

1-ON-1: DOUG HOLMES

**Civic election: One-on-one with Summerland mayoral candidate Doug Holmes**

Casey Richardson - Oct 2, 2022 / 4:00 am



Photo: Contributed

Castanet News had a conversation with each mayoral candidate running in the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity only when needed. An interactive database of Okanagan candidates, including previous questionnaire stories, [is available here](#) and is being updated daily.

Election day is Oct. 15.

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**Doug Holmes: Summerland mayoral candidate**

**Castanet: Why do you want to be mayor and what do you believe you can bring to the position?**

**Doug Holmes:** The way I look at it is it's not so much why I want to be mayor it's more in terms of you know how I can contribute. I think people contribute to their communities in different ways depending on their skills and their interests and where they're at in life.

When I first moved to Summerland, my kids were young, and I wanted them to learn how to play tennis, but there was no tennis coach in town, so I became one and I got my coaching certification. I ended up coaching kids tennis for years and still do. But at that time, that was something I was able to do to contribute to the community.

Likewise with other things I'm involved in the community, the refugee sponsorship, the Ryga Arts Festival, things like that. These were just all things I have been doing as a way it could contribute and when I first ran for council it was just kind of an extension of all my community involvement.

I was just in a position where running for council, I thought I could contribute better on council and now I've got all this experience and I think the best way I can contribute now is as mayor on a basis of leadership.

When you're talking about the position of mayor, you're talking about three kinds of experience that you're looking at. You're looking at your political experience, your community experience, and your professional or career experience.

The political experience, I think I've proven myself in the last eight years. I've been a councillor, I've spent four years on the Regional District board and the last two years on the Okanagan Basin Water Board. I think that previous council experience is really important if you want to be a good mayor, because how can you lead an organization to the future if you don't know where it's been in the past, right? How can you lead a council if all the councillors around the table know more about what's going on than you do? So there's a learning curve.

When I was first elected councillor there was a learning curve. I know there's going to be a learning curve if I am elected mayor, but it won't be nearly as steep as if I hadn't already been a councillor for eight years.

I really think it probably takes two terms on council to become completely comfortable with the process and with the issues that you're going to be dealing with. My understanding of the issues, I think, extends across the full breadth of the community so I'm not really a specialist in just one or two areas of public policy.

By the time you run for mayor, you should have that full understanding of what's happening everywhere across the community. I think there are a lot of examples out there of people stepping into the mayor's role before they're ready. And ultimately, it's the community that pays the price.

I really think a mayor needs to be immersed in the community. They need to be active in nonprofit organizations or service groups, school PACs, coach youth sports, anything like that, or have a stall at the Sunday farmers market, or anything involving giving back to the community. You need to be involved to be in tune with the community.

The third aspect of experience is your professional experience and I think a mayor should be someone who's had a career where leadership skills were acquired, and I believe I've had that.

I worked in business and journalism, including 10 years with Microsoft. I've worked in those management positions. I specialized in providing IT services to the public sector. I've shared the stage with Bill Gates and spoken at conferences around the world and met with mayors and leaders from around the world. When you put those three combined, I think it shows that I have what's really needed to be a mayor.

**C: In your view, what is the number one issue facing the district today, and how would you deal with it knowing city hall only has so much power?**

DH: I find it really hard just to pull up just one issue. I guess the important thing to me is that we maintain people's quality of life. We have a really great quality of life in Summerland, and we have to ensure that we safeguard that.

You can't talk about the quality of life without talking about affordability. And you can't talk about affordability without talking about housing, which is very important. You can't talk about housing without talking about growth. And you can't talk about growth without talking about infrastructure and they can't talk about infrastructure without talking about climate adaptation. Everything is connected to everything else, every issue, so we can't just look at issues in isolation and say, 'This is the most important issue and the others be damned' because they're there. They're all connected. Everything's connected.

**C: Summerland has continued to face issues accessing health care and walk-in clinics, how do you plan to address this problem?**

DH: Well, we are addressing it. I've been involved with the Division of Family Practice and the primary care centre that we're in the process of getting in place here. I see no reason why it won't and it's really important that we do this.

We have a doctor shortage here. Summerland currently has 13 family doctors and two more are expected to retire within the next few years and so that'll put us, based on our current population, to be short, six to seven doctors.

Then, of course, our walk-in clinic was closed. Some people say, well, this isn't a municipal responsibility. They say that's health care so it's provincial, but it's too serious of an issue for our community to ignore. We know by working with the Division of Family Practice, we know doctors today want to work in larger teams in clinics, that includes nurse practitioners, social workers, and dietitians, things like that so that doctors can just focus on their own work.

We don't really have one of those kinds of clinics in Summerland. There's the Rosedale clinic which is kind of like that. We have no problem attracting doctors to that clinic, but it's at capacity and it's not nearly as large as we need.

The current council has been working with our local doctors, the Interior Health Division of Family Practice and the Community Foundation has come in to help us to establish a clinic here in Summerland. I've been attending those meetings since 2017. As I said, it's happening, it will happen and we definitely need to ensure everyone in Summerland is attached to a family doctor.

**C: What is one project council voted through this last term that you agree with and want to see come to fruition?**

DH: The commitment to put a new swimming pool to a referendum. That is something we've really needed in the community. Ours is from the 1970s, around 1974 I believe. I wasn't in Summerland at that time, but I've heard about how when that was built, it brought out families to the community. We have got to finish those drawings because it'll require funding, we will need to go to referendum and the taxpayers. People will have a vote on that.

**C: There is a lack of vacancy and affordable housing options throughout the Okanagan-Similkameen including Summerland. What would you have the municipality do to improve the problem?**

DH: We're working on that, more housing is being built than ever before. We're building faster than the trades can cope with. We're building faster than our public infrastructure can be upgraded. We know that there are many people out there who are still struggling to get onto the housing ladder, or move up the ladder or even down on the ladder if they want to downsize as they get older. Because we have kind of a disproportionate amount of high-end, low-density housing. So we need to rezone more multi-unit housing that's attractive to people getting on and moving up and going down, for young families and seniors. We have the missing middle but we also have a missing beginning.

We can use zoning to encourage more rentals or infill densification redevelopment. Another thing we can do, we need to do, is streamline our planning approvals process, and save developers time and money. We're in the process of implementing a new software so all of this can be done online.

Another thing we need to do is enforce our new regulations for short-term vacation rentals. That will help us reconnect the housing supply to the local economy and ensure that our residential neighbourhoods are kept residential.

There are also people in dire housing need, who just can't afford housing and everybody needs housing. The market can't always take care of that. For people that have that core housing need, we need to work in collaboration with the provincial and federal governments, and the municipality needs to be a body that's facilitating building those kinds of partnerships between BC Housing, developers and nonprofit housing providers.

The main thing is we can't have local nonprofit groups competing against each other for limited housing and funding from the government. We need to have everybody working together.

**C: What improvement do you see in your municipality four years from now if elected?**

DH: Well, I think we'll have more density and a more vibrant downtown. It has always been a priority for me and is one of the things that motivated me to run for council. You're looking to create a more vibrant and happening downtown. I'm quite proud that we've really focused on our culture in the last couple of terms and what we need to do. We've just completed a downtown neighbourhood plan that really focuses on how we can increase density and get people living downtown because if you really want a vibrant downtown and if you really want your local downtown businesses to thrive, you need people living downtown.

You can't rely on people coming out from the suburbs—if you can think of parts of Summerland as suburbs—but you need people to live downtown and that'll increase density. If you look at new housing, across the street from the middle school, you look at that and then you look at the other end of downtown across from Memorial Park, the new rental apartments that are there and you can envision, if you just look at those two developments, you can judge that a future downtown can develop to.

The other is infrastructure. An ongoing issue is we need to work on the roads and the roads we can't just go look at in isolation, you have to look at what's underneath roads, like pipes. We started about five years ago, we didn't have a good handle on the condition of our infrastructure. And now we do, and we've done a lot of work. We need a long-term financial plan in place so that people can see what infrastructure needs to be replaced and when it can be planned.

That's a really big thing to improve the roads and water mains. And like Penticton, we need to get into our own electricity, which relies on planning street utilities and we need to look at our water reservoirs.

**C: Anything else you want to add?**

DH: I think what it comes down to for mayor, it comes down to trust. Who do you trust to have the knowledge to defend the municipality and provide leadership? When it comes down to trust I really think I've done what I believe that, first of all, is best for the District, not what's best for me personally. I'm not in it for self interest. I think I'll be able to provide Summerland with the leadership that it needs.