to function well in an independent environment. It is appropriate to provide them housing and supports as well. All these need to be segregated from each other and from the substance abusers who should also be afforded temporary housing at the City's expense provided they take treatment or agree to leave. The City should also provide a camping facility that is hardwired with power and proper sanitation facilities for the transient population. Our parks and common areas are not campgrounds.

**SL:** There is a need to separate the homeless issue from the drug addiction problem and build appropriate housing for each. The cost of land is the issue not the housing. The province has been purchasing property for building low income housing. This has increased the cost of land for future building of market rent housing. The City needs to work with developers to ensure appropriate housing is built on the limited land that comes available for all. We need a long term plan including what housing we need to build and need to stick to it. For the last few years, we have been concentrating on high end condos and lately on subsidized housing. We need to build both in conjunction.

**HM:** The city should restrict Airbnb's, and work towards shutting down illegal Airbnbs, should mandate all new housing projects include a percentage of affordable units, implement more mixed use zoning to open up some of the areas currently reserved for single family homes to more higher density housing projects, and support affordable housing projects that are actually affordable. I work full time as a legal assistant making more than minimum wage for the first time in my life, and I still make over \$10,000 less than what I would need to make to qualify for "affordable" housing. While it is mainly the purview of the provincial government, we need to work with them to provide more transitional housing for those with mental health and addictions. I know there is more to be done, but I think this could be an important start.

**KR:** I think we need to STOP looking at band aid approaches that don't really solve anything, There are housing establishments that are sitting empty because they are waiting for demolition or renovation. These jobs need to be made a PRIORITY over bike lanes, or artist grants. Current Council seems content to throw away money that could be used better trying to find a better solution to affordable housing. Unlike MOST candidates I live in subsidized housing--housing that is too small for my family. Instead of building "Bigger, Fancier NEW Condos" we should encourage builders to build affordable co-op housing. When people have a vested interest in their property there is more incentive to keep it looking good and not damage things as much.

**AS:** The only workable answer is subsidies for both new condominiums and rental units, applied exclusively to low-income Victoria residents. Currently, even for someone earning the average Victoria salary of \$52,000 per year, only about \$16,000 can be applied toward rent according to the standard formula of 32%. This works out to \$1,400 per month, barely enough

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for a one-bedroom apartment. For lower income, the problem is correspondingly worse without subsidies.

## **2. Parks & Green Space:**

The Official Community Plan calls for green space in downtown Victoria, However, it often feels that development occurs with little to no consideration of providing parks and green space for a rapidly increasing urban population. What are your views on what action should be taken by the City to ensure that there is adequate green space and parks downtown?

**SA:** *I fully support the retention and creation of green spaces and parks in Victoria in conjunction with development. I think the urban forest master plan and amended tree bylaw work to that end. From time to time, there will be compromise with respect to the natural environment and the built environment, but through amenity contributions and a commitment to the environment they can be resolved to the satisfaction of most, if not all.*

**RD:** *I believe the City should acquire land in the downtown area for the purpose of converting it to park space.*

**BH:** *It is my view that the City is allowing expansion of development at breakneck speed without considering the necessary infrastructure requirements of water, parking, improved roads and green space provision. I am not against development but the provision of proper infrastructure is a real requirement that should be dealt with.*

**SL:** *I believe the City needs to invest in land which can be used for sheltering now and used as future park space as the city's population grows. The City's purchasing of land for parks is separated from purchases for housing. I believe the City needs to have these purchases combined with a long term plan.*

**HM:** *Green space and parks need to be a priority. I'm a huge fan of mixed use zoning and one of the things it can do is spread out the concentration of housing developments, taking some of the burden off the downtown core. Allot of Victoria is reserved for single family dwellings, and this space could be used much more effectively to both provide housing for more people, and to leave space for more parks!*

**KR:** *My family lives near a park that is no longer safe for my children to visit. We need more safe park space. I feel that developers should be mandated to the point that for every say 500 homes they build they must donate x amount of space as parkland or green space. This green space could then be subdivided and rented out (on a sliding scale) as urban garden plots. The builder would get a SMALL tax break and still be able to collect income from the garden plots.*

**AS:** *All new development in town must include a proportional area of green space associated with the building, whether around it, on the roof or both. Such bylaws should be a priority for Council.*

## **3. Transportation:**

What policies would you advocate for balancing the competing transportation priorities in downtown Victoria? For example, need for parking, bike lanes, pedestrian walkways, public transit, etc. How will your understanding of climate change influence your decision-making?

**SA:** *Climate change and the steps we take to mitigate our carbon footprint through a coordinated transportation strategy are important. As a cyclist and driver, we need to get away from viewing each mode of transportation and one versus the other and look to more complementary models. Making the city walker and biker friendly doesn't mean we have to force cars off the road. We should look at what has worked, and what is flawed with the bike lanes and adjust accordingly. We should look for opportunities to improve parking options downtown. We need a clean and safe environment downtown for people to feel safe walking downtown, in all areas at all times of day. We need secure bike parking facilities if we want to entice more people to bike around town and work and play in town without having to constantly worry about their bikes being stolen. We need to maintain the roads, time the traffic control lights, and have traffic flow more efficiently, which will cut down on greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, we need a multi modal regional transportation strategy.*

**RD:** *I support extending fare-free bus transit beyond the student population. For example, I would like to explore ways of including downtown workers who drive cars into the downtown area, thereby reducing the number of cars downtown and, among other things, freeing up parking. I also support electrification of transit buses as quickly as possible, and transit signal priority technology, which allows a bus driver approaching a traffic light to keep the light green long enough to let the bus through (greatly improving the efficiency of buses for commuting purposes). In addition, I support development of a walkable community, with the goal of eventually making it possible for residents to walk to work and school, to get groceries, to access services, and for other transportation needs.*

**BH:** *There needs to be an integrated plan for traffic management of all kinds, pedestrian, bike and vehicular. Short-sighted efforts, e.g., closing Richardson Street, to through traffic, are wrong in principal because the City is hard enough to get around in. I believe that light rail is going to have to be reconsidered because the new developments will make it increasingly difficult to park and drive downtown. If we can deflect even a reasonable percentage of the Colwood Crawl from affecting downtown, we will all be better off. Climate change militates against single vehicle traffic unless we all switch to electric cars.*

**SL:** *I believe that infrastructure projects such as bike lanes need better planning before ground breaking. Parking is vital for downtown. The cruise ships move thousands of people per day through James Bay and Downtown. A mini transit system linking the cruise terminal with the downtown would help reduce traffic and increase the dollars spent downtown.*

**HM:** *Being a young person, the realities of climate change are something that is always with me as I look to my future. It definitely takes a central role in my consideration of public transportation. Over time, more mixed use zoning would create neighbourhoods with mixed housing and commercial purposes, so more people could access essential services within walking distance of their homes, eliminating the need for more highways and large parking facilities. In the short term, we also need to consider the realities that many people drive and affordable parking needs to be reserved. As a walker, bike rider, and busser, I would like to see more affordable bus fares, safer biking lanes on several routes, secure bike parking, and dedicated pedestrian routes. Most people drive as a convenience, so we must incentivize alternative forms of travel by making sure they are safe and accessible.*

**KR:** *The current city council is killing the downtown core by reducing the availability of parking and making navigating the downtown streets more difficult and less safe. All this makes*

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*visiting locally owned downtown shops next to impossible. Not every vehicle can fit into a parkade (for example, trucks like mine have larger caps on the back to accommodate hauling mobility devices.) Local businesses are suffering because their customers can not get to them. People figure it is easier to go to a mall and get what they need there then it is to go downtown. I would be in favour of a licensing plan and some form of payment for people to ride their bikes downtown to help offset some of the revenue that has been lost because of the lack of parking spaces. I would also support a lowering on the price of a business license and tax breaks for the smaller downtown business owners. Since downtown business owners have a vested interest in what happens downtown, I would suggest introducing a motion that these business owners should be allowed to vote in Victoria's municipal election no matter where they may live in the GVA. I feel if you have your business here and are going to be affected by the policies made by city council here then you should have the right to help choose those people in charge of making those decisions.*

**AS:** *We must focus on, and accelerate, modernization of buses, improvement of the route network and insistence of on-time and reliable service. An efficient public transit reduces the need for parking facilities.*

#### **4. Policing:**

There has been considerable controversy about the role of police in maintaining the security of our city, including questions about the overall adequacy of the police budget, allegations of systemic racism in the police force, and police being asked to respond to mental health calls for which they have limited training. Options being considered include embedding mental health workers within the police response and/or funding community-based responses that are health focused. As you think about the role of the police in the City of Victoria, what thoughts do you have about the overall adequacy of the police budget and their future role, especially related to issues of social disorder and mental health/addictions calls? What needs to be done about the allegations of systemic racism experienced by BIPOC residents of Victoria?

**SA:** *This question covers an awful lot of ground, but I'll try to give you a sense of where I land. First, the security of persons and property is one of the foundational ideals of having a civil society. Over the past two years, we experienced an increase in crimes against persons and property and in public and social disorder. At the same time, we see a city council continuously fail to support the police department in its budget requests and witness the extraordinary step of the police board forced to go to the province to request that the province step in and ensure that Vic PD is given the resources it needs to do its job. This is not a coincidence.*

*I support a fully funded and properly resourced police service. Further, I support the ACT teams and will advocate to see that program expand. I don't view the funding of police and the funding of community-based responses to mental health issues as an either/or situation. We need to allocate appropriate resources to mental health and addiction issues. Systemic racism is an important issue that continues the need to be addressed, not just in policing but in all aspects of society. I encourage all efforts to address and eliminate systemic racism and I encourage all efforts to address and eliminate systemic racism and all forms of discrimination. However, the answer is not to direct or support hate speech towards Vic PD. I have great confidence in the leadership of Vic PD and believe they do the very best they can in what is a very difficult profession I pledge to work diligently to address all the issues that they face now and in the future.*

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**RD:** I think the police budget should be examined with the goal of identifying portions of the budget that could be re-allocated to mental health-based or social work-based responders. Personnel trained in the use of force should be involved only in situations where the use of force is needed or strongly anticipated. Allegations of systemic racism in policing should be addressed through a combination of increased selectiveness in hiring and ongoing training programs for officers.

**BH:** The police budget is always an issue. At this time, I believe it is adequate. Police response to social disorder and mental health/ addictions problems can be improved by better and more advanced training. There is no doubt that there is systemic racism and profiling involved in police behaviour. Again, more training will help with that. It is not at all unreasonable to include mental health workers and substance abuse outreach workers to assist the police and help them defuse situations.

**SL:** I believe the city should support its Police department adequately to do the job they were hired to do. It is a very difficult job. Having a city with resentment towards the police makes their job harder than it already is. Integrated police and social services is required. My sister in Toronto is a social worker who works with the Police department when she visits those with special needs. A team of officer and outreach workers helping each other and those in need.

**HM:** I believe funding community based responses that are health focused will be both more effective, and more just than our current system of policing and incarceration. Like many, I have been educating myself of the history of policing and systemic racism, and it is clear that there are serious issues with our current system that need to be urgently addressed. I am in favour of defunding the police and putting money instead into services for those most in need. The police system (along with many other institutions) needs to be held accountable for the violence perpetrated towards BIPOC, and the system needs to change so that harm is no longer being done. Having researched reform vs. defunding options, defunding seems to be the more effective strategy. I am definitely open to evidence based policy suggestions however, as long as they take into account the lived experiences of BIPOC.

**KR:** I can see race being an issue elsewhere, but not here. Our Police chief is himself a POC and if the issue was as bad as some people make it out to be then Chief Manak would never have obtained his position, much less holding it. We need to increase our police spending so that we can not only hire more police officers but also give them better training and tools to use so that resorting to force becomes less necessary. On the surface, having a group of mental health specialists on staff is a great idea. I honestly think it should be well thought through and looked at from every angle. Will these people be constantly on the street or work in an on call basis? Will they have the same duties as regular police? Will these specialists be armed? If not, what precautions would be put into place to keep them safe? Will they ride along with officers or sit in the office until needed? As for the apparent systemic racism experienced by residents here in Victoria, yes I am sure that it happens or it might seem to be happening at the time. I grew up in an area of Toronto where I not only saw it take place I had it happen to me. I do NOT think "ACAB"; I think everyone can have a bad day and sometimes that is what it comes down to. Remember to stop and think: do I always have to go into work and know there is a chance I will have to deal with the death of a small child? Will I have to break that news to their families? Will I have to deal with someone today that thinks I HATE

*THEM just because of the colour of their skin? To end the Racism, we have to have a two-way street because racism has both a give and a take.*

**AS:** *I would agree to a budget increase for the Police Department if it is targeted toward more officers, plus making the police more visible and approachable. Thus, no new cruisers but rather electric-assisted bicycles. An increase in interaction with the public would make everyone feel safer. Collaboration with social workers will be a great help in dealing with mental health and addictions.*

### **5. Noise & Vibrancy:**

We want a lively, night-time city life and we also want to grow the downtown residential population. That creates inevitable conflict in terms of noise, including traffic noise and bar-related noise. What steps would you initiate or support to balance these competing interests?

**SA:** *I agree that there are going to inevitably be issues around noise in the kind of vibrant and active city that we want. I support noise mitigation measures around vehicles and developments. I think staggered closing and good neighbour policies around entertainment venues should be developed and enforced. I think that we can have a vibrant, active city that is very livable if we work together to find solutions to our noise related problems.*

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**RD:** *Competing interests like these can be balanced by adapting building requirements for residential buildings in locations exposed to high levels of noise, to make these buildings more soundproof, by avoiding having residential buildings and busy night clubs in the same immediate vicinity, and by exploring ways that night club clientele could be moved out of the downtown core more quickly at night, particularly after closing time for night clubs.*

**BH:** *Having stayed downtown for a lengthy period, I know that noise, even that of garbage trucks, etc. can be very annoying for residents. If we start requiring building code adjustments for noise reduction in our residential spaces that is one partial solution. I think we will have to create certain social corridors where noise levels are permitted to be higher than in other places and people will reside in them knowing there is a higher noise limit in the area.*

**SL:** *Areas of the downtown where late night activity is approved can keep it separate from all of downtown. Purchasers of condos or tenants would know that they are in a late night entertainment area. This would allow those that live in the downtown to know what tomorrow brings with new businesses moving in.*

**HM:** *I am a light sleeper so this issue is close to my heart. Our city soundscapes should be taken into consideration, as they inform a large part of our experience. Noise bylaws are incredibly important, as is making sure buildings are constructed with noise considerations and insulation in mind. For longer term solutions, mixed use zoning and investing in more biking, walking, and public transit infrastructure (and reserved bike and foot traffic only zones) would help reduce traffic noises.*

**KR:** *Well, this is a great question. I have worked in the bar industry in the past. I have always thought that there should be more emphasis on preventing overindulgence. Earlier closing times would help in this particular instance. In addition, any new building and/or upgrading should include better noise dampening measures.*

**AS:** *I would try to strike a balance, generally following the recommendations of the report of the Downtown Late Night Task Force of 2009 (Late Night Great Night – Putting the Pieces Together.)*

## **6. Encampments:**

The current pandemic has resulted in encampments in City parks due to a shortage of housing and the ongoing need for social distancing in the existing shelters. The DRA made a public statement calling for Centennial Square to be put on the list of places where overnight sheltering is prohibited due to concerns about inadequate park space in the downtown core, the needs of the business community attempting to survive in the face of the pandemic and the lack of appropriate services for sheltering through a cold Victoria winter. Recognizing that an equity lens calls all neighbourhoods to participate in the protection of vulnerable citizens, what actions or policies would you support to ensure that encampments are fairly distributed throughout the City of Victoria? Would you support a motion to place Centennial Square on the list of places where overnight sheltering is prohibited?

**SA:** *I look forward to a city, and in fact a region, where there are no encampments. I believe strongly that a distributed model of service delivery, subsidized housing, addiction and mental health treatment facilities and rehabilitation programs would contribute positively to the whole of the city. My own neighbourhood of Burnside-Gorge carries a disproportionate amount of social housing and service delivery that has led to inequitable stress on the fabric of the neighbourhood. We need to end 24/7 camping. We need to address the underlying issues that lead to the mental health and addiction issues our community faces and we need to ensure that the province mobilizes enough resources to address problems that are squarely in their jurisdiction and to stop downloading their responsibilities to the city. We need to resubscribe to the four pillars strategy and not simply rely on harm reduction efforts. Prevention, treatment, and enforcement along with harm reduction, not just for those afflicted but for the public in general, need to go hand in hand if we are to move forward.*

**RD:** *Yes, I would support a motion to place Centennial Square on the list of places where overnight sheltering is prohibited, as soon as appropriate alternatives are in place. I don't think that in an affluent community like the City of Victoria, people should be resorting to camping in parks. In fact, I regard this as flatly absurd. Nor do I believe encampments should be distributed throughout the City of Victoria. (Rather, they should be fairly distributed throughout the REGION, but maybe that's part of an answer to a different question.) As discussed above, appropriate housing should be provided for people who need it, in a society as affluent as ours, and instead of camping in places like Centennial Square and Beacon Hill Park, the small number of people who don't want housing should be accommodated (ideally in each municipality in the CRD, not just in the City of Victoria) with a purpose-built facility, a supervised and regulated municipal campground with washrooms, showers and maybe even an outdoor cookery (thereby avoiding the need for cooking fires in tents and other dangerous places).*

**BH:** *I have dealt with that in question 1. I believe that the City of Victoria is not a campground. Our public spaces are not for the sole use of a few underprivileged people. We are going to have to make provision for these people but not by passing a "Temporary Sheltering Regulation By-law".*

**SL:** *I believe everyone should have a home if they desire. Sheltering in our parks is not a home. I believe the province and city are working hard on the issue but their initiatives are*

*slow and people are suffering in the meantime. Drug addiction and homelessness are not the same. I have lived with the homeless in the past and in my experience we created a wonderful environment with people helping each other. Drug addiction is a different story. We must deal with the issue of homeless and drug addiction separately. In the meantime I believe we should revisit Topaz park with temporary structures (less than 2000 each) paid for by the province should be set up and proper services for a kitchen and showers. Social services and police office on site Working together assessing individual needs and providing drug addiction treatment.*

*Drug addiction can cause desperation and that is not what we need to send into our neighborhood parks. Services for those sheltering in their cars would also have access to all the services. A temporary home as long as it takes to get a permanent home. An address is a big thing. It could be set up in a month and as new people move to our area it could be increased. Centennial Square is not a place for sheltering. It is a place that requires that anyone trying to access City Hall feels safe. City Hall should be accessible to all its residents.*

**HM:** *During the pandemic, I believe the needs of those currently sheltering in parks need to be our top priority as a city. I cannot say if I would support putting Centennial Square in the list of prohibited places for overnight shelter without hearing a very good argument for it, and talking to those currently sheltered there. Since most services for the unhoused population are downtown, I imagine most people would wish to stay there. I do however understand that having public spaces is important for people, and that the wellbeing of all downtown residents needs to be taken into consideration. I would weigh people's needs as fairly as I could, understanding that sometimes interim solutions must be made to fix the most dire problems first. My sense is, that this is not an issue that a solution can be found that makes everyone happy, but I hope that long term affordable housing, support for small businesses, restricting evictions and other measures will make our current crisis obsolete.*

**KR:** *I honestly see most of the homeless situation as a provincial concern, although I do have some ideas on this matter that I have already shared with the provincial government. As for camping in the parks, I think we need to go back to set hours. Centennial Park should be completely off limits to campers, as the encampment led to a rise in crime in that area. I myself have had two attempted muggings in Centennial Park and I am not what one would call an easy mark for a mugger. Because of the growing crime rate, people are scared to go downtown. This means less business for downtown business owners, who are already suffering from not only the decrease in customers but also the increase in crime.*

**AS:** *The problem of homelessness must be tackled with the involvement of the Federal and Provincial governments, since no municipality can solve it alone. For example, the Provincial government should be lobbied to treat drug addiction as a medical issue, and also to expand the number of institutions for those battling mental illness. The most vulnerable among us must not be abandoned on the streets. In reference to Centennial Square, there should not be overnight sheltering allowed. Sheltering did occur in Centennial Square many years ago which resulted in many problems. In the case of the parks, the 7:00 am to 7:00 pm bylaw should be enforced.*