



**A Voice for Nature**

Alberta's oldest natural history organization, the Red Deer River Naturalists (RDRN) has been a local voice for nature since 1898. In the 1980's, RDRN was intrinsically involved in developing Red Deer's Waskasoo Park, the linear park and natural corridors that buffer the city's waterways, protect ecologically sensitive areas, and provide wildlife corridors through the city. This unique park system has since become central to the identity of Red Deer residents and is consistently ranked as the main contributor to a high quality of life. It has also become a key draw for tourism and economic development.

RDRN sent three specific and timely questions to the Mayoral candidates regarding Red Deer's parks and trail systems and how these assets fit into each candidate's Mayoral platform. The questions and answers are listed below. Answers were limited to 100 words and are in the order in which they were received.

- 1. Given that the people of Red Deer regularly rate the Waskasoo Parks system (the trails and park nodes we all love) as the best part of living in Red Deer, and given the pressure placed on Red Deer's natural spaces by heavy park use and development, what assurances can you give to Red Deerians that these critical spaces will be maintained and their funding preserved?***

**Lawrence Lee:**

I grew up using our Waskasoo Parks system. I believe it is part of what makes families want to come live here, and its protection should be a priority. I would be committed to continuing funding for maintenance, ecological stewardship, and sustainable development. As park usage grows, we will continue to invest in infrastructure that balances access with conservation, ensuring these natural spaces are maintained for future generations. Public input and environmental assessments will guide all decisions, reinforcing our promise to protect what makes Red Deer a city in a Park.

**Cindy Jefferies:**

I am an ardent supporter of Red Deer's Waskasoo Parks system. I am thankful for those citizens and City leaders who had a vision and realized the opportunity we had when the Lougheed government put together a fund to make this possible. With COVID, the introduction of e-bikes, and electric scooters of all sorts, I have seen our trail system use rise. It is great to see people out enjoying the parks, but it highlights the need to plan for increased capacity and take steps to protect natural spaces at the same time.

**Victor Doerksen:**

Our family is an avid user of the parks and trails of Red Deer and rate that as one of our most favorite things about Red Deer. During COVID it was the one area where anybody could go

without being restricted from entry; it does not require an entry fee, so it is accessible for all. Using a priority-based budgeting model I would rate parks and trails near the top of the list behind essential infrastructure services that people count on each day to live.

**Gareth Scott:**

Did not reply.

**John Gallagher:**

No contact information listed when the questions were circulated on October 2, 2025.

***2. With the increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in Red Deer, many are finding shelter in environmentally sensitive areas. What strategies would you implement to address this issue, ensuring the safety and well-being of the houseless population while also protecting our vulnerable natural areas?***

**Lawrence Lee:**

We must balance compassion with environmental stewardship and safety. I support a coordinated approach that includes promoting recovery, transitional housing, and outreach services, while working with community partners to provide safe alternatives to camping in city parks and trails. At the same time, we'll protect our natural spaces through proactive monitoring, education, and restorative efforts. Everyone deserves dignity and safety—and our parks deserve protection for all to enjoy.

**Cindy Jefferies:**

Encampments happen when our shelters are full and/or people have rejected shelter. While we work to get better shelter and build housing, we need interim measures to shelter people in a better way. The cycle of evicting people in an encampment and disposing of their belongings only to have them move 100m away and then repeat the cycle serves no one. It only exacerbates the problem. It also has a big impact on the park system. We could find a space to allow people to camp, perhaps within a big tent, or an empty warehouse, while we build housing, reducing damage in the parks and improving safety.

**Victor Doerksen:**

My simple goal of turning the tide on social disruption is to have fewer people living on the streets (encampments). The strategies to get there include shelter, support, enforcement, and housing. This will be a community effort and not the sole responsibility of a Mayor, Council or city administration. Achieving the aforementioned goal (not easy) will take pressure off sensitive areas where encampments occur.

**Gareth Scott:**

Did not reply.

**John Gallagher:**

No contact information listed when the questions were circulated on October 2, 2025.

- 3. *The preliminary engagement for Phase Two of the Red Deer Zoning Bylaw Review included adding numerous permitted uses on all P1 (or Parks) zoned land along with zero lot lines and no maximum height or lot coverage. These uses included developments such as auditoriums, churches, convention centres, gyms, curling rinks, rec rooms, etc. What is your position on development within Red Deer's parks system?***

**Lawrence Lee:**

Red Deer's parks are prized community assets, and I do not support broad, intensive development within P1-zoned lands as you saw in my vote last dealing with the Clearview property. While thoughtful amenities can enhance public use, we must first look at ecological integrity, public access, and the natural character of these spaces. Any proposed changes must undergo rigorous public consultation and environmental review. Parks should remain places of respite, recreation, and biodiversity—not be overtaken by large-scale infrastructure that risks undermining their value.

**Cindy Jefferies:**

In general, I do not support development within Red Deer's parks. However, I do believe there are opportunities for development/redevelopment in some park nodes. For example, in the future, could an Indigenous culture centre fit into the park system somewhere? I think the zoning is confusing and needs clarification. In some cases Public Service (PS) sites, that aren't developed, are seen to be park sites. Further consideration of this part of the zoning bylaw is necessary. The land use by-law should clearly define park spaces and protected spaces.

**Victor Doerksen:**

Not having seen the preliminary engagement for Phase Two I am at a disadvantage as to whether it's an actual proposal or a discussion piece. I would assume that limited structures would be permitted other than to support the workings of the park. Nevertheless, I am going to withhold judgement until I get to hear the full discussion. On that point, in view of other zoning discussions this past year, I would look for an opportunity for Council to be involved in the earlier discussions rather than wait for it to show up at a Council meeting.

**Gareth Scott:**

Did not reply.

**John Gallagher:**

No contact information listed when the questions were circulated on October 2, 2025.