Russell: This is Russell McRae with the Sunshine Coast Sechelt Rotary Club. Who am I speaking with?

Joanne: Joanne Van Ginkel.

Russell: You're running for Sechelt Council in the October 17th, 2026 election. What made you decide to run?

Joanne: There are a number of reasons. I've been very disappointed with the current Council, particularly the lack of ability to work together over the last four years. There are other reasons as well, but that was what initially motivated me.

Russell: Have you been involved in politics before?

Joanne: Back in university. I also sat on the PAC in Vancouver. We were instrumental in getting a new school built because our school wasn't earthquake safe. We lobbied our MLA at the time, David Eby, and were able to get the school built.

Russell: How much money was that project?

Joanne: I'm not sure because by that point we'd moved to the Sunshine Coast. I have a feeling it was around $20 million.

Russell: Around $20 million?

Joanne: Yeah.

Russell: How long have you lived on the Sunshine Coast?

Joanne: I've been here for 10 years. I'm currently in Davis Bay and have lived there for six years. Before that, I lived a little up the hill in Selma Park. When I first moved here, I lived right in Sechelt, on Medusa St, across from Hackett Park.

Russell: You're also a business owner in town?

Joanne: That's correct. I love Sechelt because it's so central. I can easily get to clients in Gibsons, Halfmoon Bay and Pender Harbour. I now have a studio and store on Wharf Avenue as well.

Russell: What services do you offer?

Joanne: Basically everything, from landscape design and project management through to installation, and now maintenance as well. So really, everything regarding your yard. I also work on bigger properties and sometimes developments. It really runs the gamut. I've been involved in park projects and playgrounds for schools as well.

Russell: One of the projects you want to push is the Rose Garden? No, what do you call it?

Joanne: It's called the Peace Garden. That's what we're calling it. It's a Rotary-sponsored project, and we're working with the District and the Parks Department right now. A master plan was done quite some time ago. The garden would be located next to Mission House in a tucked-away spot with some solitude, where people could sit and reflect.

Russell: Is there anything else you want to share that we've missed?

Joanne: There are a lot of other things I'm interested in. The waterfront is a big priority for me. I'm also president of the Sechelt Downtown Business Association, and I think the waterfront is a missed opportunity right now. People don't even know we have a waterfront currently.

Russell: It's terrible. It's a no-brainer.

Joanne: Thank you. That's a good one.

Russell: You're welcome. What's another issue that's important to you?

Joanne: I'm really passionate about housing. I've sat on the planning committee for six years, basically as long as I could. I'm promoting higher density and different housing types for the District. I'd love to see people able to live and work downtown and walk places. Eyes on the street are important to me as well. I think that could really help with our security issues.

Russell: How can people get in touch with you?

Joanne: There are numerous ways. I have a website, joannevanginkel.com, which has links to my social media. ElectJoanneVanGinkel is on Facebook and Instagram. You'll also see my posters and postcards around town, and now my lawn signs.

Russell: What's the name of your business?

Joanne: It's Garten. Garten is the name of my storefront. My legal incorporated name is Garten Design Inc. I'm in the store and studio on Saturdays, and as the election approaches, I'll be there more often.

Russell: What's the address of the store?

Joanne: Unit 1, 5523 Wharf Avenue. I'm right beside Coastal Living.

Russell: Great.

Joanne Van Ginkel: A Vision for a More Connected Sechelt

By Russell McRae

When I sat down with Joanne Van Ginkel, one thing became clear very quickly: her decision to run for Sechelt Council comes from a deep involvement in the community and a desire to see Sechelt thrive.

Joanne is officially among the candidates seeking one of six councillor positions in Sechelt's October 17 municipal election.

She has called the Sunshine Coast home for ten years, including the past six in Davis Bay. Over those years, she has become involved in Sechelt from several different perspectives: resident, business owner, landscape designer, planning committee member and president of the Sechelt Downtown Business Association.

For Joanne, running for Council is a natural extension of that community involvement.

She told me she has been disappointed by the difficulty the current Council has had working together and believes Sechelt would benefit from greater cooperation around the Council table.

Her interest in community advocacy goes back much further. While living in Vancouver, Joanne served on a school PAC when parents were pushing for the replacement of a school that was not earthquake safe. She recalls being part of the effort to lobby then-MLA David Eby for the new school.

Today, much of Joanne's professional life revolves around creating better spaces for people. Through Garten Design, she works in landscape design, project management, installation and maintenance, with projects ranging from residential properties to parks and school playgrounds. Her business describes its focus simply as "artful residential garden design."

That background influences how she looks at Sechelt.

One of the opportunities she sees is our waterfront. Joanne believes the connection between downtown Sechelt and the waterfront has tremendous unrealized potential. It's an issue already receiving attention through projects intended to make the Wharf Avenue corridor safer, greener and more walkable while strengthening its connection to downtown and the waterfront.

Housing is another subject she speaks passionately about. After six years serving on the planning committee, Joanne says she wants to encourage a greater variety of housing and appropriate higher density. She imagines a downtown where more people can live, work, shop and walk within their own community.

She also talks about something wonderfully simple: having more people downtown. More residents and activity mean more "eyes on the street," something Joanne believes can contribute to a safer and more vibrant town centre.

There is also a softer side to her vision for Sechelt.

Joanne is involved with the proposed Rotary Peace Garden, planned for an area near Mission House. She describes it as a quiet, tucked-away place where people could sit, find some solitude and reflect.

Perhaps that little garden captures something about Joanne's broader vision. She talks about development and housing, businesses and waterfront improvements, but ultimately she keeps returning to people and the places where they live their everyday lives.

Our conversation wasn't filled with grand promises. It was about practical ideas from someone who has spent years working with landscapes, businesses, planning and community organizations.

And underneath all of those ideas was something even simpler: Joanne cares deeply about the community she calls home.

For voters wanting to learn more, Joanne encourages residents to seek out her campaign information and, most importantly, become engaged in the conversation about what they want Sechelt to become.

Russell McRae