Lou Puddister (Ward 4 Candidate)

Please describe yourself in a few words.

I'm an entrepreneur with a solid business background spanning several sectors. I have a strong sense of social responsibility, developed through decades of community service. I make decisions based on fairness and logic. I am straightforward in my approach but balance that with an appreciation for differing needs and viewpoints.

What is your present occupation?

Consultant.

Why are you running in this election?

I am a first-time Council candidate, running because I have always been interested in civic affairs and have contributed to the community for as long as I can remember. I believe City Council to be the next phase of my continued service. My diverse background in dealing with people and issues will allow me to add significant value to Council discussions and decisions.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

There are many priorities for the City to address including the need for long-term planning. But if I can only name three, the issue-specific priorities would be: (1) Hold the line on taxes. (2) Renew infrastructure. (3) Facilitate economic growth & development. We need to find creative ways to generate revenue in order to do (1) and (2).

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

I am concerned with the way taxation has been managed, in relation to the sharp increase in residential real estate values. We need an improved system that lessens the degree of sudden and dramatic impact felt by taxpayers.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

The decision to expand the St. John's Convention Centre deserves recognition. By hosting larger events there, the economic benefits to the City and local businesses will be tremendous. It's also an excellent

example of an inter-governmental funding partnership, with support coming from all three levels of government.

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

Throughout my career I have worked with many personalities from diverse backgrounds. I feel comfortable working with any candidates elected. That's the beauty of a democratic election process. Citizens choose their leadership team. Then those individuals should work cooperatively based on a shared responsibility to serve and a common goal of doing what's good for the City.

Opinions & Issues

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

Heritage building regulations

8

We need to strike a balance between preserving historic properties, and supporting development in the City that does not compromise the integrity of these structures. Heritage buildings contribute to the education of both local residents and tourists regarding our valued history and culture.

City support for the arts

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The arts community plays an important role in preserving Newfoundland heritage and sharing our unique culture. As a City we must continue to support the arts community through programs, festivals, venues, and working with other levels of government which support the arts financially. We have some of the most creative and talented people in the world living here. Many of us who live here know this, but we need to do more to promote our arts community to local residents, tourists and people outside NL. Let's also consider ways to further showcase local talents to cruise ship guests.

Downtown parking

10

Downtown parking has been problematic for years. Businesses suffer because of the parking problem. Residents in other areas of the city miss out on the experience of a vibrant downtown because they can't find parking. A sustainable system of parking infrastructure east and west of the downtown, such as a Park & Ride system, needs to be explored. I'm not suggesting that we put more cars downtown. I'm

suggesting that we put more people downtown.

Public transit

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We need to improve public transit in St. John's while obtaining buy-in from surrounding municipalities to establish a regional system. We also need to create incentives for commuters to use public transit. People want transit systems that are (a) reasonably priced and (b) convenient. In keeping with the convenience factor we should also consider "express" bus routes during peak commuting periods.

Urban density

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Higher density living in certain areas of the city makes sense. It needs to be well thought out and carefully planned, without negatively impacting historic and traditional neighbourhoods. People can live where they work; shop where they live; play where they shop, and dine out where they play. It's good for the environment. And it's good for neighbourhoods.

Full-time council positions

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The City's continued growth results in an increased number of issues and therefore an increased time commitment required from Councillors. That being said, a move to full-time Council positions would have numerous implications including financial. I believe people who serve on Council should be motivated by a sense of civic responsibility, not salary. It would certainly be a worthwhile exercise to research best practices in other cities similar to St. John's but it's not a pressing priority.

Amalgamation

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Surrounding communities benefit immensely from City services and infrastructure but the cost is borne by St. John's taxpayers. Amalgamation would see a fair, equitable and cooperative provision of services to all residents and management of infrastructure in all communities. A steadfast commitment to regional cooperation now will take us to amalgamation eventually. When that happens, all communities will benefit.

Height restriction for buildings

7

While I would like to see height restrictions maintained in the historic downtown core and older neighbourhoods, I would be open to a more flexible approach to building heights in newly developed areas. But I would stress the importance of community consultation first. Once a building is erected in an already-existing neighbourhood, even a newer one, the people in the immediate vicinity are the ones who must live with it. I would also think that taller residential buildings are an option for yet-to-be developed areas, encouraging the incorporation of higher density living into upcoming developments.

Sidewalk snow clearing

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We need to look at best practices utilized elsewhere for methods to keep sidewalks clear of snow and ice. Other cities do it well. We should also be doing it well. We need to make St. John's a more walkable city -- safe for all those on foot including seniors, young families with strollers, runners and so on. Maintaining sidewalks free of snow and ice will go a long way in preventing personal injuries and allowing all citizens to remain mobile throughout the winter months.

Affordable housing

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It's difficult for seniors on limited fixed incomes to remain in their homes. It's tough for many people to enter the housing market, given the dramatic rise in real estate prices in recent years. Spacious rental units at reasonable prices are difficult for families to find. We need to work with relevant partners to create a framework that ensures all citizens of St. John's have a residence they can afford. We need to make St. John's a liveable city for ALL citizens.