

thescope's
2013 ST. JOHN'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Fred Winsor (At-large candidate)

Please describe yourself in a few words.

Citizen Advocate on urban and rural public policy issues for many years. Education: MA. Atlantic Canada Studies; PhD. North-west Atlantic fisheries history.

What is your present occupation?

Conservation Chair, Atlantic Canada Chapter, Sierra Club Canada

Why are you running in this election?

I have extensive experience advocating for affordable housing, regional public transit, healthy cities, waste management, urban development and neighbourhood planning

What should be the city's top three priorities?

Given that we are living in the middle of an oil boom in a city which has many senior citizens living on fixed incomes, I think the city's three priorities are: affordable housing, regional public transit, and urban densification to make basic services available without having to use a car all the time.

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

Failing to put more political pressure on the provincial government to build more affordable housing in the city for those on fixed incomes. Favouring parking garages over regional public transit as a solution to traffic congestion on the Northeast Avalon. Continuing to approve low density urban sprawl housing developments without determining the short-term and long-term cost benefits to the city.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

The municipal Plan planning process which was excellent for public participation and bringing in the urban designer,from Toronto. He gave an excellent presentation and discussion on urban design, urban densification, and how they create new jobs in cities.

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

The only ones I have experience with are Sheilagh O'Leary, Bernard Davis and Andrew Harvey. I found them all to be solid team players.

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 Heritage building regulations are a necessity if we are to maintain the aesthetic integrity of the old city. As a citizen who lived in the city before there were heritage bylaws, the change in the city has been remarkable. Though not always perfect, the heritage regulations have provided stability and continuity to redeveloping, rebuilding, and re-inventing older neighbourhoods. Such neighbourhoods have become assets, where once they were viewed as liabilities.

City support for the arts

10 The arts community in St. John's is a major contributing dimension to what makes the city interesting, engaging and, most important, distinctive. The dynamics of the city, both geographic and human, serve as great stimulus to the many artists who live or visit here. City support for the arts is a positive investment for present and future generations.

Downtown parking

2 When the engineers and planners laid out the streets for downtown St. John's after the 1892 fire their major concerns focused on building a compact walkable city where residents could easily walk to and from the downtown. Over the past 60 years we have tried to use much of that same area as parking spaces for automobiles with ongoing frustration. Despite building several large parking garages there never seems to be enough we keep trying to park more cars in the existing downtown space, thereby taking away space in the downtown needed for housing, business offices, restaurants, night clubs, hotels and retail establishments. It is that urban mix which maintains and grows downtown diversity, keeping it vibrant and active. It's what makes St. John's a city, and not a suburb. Public transportation options need to be explored and implemented to address and reduce demand for more downtown parking

Public transit

10 A regional public transit system, anchored by significant post secondary student ridership, will provide more and efficient, long term public transit options for many citizens. Making the system regional will double the potential ridership especially if post secondary students who live in satellite communities such as Conception Bay South, Paradise, Portugal Cove-St. Philips, Pouch Cove, Torbay, and Mount Pearl can use their student cards as bus passes. This would greatly improve accessibility to the city not only for post secondary students but also for seniors and others who may not have access to automobiles or are not interested in trying to cope with urban traffic congestion.

Urban density

10 I support increasing urban density as a means to promote healthier neighbourhoods where people know each other. This involves planning and constructing quality, multiple use buildings to provide housing and a wide variety of services with walkable access. This will increase the use of existing, underutilized infrastructure and land within the city. Providing services within walking distance reduces the need to use automobiles and encourages physical activity which, in turn, improves the overall health of the population in the long term. Similarly densification encourages more social contact between and among neighbours, thus promoting healthy, secure neighbourhoods.

Full-time council positions

5 I view any elected position on the City Council as full time. That is my expectation.

Amalgamation

1 Amalgamation is a low priority. What is important is that all of the incorporated communities on the northeast Avalon have formal and informal lines of communication so planning and operation of regional services can occur in a regular and orderly fashion

Height restriction for buildings

11 While I am not against height restrictions as such it is important to be aware that St. John's has some of the strongest winds in the Northwest Atlantic if not the world. This extreme weather condition, which some of us consider as normal, may have unforeseen outcomes for high rise buildings, particularly when it comes to wind tunnelling. The effect of strong winds has in the past received little attention when developing plans for the city. We need to understand the dynamics between high winds and large buildings and come to understand the steps which are required to reduce wind tunnelling.

Sidewalk snow clearing

10 It is my belief that just as streets are rated in priority to be cleared so should sidewalks. Sidewalks known to receive high use from pedestrians and located next to high automobile traffic areas should be kept clear to protect those citizens who walk.

Affordable housing

10 It appears from all indicators that affordable housing for low to medium income earners is both expensive and difficult to find. The result being many families try to find cheaper accommodation in satellite communities outside the city. They often use automobiles to travel to work thereby contributing to the parking shortage in the city. The provincial government needs to take an active role in this area and designate substantial funds so housing can be built in the city that is within the financial range of people who work in the city. Funds for such housing could be channeled from offshore oil revenues into affordable housing as a legacy fund to provide our citizens and their descendants with long-lasting quality affordable housing in the capital city.