



Allied Arts Council of Lethbridge
2021 Municipal Election
Arts Survey: Candidate Response

Candidate: Belinda Crowson

1. What is your vision for the arts sector within the City of Lethbridge?

There are so many facets to the arts sector. First, it covers a wide range of different fields within the arts community from music to visual arts, to performing arts, to museums and art galleries. It includes theatre, film and television, story-telling, painting, sculpting, photography, ceramics, and SO much more.

Secondly, the arts involve everyone from youth to seniors and includes a wide range of participants from amateurs to professionals who make their living in the arts and from the audience to participants to creators and everything in between.

Thirdly, we must look at the mandate of the arts and what the arts do for us, both individually and as a community, as a society. As we look back on the past 18 months of the pandemic, more than ever we realize how involved the arts are in all of our lives. We all turned to the arts to entertain us, make sense of what was happening, enlighten us, feed our souls, keep us sane and connect us to the larger community. Arts can be very personal. Arts can be communal and community focused.

We must also look at the arts and their role in our economy. A diverse economy – one built on many different sectors – is the most resilient of all economies and now more than ever we need a resilient economy to help us rebuild after the pandemic. This is essential for Lethbridge and for the entire southern Alberta region. Arts is part of the economy, both in and of itself and as part of other sectors, such as tourism, recreation, and more. Additionally, a strong arts community supports other financial investments as businesses are more likely to move to a community where there is a strong quality of life for their employees. Further, entrepreneurs and professionals want to live and build their businesses in a community that is vibrant, alive, and engaging. Arts are a vital part of making those communities.

My vision for the arts sector is a comprehensive one, that supports the width and breadth of this industry and supports arts for all ages, all abilities, all economic levels and more. To do this, we need to ensure that the organizations who support the arts and the artists themselves are supported, so they can do their work and provide a wide range of opportunities for all Lethbridge residents and visitors.

I aspire for Lethbridge to have an arts sector that helps in rebuilding our community and region and which is active in reviving our spirits and our economy. Now, more than ever, we need to develop and support communities that are resilient, inclusive, and strong. There are many skills

we will all need to have to build these communities, but among them are collaboration, creativity, imagination and a belief in each other (and in our community). These are skills that are partly developed through participation in the arts sector. My vision also includes an arts sector that supports the larger community and is considered as vital part of the development of our communities. My vision is for an arts community that is integrated into our community, which reflects the wide range of ideas and backgrounds in our community, and which helps us become a stronger and better community.

2. What do you believe are the benefits of investing in the arts and how do you view the role of City of Lethbridge in arts investment.

Investing in the arts is investing in Lethbridge, it is investing in southern Alberta, it is investing in Alberta.

Arts are part of the economy. People work as professional artists. Tourists visit places that have strong art scenes. Young entrepreneurs and professionals want to live, work, and build businesses in places that are vibrant, active and have great events and places – all of which rely on the arts. We know we have a labour shortage that is the number one concern of local businesses. If we know we need more labour and we know people want to live in places that have a strong arts community (along with other factors), investing in the arts is investing in business and the economy. So purely from an economic perspective, creating the type of community where people want to live, which will encourage people to move here, is vital for our economy. When people say they want to keep more young people in Lethbridge but they do not support investing in the arts, then do they truly want to keep young people, do they really support businesses?

Arts are essential for the personal and social development of people and communities. There is a reason that arts have been part of human culture for millennia. We know we are facing a rise in loneliness, a rise in depression, a rise in people disconnecting from each other. Arts is vital for personal development and social cohesion. It helps us to better understand the world and our role in it. It helps us to make sense of complex issues. Investing in the arts is investing in mental health, it is investing in the education of our youth. It is investing in the long-term health of our communities from youth to seniors.

Part of the role of a municipality is to provide some of the investments that support the economy and to help to build the framework necessary for the economy to thrive. No one doubts that it is the role of a municipality to provide roads and transportation systems so businesses can sell their products and bring in their supplies. No one doubts that the airport is being developed as an economic hub for the region. We know that having the city invest in broadband will support business development and retention.

In the same way, investing in the arts also needs to be seen as an essential investment of a community in that it helps to provide the groundwork that allows the arts component of our economy to flourish and contribute to the overall economic wealth of the community.

Of course, the city cannot be the only investor in the arts community. The city also needs to advocate for funding to other public and private investors and to be seen as creating an environment where investment in arts businesses and in the arts sector is welcomed in the community.

3. Please share your thoughts on public art and its role in our community.

We as a community, we as a nation, are facing some amazingly complicated and essential issues, issues that need to be part of our public conversations, issues which need to be discussed by all of our residents, issues which we must solve as we move ahead.

These conversations include rebuilding our communities and economies after the pandemic, dealing with climate change, moving forward in truth and reconciliation, community safety and crime, dealing with the opioid epidemic, helping people with loneliness, stress and mental health issues and other concerns.

Public art plays a role in those conversations as arts are one way we can have a deeper look into our shared history, our community identity, our relationships to each other and our place in society. Public art connects people and helps build better and stronger places and spaces. Both in making the art and in the public conversations around the art, public art creates community conversations and encourage us to talk and to work together.

Additionally, public art contributes to the aesthetics of our community. Beautiful places inspire us and connect us and we invest in parks for many of the same reasons that we need to invest in public arts.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of public art is the public component. These are arts for everyone, not just the rich, not just those who feel comfortable entering art galleries.

Public art also supports the local economy. It helps to grow and develop the creative class, which is essential for the growth in our community. Never forget that it is the creative class who is behind many of our new industries and who will help to build the economy and create employment. Public art is a vital part of the tourism industry. Public art encourages businesses and their staff to choose to live in our community.

Public art is part of lifelong learning, which is essential for us on an individual basis, but which also helps develop and sustain the local workforce, essential for our local businesses.

4. Lethbridge City Council has demonstrated their commitment to building a performing arts centre in their recent Capital Improvement Program. Do you support this commitment and if is so what is your proposed strategy for completing the project?

Renewal and redevelopment in all of the various sectors of our community is vital, including in the arts sector, and Lethbridge has needed a new performing arts centre for quite a considerable while. Yes, I support building a performing arts centre.

Of course, the real question is how to accomplish it, when to build it, and what strategy would be used to construct this project and pay for its construction and ongoing operation. This project has to be viewed within the larger economic realities (facing Lethbridge, the region and the province) and balanced with the many other projects and needs in our community. There's a reason that it takes considerable time to build projects such as this, as this is a large investment and involves an ongoing financial contribution towards operating expenses.

So, one part of the strategy involves ongoing community conversations.

Additionally, we need to be prepared for, and plan for, how to use city investments to leverage other money from both private and public funders.

Part of that strategy means ensuring we have the project details done to be state where we are ready to move if money becomes available and where we also have a project that can inspire other organizations and individuals to contribute. Fortunately, a great deal of this work has been done.

Throughout all of this, we must maintain an ongoing conversation with the community to ensure that whatever project is decided upon still matches the needs of the community and best reflects the activities that the community will do in the new space when the project is ready to move forward.