

1-ON-1: SUE MCKORTOFF

## Civic election: One-on-one with incumbent Osoyoos mayoral candidate Sue McKortoff

Casey Richardson - Oct 5, 2022 / 11:46 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. 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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Sue McKortoff: Osoyoos incumbent mayoral candidate

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

**Sue McKortoff:** I want to be the mayor because I love this town. I've been involved in this town by helping, volunteering and teaching. I taught here for 34 years. I am dedicated to keeping this town a great place to come and visit, our motto is Canada's warmest welcome and we want to continue making sure that we offer that.

What I bring to the table is 50 years of living here. I am experienced because I have had one term as a councillor and two as mayor. I'm organized, and I'm reliable. I'm a positive leader and a team player. I definitely am community focused. If I can buy it here, I will buy it here. And I do my shopping, my gas, appliances, and hire local workers to come and fix things or do things at my home. That is all local because I believe that you shop locally and you support local.

I'm also approachable. I have always said that if you want to phone me, or email me, or phone town hall and say that you'd like to have a meeting with me, I will try and make that happen. Of course, things were a little bit different during the pandemic. But certainly now if people want to meet me I can arrange to find a place to meet them if that was the case.

**C: What is the number one issue facing the town today, and how would you deal with it knowing Town Hall only has so much power?**

**SM:** A couple of things that are key to deal with. First is healthcare and our doctor shortages, we absolutely understand that. When we were at UBCM in Whistler a few weeks ago, two councillors, myself and the town CAO visited with the Ministry of Health. And of course, they have this problem everywhere because it's a province-wide issue, and it's had lots of press. I also had a meeting with Minister Dix, the mayor of Oliver and our MLA Roly Russell and we certainly outlined the concerns that we had in the South Okanagan. That was our main reason for the meeting, but it certainly goes towards the whole regional district and the whole province.

Emergency room coverage is a big thing at South Okanagan General Hospital. We need to offer doctors or people that come here a better way of work-life balance and many of them do not want to take on a longitudinal practice, which means having patients and dealing with all of their conditions and having to do the paperwork and sort of being on call for after hours and that type of thing. Many doctors do not want that, what they want is team-based care. That's a good thing because that was what we've been sort of working with for the last couple of years of primary care centres to try and get that up and running.

But of course, there are always concerns about getting those. There are two in Penticton that seem to be working very well. In Oliver-Osoyoos, we work together. So we have to have both of us on the right page in order to make that happen because all of the doctors that are here, all work at South Okanagan General.

Also when we were talking to [Health Minister Adrian Dix], we said the fee-for-service model, would like to be [implemented] here. They would like to have some flexible funding and some flexible scheduling. We also need to look at the underutilization of health professionals, such as pharmacists, counsellors, dieticians, and physiotherapists, we need to make sure that we don't always have to go through a doctor in order to access those. That might cut down on some of the red tape that you have to go through.

There are lots of foreign professional care workers that have been professionally trained that have a difficult time working in BC and in Canada, and we need to provide fewer barriers for them. But the bottom line is we need to work together, share, collaborate, and see if we can't come up with a decision that works for everybody. It's not easy, because I've been involved in healthcare issues for the last 40 years. I was on the hospital board and the chair of the hospital board for a while when we had hospital boards. Now we have hospital districts.

I've seen the progression of what's happened and that gives me some experience and some background in it. I would certainly continue looking at healthcare as a major issue certainly in the next four years if I was to continue to be the mayor.

**C: Osoyoos has continued to face issues with drinking water quality, how do you plan to address this problem?**

**SM:** We do have a water conservation plan and campaign that's going out called Water Smart Osoyoos and you will see that very soon. It's in print and other areas of media with explanations for people on the concerns and states what the issues are, and what we can all do to sort of help this. It's a huge issue because we use an awful lot of water in the summertime.

I'm the chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, and I know that 24 per cent of our water is used in irrigation so we may need to rethink that. We have over the years certainly put in water conservation steps in many areas and the make water work campaign from the Okanagan Basin Water Board. We all need to sort of look at all the issues and work together to try and solve them. We are having a hydrologist come and check all our wells because in Osoyoos we have four wells that have manganese in them.

Health Canada has put more regulations in and we do not meet the regulations for it. Health Canada has lowered the maximum allowable concentration for manganese in drinking water. So the Town of Osoyoos water distribution system no longer meets that, and so that's really why we have to really look at how we can deal with this.

It consumes many of our town staff on a daily basis, and they're out flushing all the reservoirs right now and they have a program to likely do that more often. The concern is that a lot of these things are underground, and aren't visible like work being done on your sidewalks and your street lighting. So we need to be very careful about looking at infrastructure, particularly underneath the ground. So the bottom line is that we need water treatment plants and maybe because our wells are spread around, we certainly need more than one.

We do have a well, it was dug and it was ready to go but Interior Health rejected it. It was for water quantity. You run up against these things because there are stricter rules put in place. But they did tell us at that meeting that we had on Monday, with all of this information that having reverse osmosis in your home, is probably better protection, certainly than not having one. So I know there are many people that have them and that's a good thing.

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

**SM:** We've met with the Ministry of Housing and explained what we're concerned with, that we need a range of housing types in town. We have 550 units that we've okayed, some of them are rental, some of them are single family, some of them are duplexes, that type of thing, we have a range. We have to wait till you get enough workers and you get enough people to organize to actually build them all but many of the units are being built right now. It's quite obvious around town.

One of the problems we face because we're a resort municipality, we need short-term high-season accommodations. Many of our local businesses, resorts and restaurants and so on have been very proactive in looking at that. Sometimes they have purchased or rented motels or condos or houses in order to house their workers and that's a good thing because the town can't supply that. But certainly working together with the businesses works out better than we thought. We're actually assisting the ministry staff for some help with a new housing program in order to help resort municipalities mainly, and start a new intake session for rental housing. BC Housing was there, the gentleman who was in charge of that talked to us about loans and getting BC Housing involved. It could be done by the town, it could be done by a developer, it could be done by a nonprofit. So we're looking at all of those things, of course.

Part of the problem in Osoyoos is it's a very desirable area to be because of our weather, because of our wonderful warm lake and it's just a great place to place to live, of course, but housing prices have gone through the roof.

One of the things that we have a concern with is the increase in visitors and in people who own homes here, and that come up in the summertime, that's our busiest season, June, July, August, September, or in June, probably those four months.

We have so many people here in the summertime and we have two full-time bylaw officers where much of their time is spent going around and making sure that short-term rentals are notified. We send them a letter saying 'You know this is not allowed in this zoning and you need to take your ad down.' And many times they do, the problem is that it's very lucrative and so people will get around that by saying, 'Well, I'm not renting it out, there's no money changing hands, it's my cousin, and their family that are coming to stay.' And, that might be it. But it's also very hard to prove that it's not. So those are some of the issues, but we are looking at a new policy to try and address this. And I know, it's very, very similar all around BC, that just about every community is having concerns with this.

We want people to understand why we have concerns about short-term rentals and why we have concerns about following the bylaws.

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

**SM:** One that did come to fruition is the sewer lift station and that was a really important thing because it's at the lowest point that pumps up the sewage from all our sewers around town, and they send them up to the sewage lagoon. That was a really big project that we took on and it was just completed last year.

One of the other things is that there's been water twinning. We've finished the area down here where I live, and I do not have a boil water advisory and this is the first year in 30 years. So I'm happy about that. But it is also needed for all of the other people that are outside the actual town boundary, but get their water from the town. We still don't have the very north end, before the end of the lake. That hasn't been done yet. But it takes money. We've done probably 80 per cent of it now, which is a good thing.

Also during this term, we provided fire rescue with needed resources, including hiring full-time staff, a fire chief and two assistant chiefs now that we pay.

Six years ago, we almost lost our high school and it was sort of at the last moment that we got some funding from the provincial government to keep the school open. Since then, we make sure that one of our councillors goes to all school board meetings. We're determined that we're going to be front and centre because we do not want ever to go through that again. That was a huge issue for this town and it took many, many, many people to make sure that that was handled.

We're also right now doing our town centre renewal. And we've had all kinds of public meetings about that, public meetings about our official community plan that has just been adopted in June, which is a living document, it can be changed when necessary. But those kinds of things have taken a lot of time and a lot of reviews. And of course, everything has been a little bit slower because we've had the pandemic to deal with.

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

**SM:** We will be continuing probably on a daily basis to look at water issues, looking at health issues to see what we can do to help that and looking at the infrastructure, as we build more, and our population has gone up 10 per cent since the last census.

If we're going to build more homes, and we obviously are, we need to make sure that we have everything prepared to accept the new challenges with more water, sewers, streetlights—that type of thing. So that's going to be an ongoing challenge.

We are a resort municipality, we get funding for that and we do projects in town that will help attract tourists but also are good for our residents. And that end, we've just been at meetings that UBCM on that issue as well. So I don't think there's a shortage of things for us to do for the next four years.

And I would certainly like to be the mayor, in order to carry on with these because I certainly have a background in them and have been very involved over the years.