The Scope 2013 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate for Councillor at Large

Dave Lane

Please describe yourself in a few words.

I am inspired by our beautiful city, and by the hard-working, passionate people who live here. I work to ensure I am informed about local issues, I get involved in solution-oriented initiatives, and I am extremely optimistic that, together, we can achieve great things for St. John's.

What is your present occupation?

I am a Development Partner with the quickly up-and-coming local design and promotion firm, Dc Design House. I am a web developer by trade, but my role is more accurately described as "business analyst," as most of my work involves helping businesses determine the best ways to achieve their business goals (usually online).

Why are you running in this election?

I love St. John's and have worked for years to encourage constructive dialogue between City Hall and the public. Through my years of experience as the founding chair of Happy City St. John's, and my work with many other city-building committees and organizations which represent a wide variety of interests, I have met with hundreds of fellow citizens, and have attended countless council meetings. I am driven to bring what I have learned directly to council. I believe that, now, perhaps more than ever, there is a strong desire for thoughtful and inclusive dialogue and decision-making in St. John's. I believe I am someone who can make this happen at City Hall.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

1. Improved engagement between City Hall and citizens, so we can make better decisions together

2. Improved transit system (buses, roads, bike trails - the works) to better serve and connect us all

3. A solid municipal plan to guide sustainable development that leverages our heritage and includes citizen input

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

I would say that council's biggest blunder has been neglecting to review the municipal plan for more than

10 years. They did begin a review last year, thankfully, although it is taking longer than expected.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

The Curb It program is a major accomplishment, not only because we can finally recycle from home, but because the city is still promoting this initiative with an effective ad campaign. The city's (yet to be completed) cycling master plan is a good one, but there is a lot more work to be done. Imagine if, a year from now, we were seeing billboards that said "You're doing great, St. John's! And we're still working to make biking safer and easier!" With more awareness of cycling, and of the city's plan, I think we would make a lot more progress toward acceptance and efficacy.

What other candidates running in this election do you think you would work best with?

I mean it when I say that I can work with anyone. I will say, though, that I am excited to see other young, promising candidates in the running.

Opinions & Issues

Please rate the importance of each subject on a scale of 0 to 10, and then add your comments.

Heritage building regulations - 10

Our built heritage is a tremendous asset for our city.

It's not enough to simply have "regulations," however. Guidelines and regulations should encourage adaptive re-use, should be based on the context (not just "building by building" - what is nearby?), and should be enforced consistently.

Also, we must ask ourselves what are we building today that we'll want to preserve in 100 years? Development regulations should include principles that encourage good design in buildings and neighbourhoods.

City support for the arts - 10

Our local arts scene is incredibly valuable for many, many reasons: it provides us a sense of identity; it enhances our quality of life; it brings people together; and it draws people to our city - both tourists and residents.

I'm very proud that City Hall seems to "get" this. They've established an arts advisory committee, contribute annual grants to artists and arts organizations, present Harbourside Summer Concerts, host a Poet Laureate program, foster an Art Procurement Program, and coordinated the Arts & the City

symposium held this past May.

I think we can do even more. The city launched a Municipal Arts Plan in 2010, which shows that the arts are a true priority for the city, but this plan is now in its fourth year and we need a new plan for the next four years. We also need more spaces to create, share and present art. And we need to support and invest in our current cultural infrastructure. I'll be a strong proponent of all these initiatives.

Downtown parking - 10

Our downtown is, and should be, the financial and cultural hub of our city. Already, we have a lot of congestion, and it is a major challenge to find parking during the weekdays and special events. Compounding this issue with the many new hotels, condos, and office buildings in development, we have a major problem facing us.The solution is not to simply add parking garages (though that is certainly a necessary component). Our focus in improving downtown traffic should be to markedly improve our transit system.

At the very least, we should provide park-and-ride systems that are serviced by frequent shuttles to the downtown core. At best, we should keep the downtown dense to make walking and bicycling as easy and enjoyable as possible, so parking at relatively long distances is less of a burden.

Public transit - 10

The primary issue with our existing transit system is not that no one uses it. Again and again, we have heard people say that the routes are inconvenient and infrequent. In other words, people are not able to travel to their destinations when they want and need to. I believe we should invest in an integrated public transit system. Metrobus must add buses and routes. We have to finish our Cycling Master Plan if it is to be effective. And our walking trails are the envy of the country and should be protected and expanded.

It is important for us to make these improvements because public transit doesn't just solve parking issues. A functional, widespread transit system addresses other major challenges we are facing right now: unemployment, a labour shortage, an aging population, road maintenance costs, rising healthcare costs, and more.To make all of this happen, we will need a collaborative effort with our municipal neighbours and support from our provincial and federal leaders. As a councillor, I will continue the work I have already done with Happy City and others to help us achieve this goal.

Urban density - 7

Many believe we should "build up rather than out" because density can lead to economies of scale which enable cheaper, high quality services. I agree with this, in principle, but prefer to say "build IN rather than out."

Density for density's sake is not always a good thing. We have all seen photos of failed and deserted housing "projects" where a government builds tall, nondescript social housing complexes. They simply do not work because they are not properly integrated into the rest of the community.

I appreciate the expression "It's not how dense you make it, it's how you make it dense." What we need to do is make effective use of space, and that involves such things as mixed-use neighbourhoods, subdivisions that retain more natural landscapes, and business parks that readapt and infill pre-existing buildings and spaces.

A dense city can be a wonderful thing, but we should achieve this in a collaborative, thoughtful manner.

Full-time council positions - 4

I am not sure we necessarily need full-time council positions, because we have many qualified staff who do much of the legwork of city business.

That being said, I am aware of the pressures and expectations I would face as a councillor, and have been preparing myself to balance the demands with my full-time job, should I be elected. It will require effective time-management skills and setting priorities.

Amalgamation - 0

I think we should improve regional cooperation with our neighbours and focus more on competing with global cities - such as Toronto and Calgary - rather than with each other. I consider amalgamation to be the "easy" way out of the challenges regarding how to effectively share services and costs. Cooperation requires trust, and I intend to establish that with our neighbours over my tenure in Council.

Height restriction for buildings - 6

Regulations can help us guide the context of an area, so sometimes height restrictions make sense. But they are not the be-all end-all of planning, and we should ensure we do not become distracted by them. The main downtown core of Water Street and Duckworth Street is vibrant, and this is because there is a wide variety of retail, food, and office space in a densely packed area. There is a major risk of disrupting this asset by inserting tall buildings that are not sensitive to the overall context: they cast dark, cold shadows; they direct wind down to street-level; and they are often designed with unengaging frontages that people will avoid when walking.

To date, there have been many debates over whether we need higher buildings in the downtown. I am glad we have allowed taller buildings in the west end of the downtown, because taller buildings add a lot to the area when done correctly. But we need to set clear and final guidelines to end this issue, and I believe they should be based on context of the area.

Sidewalk snow clearing - 8

This should be integrated with our entire snow clearing system. Accessibility and safety for all should be our top priority, and, if it costs more money, then we should focus on more efficient delivery to save on costs.

Affordable housing - 10

It has been shown worldwide, and here at home, that one of the most important ways to maintain a strong economy and quality of life is to make sure everyone can afford a place to live. Housing prices are affecting people of all income levels, and solving this problem helps everyone.

I believe there are ways that City Hall can help reduce the cost of living. For example, we can work with developers to encourage the development of rental apartments, and mixed-use neighbourhoods with various types of housing. Also, we can help reduce the “hidden” costs of housing, such as utilities and property taxes, by providing more efficient services and a more equitable tax system. For those who are struggling with income, I support groups that are already doing incredible work in this area such as the Housing and Homeless Network, Choices for Youth, and Habitat for Humanity.