

Tofino Ratepayers Association



Tom Stere

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

My name is Tom Stere and I'm running for a council position for the District of Tofino. I've been a resident of Tofino for 35 years. I was married in Tofino 22 years ago and have had the pleasure of raising my two sons, ages 16 and 19, in Tofino. I'm currently a rescue specialist at the Tofino Coast Guard station and an instructor in the Canadian Coast Guard Medic A program. I was involved in the formation of Tofino Sea Kayaking Company in 1988 and worked on the Clayoquot Biosphere Project as the field station manager from 1992-2000. I served on Tofino council from 2018-2022.

I have chosen to run again because I feel my experience on the last term of council has made me a better councillor and I can more effectively serve the community in tackling the challenges and opportunities moving forward.

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

My history in the community gives me a unique perspective and broad understanding of both the historical and current issues facing the residents of Tofino. In the past I have worked for a community-based non-profit research organization and have managed a small business. Because of these experiences, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with residents from all walks of life and have shared many of the challenges that face them. I also feel qualified for these responsibilities due to my recent experience this term on council including: serving on the Audit Committee, Director on the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District and Tofino Harbour Authority, and council appointee on Wickaninnish Community School Society. I also serve on the board of Rainforest Education Society, am a past executive member of the USS Parent Advisory Committee and volunteer with the Tofino Salmon Enhancement Society.

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.

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I've taken the liberty to list the concerns and my sense of priorities:

Completion of waste water treatment plant.
Water supply strategy.
Growth management and challenges of tourism based economy.
Appropriate housing supply.
First Nation Relationships.
Alternate Municipal revenue sources.
Climate change adaptation strategies.

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?

Yes.

The DoT has initiated two sources of revenues directly related to this issue. Negotiating a share of the MRDT (\$400,000 per year) towards debt servicing of the WWTP and phase 1 of pay parking that the DoT targeted to tourism users with positive revenues for 2022.

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?

Yes I firmly believe pay parking is a positive initiative. In terms of how revenue should be utilized I believe this is an excellent opportunity to engage the community in areas for the revenues to be spent. I would be excited to see the community interested in infrastructure that would be directed to community members ie: sidewalks, recreational facilities and, more boringly, asset management initiatives.

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

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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.

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?

The ability to proactively enforce By-laws is a question of resources and applying those limited resources to the prioritized areas. Often the community has a variety of opinions on the the important by-laws to be enforced. Enforcing certain bylaws can be complex, very expensive and demand a considerable amount of staff time. This has to be done . Council committed increased resources for by law and has proceeded on a number of important issues. Council has had recent and positive conversations with RCMP for continued support of the Reservist program to assist and support bylaw in Tofino.

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?

Certainly the question of STRs and its impact on the residential housing supply is an issue and work is currently being initiated to address the issue, with solid data to explore options available.

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.

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The DoT has ongoing conversations with the Ministry of Finance on alternative sources of revenue. The use of a portion of the MRDT for infrastructure financing is a recent success. The powers of taxation reside with the provincial government and as such a collaborative approach with other Resort Municipalities to lobby the province on the need for small communities to have new revenue sources to address infrastructure needs related to a tourism economy is underway.

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.

The rising cost of living is a national issue and certainly exacerbated in Tofino, especially in the area of housing. Where municipal authority and powers exist those tools should and must be used to address affordability in our community. The creation of close to 90 units of below market rental housing units for residents of Tofino by 2024 is one tool to help address this issue.

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

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water demands will begin exceeding supply. Are you prepared to make the decisions necessary to avert Tofino's current and looming water insecurity?

The short answer is YES.

The delivery of a safe, consistent and reliable supply of potable water is the most important service and responsibility a municipality delivers to the community. That responsibility is a major priority for me.

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?

I strongly believe Tofino is an incredible place to live, play, raise a family, grow older and have a high quality of life. To help ensure that continues would be a measure of success. There are challenges to be sure, but by listening, observing, and working collaboratively and civilly the community will continue to be an exceptional place to be.