

All Candidates Response Form

Village of Harrison Hot Springs



Instructions

1. Complete the Candidate Information below, then answer all questions, including the Lightning Round. These questions apply to all candidates, whether running for Mayor or Council.
2. Type your answer in the response box under each question. Responses may be given in any order.
3. Each response must be no more than 500 words. Lightning Round answers are YES or NO.
4. Your file MUST be saved in PDF format and titled with your name, for example: Stephanie_Gallamore.pdf
5. Word documents will NOT be converted to PDF for the website. Files that are not PDFs cannot be posted.
6. When finished, in Word use File > Save As (or Export), choose PDF as the file type, and name the file with your name. Return the completed PDF as directed by the event organizers.

Candidate Information

Candidate name:

Gary Webster

Running for:

☐ Mayor ☒ Council

File name to save as:

Gary Webster

Click in a box and type. Boxes expand as you type.

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

For all candidates

Question 1

When a tourism business wants to expand, do you see that as an opportunity for economic development or a risk to preserving Harrison's character? What criteria would you use to decide?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I see responsible expansion of tourism businesses as an opportunity for Harrison. Tourism is a major part of our economy, and I want to see our existing businesses succeed and new investment come to our community.

But growth needs to fit Harrison. I would look at each proposal based on its impact on infrastructure, traffic and parking, neighbouring residents, the environment, and whether our water, sewer and other services can support it.

I would also consider whether the proposal contributes to a stronger year-round economy. Harrison needs more reasons for people to visit outside the summer months, and businesses need opportunities to remain viable throughout the year.

At the same time, economic development should not come at the expense of the natural setting and small-community character that make Harrison attractive in the first place.

I don't believe the choice has to be between economic development and preserving Harrison. With good planning, clear information and responsible decision-making, we should be able to do both.

Question 2

What is your approach to transparency and accountability? What information do you think residents are not currently getting from council that they should be receiving?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Transparency and accountability mean residents should be able to understand what Council is considering, why decisions are being made, what they will cost, and what happens after a decision is made.

One area where I believe residents need clearer information is the costing of major infrastructure projects. When we are discussing water, wastewater, stormwater, flood protection or other major projects, residents should be able to see the estimated cost, what funding is confirmed, what may depend on grants or borrowing, what the Village's share could be, and how those costs could affect taxpayers.

I also believe reports and studies that Council relies on to make public decisions should be readily available to residents whenever they can legally be made public. Residents should not have to search through years of agendas or resort to Freedom of Information requests to find basic information that could reasonably be available on the Village website.

For major projects, I would like to see information presented in a simple and consistent way: what was approved, the original budget, the current estimated cost, funding sources, what has been spent, what has been completed and what remains to be done. If costs, timelines or the scope of a project change, residents should be told.

Accountability is not about finding fault. It is about asking questions, providing clear information and making it possible for residents to follow how public money is being spent and whether Council's decisions are being carried out.

Question 3

How would you work to strengthen the relationship and communication between the Village of Harrison Hot Springs and the District of Kent, including pursuing a cost-sharing agreement for the regional aquatic centre so Harrison residents can access the same rates and registration

opportunities as District of Kent residents, while also strengthening partnerships with other community organizations?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Harrison and the District of Kent are neighbouring communities with many shared interests, and I believe maintaining a respectful and productive relationship between the two municipalities is important.

I would support sitting down with the District of Kent to explore a cost-sharing agreement for the regional aquatic centre that could provide Harrison residents with the same rates and registration opportunities as Kent residents.

Any agreement must be financially responsible and clearly explained to Harrison taxpayers. Council should understand the full cost, how that cost may change over time, what Harrison residents would receive in return, and whether the agreement represents good value for our community.

I also think there is a benefit to Kent in finding an arrangement that works. If Harrison residents find it more affordable or convenient to use recreation facilities in other communities, that is activity and spending leaving the Agassiz-Harrison area. A fair regional arrangement could help keep more residents using local facilities and supporting the surrounding community.

Our relationship with Kent should also go beyond the aquatic centre. Emergency planning, infrastructure, recreation and other regional issues do not stop at municipal boundaries. Regular communication between the two councils can help identify areas where working together makes sense.

Good relationships do not require us to agree on everything. They require respectful communication, a willingness to work together and recognition that cooperation should provide value to both communities.

Question 4

What specific initiatives would you support to attract visitors in the fall, winter, and spring? What are your priorities for improving Harrison's tourism infrastructure?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Harrison needs to become more of a year-round destination. A strong fall, winter and spring tourism season would help local businesses remain viable throughout the year and create more stable employment.

I would support working with Tourism Harrison and our local businesses to develop and promote more reasons to visit outside the summer season. That could include festivals and special events, outdoor recreation, arts and cultural activities, and opportunities that take advantage of Harrison's natural setting throughout the year.

I believe one of Harrison's greatest opportunities is right in our name — the hot springs. Greater public access to our natural hot spring water could give Harrison a major year-round attraction and strengthen our identity as a hot springs destination. Done properly, I believe it could significantly raise Harrison's profile as a destination well beyond our region.

I would support seriously exploring what would be required to make greater public access to the hot springs a reality, including the costs, access to the water, environmental considerations, location and potential partnerships.

Tourism infrastructure also needs attention. Roads, sidewalks, parking, public washrooms, waterfront facilities and accessibility all contribute to the visitor experience, but they are also used by residents every day.

Before committing significant public money to new tourism projects, I would want to understand the cost, expected benefit, ongoing maintenance costs and whether our essential infrastructure can support them.

Successful tourism should strengthen our businesses, provide opportunities throughout the year and contribute to a community that remains a good place to live.

Question 5

Harrison Hot Springs Elementary is an aging school in a growing community. If elected, do you support the Village actively pursuing the Civic Campus project in partnership with School District 78 to make a new elementary school a reality? What specific actions would you support?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I support a new elementary school for Harrison, but I do not support the proposed land transfer as part of the Civic Campus project.

Under the proposed arrangement, the Village would receive the existing school property. Before I could support an arrangement like that, I would need to know the full financial implications for Harrison, including the condition of the existing building and any potential costs associated with hazardous materials such as asbestos or lead paint, demolition, remediation or redevelopment.

Village-owned land is a public asset, and once it is transferred, we may not get it back. I believe we should look at alternatives that would allow a new school to be built while protecting land that could be important to Harrison's future.

I want the Village to continue working constructively with School District 78. My opposition to the proposed land transfer should not be confused with opposition to a new school.

My position is straightforward: **yes to a new school, but no to the proposed land transfer.**

Question 6

What are your priorities for emergency management?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

My priorities for emergency management are preparedness, clear communication and making sure residents know what to do before an emergency happens.

Harrison faces several potential emergencies, but flooding and wildfire are two that particularly concern me. We need to continue improving our flood protection and understand the condition of our dikes and other flood-control infrastructure. We also need to consider risks such as river flooding and dike seepage, not just rising lake levels.

Wildfire preparedness is equally important. I support continued FireSmart work, vegetation management where appropriate, public education and cooperation with neighbouring communities and emergency agencies.

Evacuation planning is especially important because Harrison has limited routes in and out of the community. Residents should understand evacuation zones, routes, alerts and what they should do if an evacuation becomes necessary. Plans should be regularly reviewed, practised and updated as the community grows.

Residents also need confidence that the people responsible for helping during an emergency are properly trained and prepared for the roles they may be required to perform. That means appropriate training, regular exercises and clearly defined responsibilities before an emergency occurs.

Communication during an emergency must be simple and reliable. Residents need to know where official information will come from and how they will be notified, including people who may not use social media.

Emergency management is one area where we cannot wait until something happens to discover where the weaknesses are. We need to identify the gaps beforehand and make sure Harrison is as prepared as reasonably possible.

Question 7

Harrison is a small, close-knit community. How would you keep personal relationships, business interests, or political disagreements from influencing your decisions as an elected official — and how would you handle it when residents strongly disagree?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Harrison is a small community, and we are not always going to agree. I don't believe disagreement should become personal.

As a councillor, my responsibility would be to make decisions based on the facts, the information provided to Council, the financial consequences, the applicable rules and what I believe is in the best interests of the community — not on friendships, business relationships or whether someone agrees with me politically.

If I had a conflict of interest, I would declare it and follow the requirements that apply to elected officials.

Residents also have every right to disagree with a decision I make. I would listen to their concerns, explain why I voted the way I did and, when new information is brought forward, be willing to consider it.

I also believe councillors should be able to disagree with one another and ask difficult questions without those disagreements becoming personal. Respectful questioning and debate are part of making good decisions.

We can disagree and still treat each other respectfully. I would rather have an open and respectful disagreement than have people feel they cannot question their elected officials.

At the end of the day, I would be accountable for my own decisions. Residents may not always agree with my vote, but they should be able to understand why I made it.

Question 8

Can you tell us about your involvement in our community to date — whether through serving on committees, volunteering, or attending council meetings?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Since moving to Harrison in 2021, I have tried to become involved and better understand how our community and local government work.

I served on Harrison's Environmental Advisory Committee, which gave me an opportunity to participate directly in discussions about environmental issues affecting the Village. I am also a current member of the Miami River Stream Keepers Society and support the work being done to protect and improve the Miami River.

I have regularly followed and attended Council meetings and spent a considerable amount of time reading Council agendas, reports, bylaws, budgets and other Village documents. That involvement has helped me better understand the issues facing Harrison and, just as importantly, how municipal decisions are made.

I created Harrison Village Facts as a way of sharing information from public Village documents with residents and encouraging people to become more informed and involved in what is happening in their community.

I am also a local business owner, which gives me another perspective on Harrison. I see both the opportunities our tourism economy provides and some of the challenges of operating a year-round business in a small resort community.

My involvement has taught me that being engaged in your community means more than simply having an opinion. It means doing the homework, asking questions, listening to different viewpoints and being willing to contribute your time.

Running for Council is another step in that involvement. I would like to put the knowledge I have gained to work for the community.

Question 9

Council operates under specific rules of procedure, including Robert's Rules of Order and the Community Charter. How do you plan to educate yourself on these, and what commitment will you make to being prepared before your first council meeting?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

If elected, I would begin preparing before my first Council meeting.

I would review the Community Charter, the Village's Procedure Bylaw, Robert's Rules of Order where they apply, and the policies and bylaws that govern how Council conducts its business. I would also take advantage of the orientation and training available to newly elected officials.

During my career with the Vancouver Park Board, I served on safety committees, including chairing a workplace safety committee. That experience introduced me to structured meetings, established procedures, agendas, minutes and the importance of following a proper process.

I have also spent considerable time reading Harrison Council agendas, minutes, bylaws, reports and other Village documents. That has given me a good understanding of how Council operates, but I recognize that observing Council is different from sitting at the Council table.

I would make it my responsibility to understand the rules governing meetings, motions, voting, conflicts of interest, closed meetings and the respective roles of Council and staff.

Preparation also means doing the homework for each meeting. I would read the complete agenda package, review the supporting reports and identify questions before arriving at the Council table. If I don't understand something, I will ask.

I don't expect to know everything on my first day, but I will come prepared to learn, understand my responsibilities and do the work required of an elected councillor.

Question 10

What is your top priority for your term in office in Harrison Hot Springs?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

My top priority would be making sure Harrison's essential infrastructure is properly planned, funded and maintained.

Water, wastewater, stormwater and flood protection are basic services that residents and businesses depend on every day. They also have significant long-term costs, and decisions made today can affect taxpayers for decades.

I want Council to have a clear understanding of the condition and capacity of our infrastructure, what work is required, what it will cost, what funding is available and what needs to be done first.

I also believe residents deserve to know where these projects stand. For major infrastructure projects, Council should provide clear information about costs, funding, timelines, progress and any significant changes along the way.

Harrison has many opportunities and there will always be new projects we would like to pursue. But before committing significant public money to non-essential projects, I believe we need to understand our infrastructure needs and our ability to pay for them.

Taking care of the basics may not always be the most exciting work Council does, but it is one of its most important responsibilities.

Question 11

What do you believe is Harrison's most urgent infrastructure problem, and what would you do about it?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

I believe Harrison's most urgent infrastructure issue is making sure our core water, wastewater, stormwater and flood protection systems can meet both our needs today and the future needs of the community.

Planning for the future is extremely important. Infrastructure decisions can last for decades, and we need to consider not only what Harrison needs today, but what our population, development and changing environmental conditions could require in the years ahead.

These systems are interconnected, and I would not identify one as the most urgent without having the complete technical information and current condition assessments in front of Council.

My priority would be to make sure Council understands the condition and capacity of our existing infrastructure, what needs immediate attention, what can reasonably wait, what future upgrades will be required, what they are expected to cost and how they could be funded.

From there, I would support clear priorities and a realistic long-term capital plan. Projects involving public safety and essential services should come before projects that are desirable but not essential.

Residents should also be kept informed. If a major infrastructure project is required, residents should understand why it is needed, what alternatives were considered, what it will cost, what funding may be available and what the financial impact could be on taxpayers.

We cannot fix everything at once, but we can plan ahead. Good infrastructure planning today can prevent much larger and more expensive problems tomorrow.

Question 12

What is your position on the Village's water and wastewater infrastructure, and how should council approach the significant capital costs involved?

Your response (maximum 500 words):

Water and wastewater infrastructure is not optional—it is one of Council's most fundamental responsibilities. Council must ensure these systems are safe, reliable, properly maintained and capable of serving Harrison today and in the future, while making responsible decisions about the significant costs involved.

The first step is good long-term planning. Council needs a clear understanding of the condition and capacity of our existing systems, what upgrades will be required, when they will be required and what they are realistically expected to cost.

With major capital projects, I believe Council should look at the entire financial picture before making commitments. That includes available reserves, grants from senior levels of government, borrowing requirements, contributions associated with future development where appropriate, and the impact on water and sewer rates and property taxpayers.

Grant funding will be particularly important, but we also need to distinguish between funding that is confirmed and funding that we hope or expect to receive. Residents should understand what portion of a project is actually funded and what portion Harrison may ultimately have to pay.

We also need to plan far enough ahead that we are not forced into expensive decisions because critical infrastructure has reached the end of its useful life before we are financially prepared to replace it.

These projects can involve millions of dollars and will affect residents for many years. Council needs to ask difficult questions, compare alternatives and make sure residents understand both the need for the work and how we intend to pay for it.

Good planning will not make major infrastructure inexpensive, but it can help prevent unnecessary costs and reduce the likelihood of unpleasant financial surprises for future taxpayers.

LIGHTNING ROUND (YES / NO)

All candidates: check YES or NO for each question

Lightning Question 1

Do you support the Village continuing to pursue the Civic Campus project and a land exchange with School District 78 for a new elementary school?

☐ YES

☒ NO

Lightning Question 2

Would you support the Village pursuing a cost-sharing agreement with the District of Kent so Harrison residents pay the same fees at regional recreation facilities?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Lightning Question 3

Will you commit to holding council wages and expenses at 2026 levels for the next four years?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Lightning Question 4

Do you support stronger protection of Harrison's natural areas even if it limits some future development opportunities?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Lightning Question 5

Have you volunteered with a local organization in the last three years?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Lightning Question 6

Do you believe Harrison should actively encourage expansion of tourism businesses and new tourism investment over the next four years?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Lightning Question 7

Do you commit to respectful conduct to fellow council + staff even when you disagree?

☒ YES

☐ NO