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Connelly weighing run for Calgary's mayoral spot

New website to help alderman decide

BY JASON MARKUSOFF, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 10, 2009 7:00 AM BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT

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Calgary City Hall via Google Street View

Photograph by: Courtesy: Google Maps Street View, Calgary Herald

CALGARY - Ald. Joe Connelly's new website is designed to give him citizen feedback on city priorities, but it's also going to help him decide whether to run for mayor next year.

Telljoe.ca, launched on the weekend, presents Connelly as a citywide politician rather than just Ward 6's alderman. It's filled with his own value statements, and lacks ward-specific information.

The website's immediate goal is to help him determine what Calgarians want from budget debates this month, with a survey that asks visitors to rate council's 25 official "priorities," which range from public transit to waste management to planning a sustainable city.

He said the website will ask other policy questions in the future. And as to the big will-he-or-won't-he question for the rookie alderman mulling a mayoral bid, Connelly said the feedback will inform that decision as well.

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"The challenge that I have right now with that direction is I'm well behind," he said. "I'm very far behind some of my peers who have made their intentions more obvious, so it's a catchup game."

Calgary social-media consultant Roger Kondrat, however, says the site doesn't do much to raise Connelly's public profile. The "Tell Joe" brand and page does little to explain who the alderman is, he added.

"It's confusing to understand why that website exists-- he's asking all Calgarians, but he's just a Ward 6 guy," said Kondrat, a casual observer of city politics who admitted he doesn't know much about Connelly. "It looks like it's a branding campaign because of the look of it, but the question is: what's your goal?"

Kondrat thinks Connelly is mistaken if he expects his website survey on city priorities to garner a large response from Calgarians for upcoming budget debates. That will happen only if he buys online or TV advertisements directing people to the website, he said.

Should Connelly run for city hall's top job, he will not only be challenging Mayor Dave Bronconnier and his formidable campaign war chest, but likely at least one other council colleague.

It's long been expected Ald. Ric McIver will seek the mayoralty, although he hasn't declared his intentions. Like Connelly, the third-term alderman is one of council's fiscal hawks, pushing for extra spending cuts to keep the 2010 tax hike well below five per cent.

Connelly, a former marketer with Telus and Tourism Calgary, says on the website he believes in "a new type of politics that supports safe neighbourhoods, community input and western values." One page explains he believes in "cowboy ethics," a moral code that includes proverbs like "be tough, but fair" and "talk less and say more."

He announced the website to nearly 2,000 people Monday on his Ward 6 mailing list. The website was created with fund-raising dollars, not aldermanic funds, Connelly explained. Many aldermen have their own websites, most of them funded by taxpayers, which focus on issues or events in their wards. Connelly hasn't had one until now.

"I've got a pretty good handle on what's going on in my ward," Connelly said. "I have some very good people as my community presidents, and they're not shy about giving me direction, and that's good. Now I want to take it to a broader level and get to know what all Calgarians feel about the city and what they feel our priorities should be."

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