

## **Tell us about yourself**

*My name is Laureen Barker, I am running for a City Council position in Nelson.*

How long have you lived in this area?

*I have lived in Nelson since July 2005 when my husband Vern Barker and I moved our shop, Gaia Rising Metaphysical to Baker Street from Trail.*

Do you live within Nelson City Limits or in Nelson's service area?

*We live in Rosemont.*

Present and previous employment

*Currently I am working full time at our retail shop. Previously I have worked for Interior Health in Nelson as a Home Support worker and Scheduler; BC Gas in Trail as a Customer Service Representative; BC Gas in Vancouver as a Residential Service Planner and Drafter.*

City Committees

*In the past in Nelson I have served on City Committees - the Cultural Development Committee, Heritage Committee and Housing Committee as a member of the public and a representative of the Business Community.*

other boards and committees

*I am currently a Director of Nelson and District Credit Union (NDCU) where I chair the Governance committee and sit on the Member Engagement committee and the Investment and Lending Committee. In the past I have been a member of the Audit committee and Nominating Committee and Conduct Review Committee.*

*Currently I am also a member of the Board of Kootenay Career Development Society (KCDS) Board. In the past I have sat on the board of the Upper Columbia Cooperative Council and the Kootenay Carshare Board.*

What's unique about you that you feel you can offer to the City?

*I offer my experience working on collaborative, high performing boards; expertise in governance largely gained through training and experience on the NDCU Board.*

***I offer my perspective as a hardworking, thoughtful and caring Baker Street business person; wife of a strong and gentle man who loves to hug; mother of 2 fabulous daughters and 5 fabulous grandsons all good huggers; left-leaning, green party supporting pragmatist.***

## **New to council:**

What decisions did the last council make that you would not have supported?

***I was disappointed that council did not proceed with donating land for 40 modular housing units in Raitown however I am not sure of the full details.***

What decisions did the last council make that you would support?

***I have not followed council activities that closely. I trust that they are doing their job. For the most part I think that council is forward looking and doing a good job for all citizens.***

## **Committees**

Nelson has a system of committees. How important are these committees to our city?

***I think council committees are an important means to solicit the participation of citizens. I think their work is important and a valuable representation of democracy at the local level.***

Anything you would do to increase the efficiency and use of the committees?

***Sometimes, I believe the work of committees is ignored or left to languish. If committees are going off on a tangent it would be more helpful to engage them instead of ignoring them.***

What are the Council's and the Mayor's responsibility to its committees?

***I'm not sure. I don't think there is any responsibility to the committee.***

What are the committees' responsibilities to council?

*This would be set out in the Terms of Reference in the committee documents and would vary from one committee to another. Generally, the Council Representative and the Staff Support would attend meetings of the committee and report back to City Council.*

## **Street culture**

Some people have been concerned about Nelson's street culture, pan handlers and people without homes. Does our City Government have any role to play in addressing these concerns?

*Nelson must work for these folks or they would not be socializing, living and making a living on the streets of Nelson. There are many societies in Nelson trying to help folks better their lives and make choices for a more stable future. Some say that because we have supports, that is why people come to live here and we should withdraw these supports. I do not agree with this perspective. I believe we need to be compassionate with people who have different lifestyles without enabling harmful lifestyle choices and supporting those who want to make change. I believe we must support the organizations working to help street folk support healthier lifestyles.*

## **Business community**

Some of our Nelson business owners have felt they have not been consulted appropriately about issues that affect them. What would you do to mitigate that feeling?

*As a business person, I know firsthand that Nelson Business Owners are very busy. I also know that the City reaches out to the business community with virtually every initiative in the City because they realize how important the Business Community is to the economic health of the city. The Chamber of Commerce tends to be the focal point of the discussions which is one point of contact representing their members, a good source of information. Perhaps the City could attempt to reach out another way to individual business owners via email or social media for increased engagement. This is a difficult problem and an important one to solve because there are a lot of smart busy people running businesses in Nelson.*

The downtown business community suffers from such issues as limited parking, increased parking rates, competition from online shopping and the mall. What actions would you take to let the downtown business community know you are pro local business?

***When business people complain about problems with parking I have to smile. This is an excellent problem to have. I do get that our customers need to have a place to park. Ideally, I would like to see additional parking away from the downtown core connected by shuttles, perhaps in a tram style similar to universal Studios in California, to connect both people who work and visitors to the downtown core. A study done a few years ago recommended charging even more for parking in the downtown core, but allowing for longer time in one spot, with the cost decreasing as one moved farther away from the center.***

***This was not a popular option as I am sure most would agree.***

***Think about it for a minute though as I fantasize;***

- a) in a situation where I need to pick up a prescription at the Drug Store or something from the bakery; I could park in a 15-minute spot and do my business quickly.***
- b) If I was working at a business downtown I would probably find less expensive parking further away from work and walk a bit (or take the tram ☺) or ride my electric bike. I would stop plugging the meter thereby freeing up a spot for visitors to pay the higher rate.***
- c) If I was a visitor I could elect to pay more to park conveniently or park farther away and walk or shuttle into town. It is a lovely walk! Perhaps some enterprising folks would set up bicycle or Segway rentals.***
- d) I would also like to see the expansion of parking meters that are chargeable with credit cards because it is really hard to carry around all those quarters, loonies and toonies.***

***Eventually this may lead to less vehicles parked on the downtown streets allowing for a true pedestrian downtown which is healthier for everyone.***

***This approach is supposed to allow the city to recoup costs for additional parking and shuttles away from the City Center, while prioritizing and properly allocating costs to the limited spaces according to their need.***

***Another part of this problem relates to the availability of reliable transit ... another issue ... as this reliable transit has to exist before people can begin to use it and it takes a while for people to realize that perhaps they can manage without their car for work. Someone mentioned to me that they must bring their car with them to work as they live in Blewett and have to go home at lunch. Transit doesn't work for them and I am sure there are many stories like this one. A very complicated issue with lots of philosophical arguments from many perspectives, what fun!!***

***On-line shopping cannot compete with retail in experience or customer service. Retailers may have to adapt but bricks and mortar shops are resilient. Businesses in the mall are part of Nelson, they employ citizens of Nelson and***

*serve citizens of Nelson. People shop there because they make choices preferring to support large international chains in some cases over locally owned and operated small businesses. Personally, I support local businesses over international but that is a choice all of us get to make every day. Every dollar we spend is a vote for the type of world in which we want to live.*

## **Housing**

Some businesses in the service industry are concerned about the lack of affordable housing for their workers. Can the City do anything to help provide worker's housing?

*Housing is a complicated and multi-faceted issue; with zero vacancy rates there is no pressure on landlords to provide quality housing at reasonable prices. When the city, or any organization steps in and adds to low-end housing stocks there will be push back from landlords protecting their income. Housing is expensive to build and maintain. Do we believe in competition over people having safe and secure housing? If we believe in housing people over protecting landlord rights must we somehow compensate landlords for their losses? Personally, I come down on the right of people to have secure housing however there are definitely complications to this point of view.*

Selkirk College has many students who need accommodation. This has put further demand on our already scarce available housing. Can the City do anything to help provide student housing?

*Selkirk College has land and resources. I do not believe the city needs to step in to this area of housing. However perhaps there can be some pressure put on Selkirk College as the lack of student housing impacts the rentals in Nelson. With additional student housing perhaps there would be a slight easing on the vacancy rate in town.*

## **Services**

Does Nelson feel old and dated?

*No, it is a heritage community and people love the look and feel of the streets with trees and brick buildings. The infrastructure is being maintained and updated appropriately.*

Are you interested in improving the look and feel of our community?

*I suppose there is always room for improvement but I love Nelson the way it looks and feels.*

Money no object, what recreational and/or cultural facilities would you like to see here?

*Hah! I really would like to see gondolas to mountain station and the Selkirk College campuses! It would fit with the fossil fuel free 2050 initiative.*

How would you like to see Lakeside Rotary Park and Nelson's other parks improved?

*No idea, I'm open to initiatives.*

Would you do anything to help make Nelson more bicycle friendly and what would you do? Bike lanes?

*Sure why not?*

Can our public transportation system be improved? How?

*This is difficult because it seems to me that there needs to be more pain to get people out of their cars and onto busses. No one wants to be the cause of that!*

## **The Regional District of Central Kootenay and the City of Nelson**

Over the years the **RDCK** and **City** have had conflict over jurisdiction and services such as the Nelson Municipal Library, and Nelson & District Community Complex . These conflicts caused many tough decisions over the years. Is there anything that can be done to encourage better cooperation between the **RDCK** and the **City**? Should we be one Regional District?

*I have no idea or opinion on this topic at this time.*

## **Cannabis**

Do you think the current regulations of quantity and location of cannabis retail stores are appropriate?

*This is such a crazy time for this industry I have no idea of the right path, I suspect the underground economy may continue to flourish.*

## **Climate change**

What role does our municipal government have in helping to reduce the risks of local forest fires, floods and other environmental emergencies?

*I support the Wildfire Mitigation plan on the Council agenda at this time.*

What can be done to improve the City of Nelson's recycling system?

*Adding regional composting, about time!*

## **Youth**

Youth, while not yet able to vote, will be an important part of future elections. How will you involve youth in understanding and participating in our civic government?

*Welcome them to council meetings*

How can the Nelson & District Youth Centre be improved?

*Supported dwelling units on the roof for youth aging out of the foster system.  
Need a partner.*

## **Final thoughts**

Do you have a pet project you would you like to see happen in the next two years?

How will you communicate with citizens of Nelson?

[laureen.barker@gmail.com](mailto:laureen.barker@gmail.com) please communicate with me!

What makes for a happy community?

*Happy citizens*

Is there anything you would do to help the City government be more transparent and responsive to its citizens?

*I don't believe the City is deliberately being non-transparent and unresponsive. It is difficult to know how best to engage the citizenry, that doesn't mean give up, it means keep trying other methods.*

Do you see yourself as a leader, or a servant to the community?

*A servant who walks the talk, listens well and thinks outside the box.*