

## **“WORKING TOGETHER FOR A PROSPEROUS AND SUSTAINABLE FERNIE”**

### **FERNIE CHAMBER 2022 MUNICIPAL ELECTION PLATFORM**

The past four years have represented a turbulent time in Fernie’s history. Of course, a global pandemic has thrown extraordinary challenges at all organizations and individuals – with impacts that are still being felt acutely like supply chain issues, crippling labour shortages, and spiking inflation. Our population has seen significant growth, and with that has come the attendant growing pains. Housing attainability has reached crisis levels with dramatic upward pressures on the cost of housing. Childcare is unreliable and unaffordable – locking many out of the workforce. There is immense and growing pressure on our community’s aging infrastructure. Local businesses are trying to thrive under the weight of rising costs, lack of staff, and an often-challenging regulatory environment.

But in the face of these challenges, Fernie is poised for great success. The visitor economy has come roaring back from the pandemic lull with tourism levels higher than 2019 in many sectors. There has been a construction and development boom with record levels of building permits issued from the City of Fernie. Optimism amongst local businesses remains strong with 44.2% describing their business as growing with another 47.2% expected to increase their number of employees over the next three years<sup>1</sup>.

But reaching our growth potential, while keeping it sustainable and inclusive for all residents, will require one thing above all else – collaboration around a shared vision.

On October 15, 2022 the citizens of Fernie will vote for a Mayor and Council to lead the City of Fernie over the next four crucial years. It is a unique opportunity for all of us to elect a leadership team that will prioritize working with and listening to stakeholders, along with a determination to tackle very complex issues with humility and innovation.

Incorporated in 1902 as the Fernie Board of Trade, the [Fernie Chamber of Commerce](#) is the largest business support association in the Elk Valley representing approximately 300 member businesses and organizations. Our mission is to sustainably strengthen the local economy and quality of life in Fernie. As an organization, we developed this election platform to highlight critical issues and policies for the next council of the City of Fernie to work with us on.

The key areas of focus for the Fernie Chamber’s municipal advocacy ahead of the 2022 election are:

- **Meaningfully engage local businesses, community partners, and citizens**
- **Urgently address housing attainability**
- **Make Fernie more livable, sustainable, and inclusive**
- **Make it easy to do business in Fernie**

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics taken from 2022 Fernie Business Retention & Expansion Report (<https://theelkvalley.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Fernie-BRE-Report-2022.pdf>)

### **Meaningfully engage local businesses, community partners, and citizens**

1. Provide regular communication and a variety of engagement opportunities to all Fernie businesses on issues that directly impact them (including, but not limited to, downtown revitalization efforts, vehicle parking plans, future of Station Square, snow removal, widespread zoning changes, and City of Fernie land disposition plans). Collect business emails during annual business licensing renewals to engage directly with businesses on updates and surveys.
2. Facilitate regular council to board engagement opportunities (at least twice a year) for key community groups. Provide clear direction and certainty to community groups that operate City of Fernie buildings on their future funding, partnering agreements, and building leases. Recognize that community groups are experts in their fields.
3. Prioritize a new Official Community Plan (starting in 2023) with unprecedented public engagement and consultation throughout the process, to ensure a robust shared vision for Fernie's future.
4. Implement other forms of communication and engagement with businesses and citizens, that are not just project-based but ongoing. Review the effectiveness of the Let's Talk Fernie platform and aim to engage people where they are online, with a commitment to more open houses and non-internet-based engagement opportunities.

### **Urgently address housing attainability**

5. Change policy, processes, and staffing levels to optimize and meet the increased building and development activity we are seeing in Fernie. Achieve this by fully implementing all opportunities highlighted in the [Development Approvals Process Review](#) (DAPR – prepared by the BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2019), accompanied by significant consultation with local builders and developers. This includes prioritizing an urgent and comprehensive update of the City of Fernie's Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw.
6. Approve multifamily developments and secondary suites as a means of increasing density and housing supply, even in the face of NIMBY-ism.
7. Clearly define and publish a suite of building and development incentives to attract partners for projects that address community needs like attainable workforce housing, new childcare spaces, and more commercial spaces.
8. Prioritize making strategically selected parcels of City-owned land available for public-private partnerships to develop projects that address community needs like attainable workforce housing, new childcare spaces, and more commercial spaces.

9. Consistent and active enforcement of (and reporting on) the Short Term Rental Bylaw to protect Fernie’s housing stock for long-term renters.
10. Create short-term emergency accommodation opportunities as a landing pad for newly arrived workers, while they navigate the local housing market.

### **Make Fernie more livable, sustainable, and inclusive**

11. Make addressing Fernie’s aging infrastructure needs a cornerstone of the City of Fernie’s plans for the next four years, and beyond. Approach capital asset management with an eye on replacement and operating costs, continued population and development growth, and climate resiliency. Prioritize resources and grant writing on advancing and supporting core services and infrastructure like sewer, water, and roads.
12. Make it easy for citizens and workers to move around the community and region with a renewed focus on Fernie’s transportation needs. Use the City of Fernie seat at the RDEK and UBCM to advocate for an immediate expansion of the BC Transit bus service in the Elk Valley, while exploring an expansion of the #FernieStoke ski shuttle operation to serve more of the community.
13. Review City of Fernie policy, operations, and facilities through the lens of accessibility, inclusivity, and universal design. Immediately move on making public in-person meetings permanently accessible to all members of the community, while committing to reviewing policies and practices that ensure inclusivity and non-gender-specific language.
14. Prioritize the planning and development of a new firehall and emergency services facility that is located along the Highway 3 corridor. The Fernie Chamber does not support the concept of a new firehall being developed at 902 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue – as this lot is critical to both the expansion of our downtown core, as well as a prime candidate for a mixed-use development with enough density for a significant number of attainable housing units. Engage with local developers and appropriate landowners to find a suitable location along the highway that would enable both a quicker response time to emergency highway callouts and an expansion of Fernie’s historic downtown.

### **Make it easy to do business in Fernie**

15. Create an economic or business development officer role to act as an informed and resourced first point of contact for businesses and developers (both new and existing) trying to work with the City of Fernie. Consider a shared position with the municipalities of Sparwood and Elkford (through an agreement with the [Elk Valley Economic Initiative](#)) if resources don’t allow for a Fernie-centric role.

16. Leverage membership in the [Elk Valley Economic Initiative](#) and its supporting organizations, by using and sharing the data and tools it generates. Review and update industry facing information provided on the City of Fernie website to incorporate these. Support efforts and implement recommendations presented by the EVEI to attract investment and grants into the region.
17. Define for Fernie businesses what the return on investment is on their business license fees. Immediately publish (and keep updated) the list of licensed businesses operating in the City of Fernie for the public to view.
18. Address the lack of commercial lands available in Fernie by allowing flexibility for creative uses and variances to existing commercial zones.