

Tofino Ratepayers Association



Kat Thomas

1) So, the first question is the obvious one. Tell us about yourself and in general terms why you have chosen to run.

I was once an East Coaster - my mom is from Nova Scotia and my dad from Newfoundland (you'll hear it come out in my "R's" when I invite you out to the bahrr!). In 2013 I started my journey west and ended up in Tofino in February of 2015. I came here without concrete plans beyond continuing my culinary career and escaping the winter snow. Tofino grew on me and I started putting down roots of my own in town. Over the past 7 years I have switched careers, fallen in love and gotten married, and become a homeowner. I know this is a 'Tofino success story' and I want to help others achieve their visions of success and security in our town.

For me security is a roof over my head, clean drinking water, affordable accessible food, reliable transportation, and safe streets.

I see municipal government as a way to provide these things for others - through higher density housing, variety in housing options, short term rental licensing that benefits locals, water storage and treatment, public transportation, affordability via wages and taxes, and access to health and safety resources.

2) What qualification or life experience has prepared you for the responsibilities you are seeking by running for office?

On paper my qualifications may look less impressive than our other candidates: a few years of post secondary education (Radio+Television Arts, and Commerce) and a career background that mainly consists of cooking food and mixing drinks, but what I lack in certification I make up for with many years of experiences I would deem 'character building'!

This means I am compassionate, honest, and have a strong sense of responsibility. I want the best for those around me and will put in the work to make that happen. I can always 'show my work' and explain how I come to any decision. The joke here of course is that these traits should make me a lousy politician, but I hope they will be strengths if I do have the opportunity to sit in a councilors seat!

3) Residents have expressed many concerns over the years. Number the items from 1 to 14 on the basis of your sense of priorities with #1 as your top priority. The item you would feel most urgently needs to be addressed. Should you wish to comment on any item please do so below your ranked list.

I do not feel that I can fairly rank these - many of these are issues that need to be tackled together, with decisions that need to take more than just the issue at hand into

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consideration.

For example: Recreational facilities - improved recreational facilities would benefit a wide range of our population. Water supply would tie into this issue (especially with the desire to have a pool in the future), as would climate/environment, and the obvious issue that comes with big ticket items: taxes

4) Recent studies have identified that, over the course of a year, for every Tofino resident there are 300-500 tourists, depending on the study. Should tourists be paying a greater share for operating the municipality?

Of course we are all going to say yes to this. The challenge is to maximize revenue coming in to our community without making people feel as though we are nickel-and-diming them.

5) Last year Tofino initiated a pay parking scheme for the beach areas. Partly in an effort to secure money from tourists to help the town in paying for needed infrastructure. It seems to be a success. The plan was that this year the program was to expand into the downtown area where summer parking problems abound. The implementation of that plan has been delayed, apparently while the need for Offshore parking and the parking needs for downtown businesses are reconciled. Do you think pay parking is an important initiative for the community and a good way to generate money? How would you proceed? How should any revenues over the costs of operation be spent?

I look forward to seeing the financial outcome of the pay parking! I think the implementation of the beach pay parking went much smoother than I anticipated. I see pay parking as a viable option for generating revenue, though I do think the affected businesses need to be on board and offshore parking needs to be accounted for. I would like to see the free passes for Tofino, Ahousaht, Opitsaht, Esowista, Hesquiaht and Tyhistanis residents continued.

There is no shortage of options for spending the revenue generated! However I would like to see it contribute to public transportation,

Increasingly, housing issues in Tofino are becoming complex. Businesses are buying existing residential homes and converting them to staff housing. Vacation rental by absentee property owners seems to be commercializing our residential areas. These more commercial uses of residential property can apparently pay a higher purchase price for the home than families trying to live here can afford. They may also be able to write off expenses against income that resident homeowners are unable to do.

Rates of home ownership in Tofino are in decline.

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I can't fault businesses for buying homes for staff housing. Offering staff housing is obviously one of the biggest tools to bring in and retain staff. Given that we have limited space for building, purchasing houses seems a logical choice.

Vacation rentals need to be managed through zoning and licensing. I know that our licenses are meant to only be given to properties that also have a full time resident on site. I think in the future we should only issue new licenses for Short Term Rentals that are part of the owner's primary residence/property. This allows people who live here to run their (properly zoned) STRs and discourages people from building solely for the purpose of vacation rentals.

6) Currently we have a complaint driven bylaw system in which bylaw responds to problems only when infractions are reported by citizens. Issues such as illegal vacation rentals and illegal uses of property with, for example, trailers and motor homes parked as rental units on residential property are becoming increasingly problematic. This pits neighbour against neighbour. The argument is that lack of enforcement of vacation rental infractions and other forms of commercialization results in a loss of much needed residential housing units while the quality of neighbourhoods is deteriorating as they fill up with temporary and substandard rental units. For the good of the town, does bylaw need to be more proactive in enforcing important Municipal bylaws?

Yes, it would be ideal if bylaw had the resources to be proactive rather than reactive. Logistically bylaw is not able to patrol for every issue, nor would people want them patrolling private residences, so of course there will be a large number of issues that will be dealt with only when reported.

7) Going forward, will increasing numbers of vacation rental with absentee owners, and other quasi commercial uses of residential property actually reduce the number of residential properties and pose a threat to the long-term viability of Tofino as a place to live?

There is the potential for that to be a reality - though I think we are making progress to fight that outcome and we can continue to make progress by:

- a) Building higher density housing in areas not zoned for STRs. (ex: Sea Otter, Yew Wood, Sharp Rd, Tonquin)
- and
- b) Updating our short term rental bylaws and licensing rules.

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8) Tofino's taxation and spending increases at a rate exceeding the rates of population growth, inflation, and wages for the average Tofitian. It has been argued the divergence is so apparent in terms of livability, versus the cost of operating the municipality, that spending must be curbed, and/or alternate sources of revenue must be found. In response to this dilemma, it has recently been proposed that Tofino petition the provincial government to allow a sales tax to be applied to all commercial transactions (hotels, retail stores, charter operations, restaurants, etc.) in an effort to 1) secure the infrastructure Tofino needs as it grows and 2) to place the burden of the necessary taxation more properly on tourists. Please comment.

I think this solution overlooks the fact that locals also dine at restaurants and make retail purchases here. We also book hotels for staycations - or make bookings for our families at hotels and charter operations. You run the risk of making things less affordable for those who live here as well as frustrating repeat guests. We are increasingly alienating visitors who have been coming to Tofino for many years. I do feel that some of our return visitors are also a big part of the heart&soul of our little town! The people who come back year after year tend to hold Tofino with a certain reverence and treat it with respect because they are also trying to preserve their own memories/vision of Tofino.

Businesses raising costs slightly to account for higher wages for their staff is generally more palatable even though it may result in the same cost to purchasers.

9) Do you think Tofino is facing a crisis as families leave because they cannot afford to live here? The **Tourism in the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region A Vital Snapshot | 2021** report states the following re: the Living Wage:

At \$19.63, our region's living wage—the hourly pay that each parent must earn to cover the basic expenses of an average family of four—was the highest in BC in 2019.

Few people actually receive this wage, however, and more than half of the region's population earns below \$31,000.¹⁵ Over 16% of women and 18% of men earn less than \$10,000 a year.

Between 2017 and 2019, monthly family expenses have increased by approximately \$300 (or 5%) in our region. Rising housing costs are largely driving up the cost of living.

Please comment.

Yes. Cost of living, lack of appropriate housing options, access to health care, childcare availability, and limited job options are all contributing to families leaving. I am fully in

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support of having all jobs pay a living wage while also acknowledging that families will continue to leave if their other basic needs are not being met.

10) It has been 20 years since Tofino has done anything significant to improve/increase its water supply. It is an issue for discussion in many reports and council meetings. For example, the availability of water is often cited in regard to the consideration of rezoning for housing development. Recommendations from the most recent staff report offer, as a solution, further water restrictions and methods to reduce consumption layered on top of the current system of seasonal water restrictions. It also tentatively suggests the consideration that certain businesses in Tofino may need to close for the summer months. As well, the study identifies opportunities for increased supply and storage to avert the potential for summer shortage. The report identifies that within a few years of the end of the upcoming council term, Tofino's water demands will begin exceeding supply. Are you prepared to make the decisions necessary to avert Tofino's current and looming water insecurity?

I'm in support of continued conscious use of water. I look forward to us finding a solution for additional storage as we know that is ultimately the answer to this issue.

11) What else would you like to address?

12) Let's say you have a very successful term in office. How would Tofino be better in the future than it is today, because of your successful efforts? How did you bring that about?

With a successful term in office I envision : We will have more residents with permanent roofs over their heads - through home ownership as well as reliable rentals. We will have year round public transportation. We will have a vision for a solution to our water supply.