

YYC Mayoral Showdown 2025

Luncheon Fireside Chat Series

April 10, 2025, Luncheon with Jeff Davison: Summary of Discussion

Q1: Why are you running for Mayor of Calgary? And why should we vote for you?

It's funny having been on Council and also having been outside of council now for the past few years. It's just like it's been issue after issue after issue at the City for me. And, you know, three and a half years ago, I didn't think I'd be sitting here, right? I mean, we kind of moved on from the last election and Jodi was elected but from day one, it just sort of seemed like the narrative turned around. We had a climate emergency, we canceled my arena deal in favor of spending triple the amount of money. There were new bylaws, blanket rezonings and it just seemed like over and over again, things were not going the way it should have for Calgary. I did a radio show with Shaye Ganam on QR radio for about a year and overwhelmingly, every week we would end up talking about one issue or another, but it all kept coming back to the same thing for me. We don't trust this Council. When you fail as a politician to build trust with the public, it's really hard to get that back. To me, it's all about where we are going to go from here. It's my belief that Calgary can be better and we should be better, and there's a faster path to get there.

Q2: If you had been on Council at the time, how would you have voted regarding Blanket Rezoning (RCG) across Calgary and why?

First of all, let me go back a little bit to answer your question. I would have voted against the blanket rezoning. and fully intend, and I think I'm the only candidate out there saying this, to repeal this bylaw. To address that as to why, it's not like I'm against RCG, I think there are areas where RCG could be impactful. But the reality to me is that Calgary is built out of hundreds of communities - the best thing about Calgary to me is the diversity of those communities. And when you clean sweep them and say, "We don't really care about that, we think this is the best housing path", it just doesn't work for me. And I remember on the radio show about a year ago saying, mark my words, this will create inflated assessments in our city - assessments will go up by 15% and people will be paying more to continually get less. And sure enough, what came about was that your assessment went up by 15% coupled with the mill rate going up by five and a half percent.

Q3: You talked about community input. There were a record number of citizens at city hall voicing their concerns about blanket rezoning. How do you plan on engaging the community and how can that be done effectively so that their voices can in fact be heard?

Well, I think it's holding meetings like this one, right? I certainly hope that this is not a one and done conversation. This should be the start of many conversations that we will have, not just as industry, but also as citizens. We have to create different mechanisms whereby we can create public feedback and do something with that public feedback. For example, it might be how we involve community associations differently. Because those are the people with their ear to the ground. A lot of people have stepped away from even getting involved with community associations because they feel like everything is being done to us. So why bother? What people are tired of is giving their feedback and being completely ignored. And so it's creating the mechanisms now to say how we are going to listen differently. And again, it really starts with resetting the culture to a mindset that we are here in service. We're here to represent the public and my job as the mayor is to set a four year strategic plan for this city to say, this is what we've heard, and this is what we're going to do.

Q4: I think all of us are suffering whiplash from the daily announcements and 180's that we've seen in the tariff war. And certainly, while we were not hit with the latest round of tariffs, Canada still has a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum. And let's put that into context. We're shipping those raw materials into the US. Anything that we import back that contains Canadian steel or aluminum, is going to be more expensive. And that is going to lead to increased cost of construction for purpose built rental accommodations. What strategies can the City use to mitigate the impact of those rising costs when we clearly need more housing in this city?

The challenge is we have to start thinking about things as a city - what can we control? So that comes back to all of you - what are going to be the differentiators in this election. First of all, I look at three things that I would say probably differentiate me from any of the other folks running for Mayor. All good people, I just think we have a different plan. But it really comes down to leadership, experience, and vision. So to me, it's about having a career over the last 20 years in energy, technology, and filmmaking and now healthcare, and yes, sitting on city council. Leadership requires you to create partnerships and create working relationships to get the best deal for Calgarians. Experience matters in that, right? For me, I've been in a lot of different sectors, but the commonality is always being able to find that common ground, always being able to bring people together, and bringing their projects to the table and getting them done. One of the things that we've got to do a better job of is land use and building permits. We've got to be able to get to the table

faster with these. Bob Dylan at Mainstreet was telling me that the average rental building that they're trying to put in place right now takes eight years from concept to the time they open the doors. That's way too long and a lot of that has to do with the City not being able to react fast enough. The longer you delay somebody, the harder it is to make a project financially feasible and therefore the more likely that they're going to go somewhere else with their capital. People are willing to invest where it's easy to do business. As a city, we have got to do a better job to compete with that and create a fair and equitable place where people can invest.

Q5: Calgary's housing strategy was developed and approved back in September of 2023. And one of the recommendations proposes that the city investigate rent control used in other jurisdictions and provide a summary to the Alberta government. So my question is pretty straightforward. Do you support investigating and/or implementing rent controls in Calgary?

The answer is a clear no. I don't support it, because I believe the market should dictate where rents are at. Our job as the city is to move things forward. Our job is to get out of the way and let developers develop this city. City council does not build this city. We rely on the development community to do the job of putting these houses in place and making things happen. So, to me, I don't even know why we're looking at rent controls at a time when we need to be looking at densification.

Q6: I would now like to talk about short term rentals and housing availability in general. Another thing that was approved by Council in April of this year, was updated regulations around short-term rentals. What impact do you anticipate those short-term regulations will have on the availability and affordability of long-term rentals?

First of all, I'd love everybody's perspective on this. I look at it more like, as a city, are we or are not supporting the shadow market? And do we need to have regulations in place or do we not? Let's look at Uber, for instance. How many people do you know support their daily income by picking up three to four rides a day? It's because affordability is getting tough. It's the same with short term rentals. We tend to overregulate a lot of things that don't necessarily need to be overregulated. I firmly believe Council should be in place to make sure people succeed in our city, and when we start creating too many rules around limiting their success, to me, that's a problem.

Q7: One thing that has been talked about a lot in our membership is property taxes. Today, the commercial rates businesses pay in Calgary are significantly higher than any other major urban centre – in places like Vancouver, Toronto, and even Edmonton. How can the City, and how can you as mayor, manage property taxes so that you can ensure tax fairness between residential and business owners, but also have the revenue that you need to provide the services and infrastructure that we need in the city?

The average citizen that I've been talking to said two things to me: "our taxes keep going up and our services keep going down". That's not the way this should be working. One of the differentiators I believe in our campaign is that we're promising a tax freeze for four years. To me, it's all about resetting the foundation so that we can continue to move this city forward. These four years are about freezing property taxes and talking about what's no longer on the table. As a city, we have gotten too far down the path on too many things that are not in our lane. And we've got to get refocused because property taxes cannot continue to go up the way they are while delivering substandard services. For example, 39% of Calgary roads are now in disrepair. They need to be fixed. Only 32% of roads are in good condition. That's not a good place to be when you're in a city that is promoting itself as being a logistical transportation hub. We need to fix that. Let's talk about our failing water infrastructure. I fully anticipate we're going to have water shortages again this year because nobody on Council has asked three basic questions: What's the fix? How much is it going to cost? And when will it be done? Getting back to focusing on core services has to be the priority moving forward.

Q8: I know that you supported the previous arena deal. What do you think of the current deal?

I've always said that we need this facility. I do think it's the key to unlocking the entertainment cultural district. We spent a lot of time looking at places like Nashville, Columbus, Kansas City, LA, places in Florida, even to some degree, the ICE district in Edmonton. When you bring a facility like that into the community and don't surround it with parking a lot, you centralize things, you can really move the needle on how you can develop your downtown. So I believe we need it. but I'll be very clear that the current deal is terrible. When I had the deal done, and remember my deal was signed with the Flames, we got all of our money back in eight years because I was successful in negotiating 2.2% of the ticket tax for the City. That allowed us to actually combine the three mega facilities together: Scotia Place, Arts Common Transformation, and Olympic Plaza Transformation. So we had the idea that it would be built using all three levels of government and we were able to work out a structure that advanced the federal and provincial money and the city money came in behind. We capped the City investment on the event center at \$300 million and the Flames took all the risk on cost overruns.

Q9: Jeff, I would now like to give you the opportunity to give your closing comments.

To me, the mayoral election comes down to what do we value as a City, and who do we think has the best possibility of getting the best deal for Calgarians? Who's the person who listens to Calgarians? And who has the ability to bring them together and say, "here's the path we're going down". We very clearly know what we're going to do over the next four years. We're not straying from that. There's going to be no surprises. I'm not coming out one day to declare a climate emergency. What you see is what you get. And the biggest failure I think of this City Council has been that they don't do what they say they're going to do, and we've got to change that. We've got a big, big task ahead of us and it's a simple task, but nevertheless it will be difficult. We need to rebuild trust with the public. And that's hard work. It's going to take us some time, but I believe we can get there. Thank you.