

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

Ron Ellsworth, Deputy mayoral candidate

Please describe yourself in a few words.

I own several local companies, which has given me an understanding of how to set a budget and how to best spend every dollar. I am a dedicated member of my community and have worked for years to make it a better place to work and live.

What is your present occupation?

I am self-employed in the real estate and technology industries.

Why are you running in this election?

I have been active in the community for many years. When I was first elected in 2005 I saw it as an opportunity to continue my work in the community. I am running now for the same reason: to help make our city a better place to live.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

I have outlined three priorities for my campaign. They are financial accountability, community leadership and collaboration. Below is an excerpt from my website detailing my position on these three issues.

Financial accountability – Ron will bring a strong financial background to City Hall. He has years of experience in operating large organizations on a limited budget and has helped various community groups get their finances in order including COD-NL and MacMorran Community Centre. Ron understands that with vision, proper planning and fiscal prudence organizations can and will succeed whether it is a business, non-profit

group or a city. His knowledge and experience will help develop and manage City Council in spite of expected decreases in transfer payments from both the federal and provincial governments. Selected Entrepreneur of the Year 2005, he can make effective spending practices a priority which will allow St. John's to continue to prosper. Ron is confident that his experience will ensure council makes the most responsible decisions with your tax dollars.

Community leadership – Ron's community resume is remarkable. His interest in the community goes beyond being a patron of charitable causes; Ron has dedicated an insurmountable amount of his time to serving community organizations and charitable groups. He has already made a huge difference in so many lives and wants to continue to do so by serving as Deputy Mayor. His experiences working in the community have given him a unique perspective of what the citizens of St. John's need, deserve and expect from their council. In recognition of his broad work with community organizations Ron was awarded the Community Builder of the Year for 2012 by the St. John's Board of Trade and was presented with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal by the Premier.

Collaboration – Ron believes that the best way to improve the city is to engage the public, particularly the seniors and youth who are so often left out. These groups can provide a unique perspective on problems that our city has faced for years. Hearing what they have to say is the key to solving many of those problems. The city cannot be run simply by council meeting at City Hall. Council needs to actively seek the public's opinion on issues and have meetings at locations throughout the city to engage as many people as possible. We also need to bring different groups to the table because the best way to solve any problem is to get as many views and thoughts as possible. Ron recently did this when he helped COD-NL gain support from the community and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador in order to keep the group operating.

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

Blunder is a strong word. I see a lot of good that the current council has done, but there are certainly areas of improvement. I would like to see better communication between City Hall and residents. The public does not hear from council nearly enough and as a result cannot take part in the decision making process. An example of this is the restructuring initiative currently going on within senior staff. While these changes may have a significant impact on residents, they know very little, if anything, about what is happening and the opinions of residents has not been taken into consideration.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

The multi-year budget. A long term plan is the best way to manage rapid growth in a city. Planning for several years instead of one at a time forces us to look at the big picture, meaning we are more likely to find long term solutions.

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

I have worked with many members of the current council in the past and believe that I can work well with them again. I have also met several new candidates, all of which have been great conversations. I truly believe that I will be able to work well with any of the candidates running.

Opinions & Issues

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

All of these issues are equally important and should be given equal consideration by council. As a result, I don't believe that can be rated as they all have a major impact on residents.

Heritage building regulations

A major draw for St. John's is our history and culture. We must do as much as we can to preserve that history and maintain our heritage buildings as much as possible.

City support for the arts

Support for the arts is crucial for preserving and strengthening it as part of our culture.

Downtown parking

The solution to the downtown parking issue is not to create more parking spaces downtown. We should instead focus on ways to get people to the downtown core without them having to drive there themselves.

Public transit

As a growing city, the demands on our public transit system are only going to increase with time. Many people are not inclined to use Metrobus if they have the option of driving because it is simply faster and easier. To create an effective and useful public transit system we need to address this issue. Developing a more efficient system will encourage people to start using the service and will hopefully be an incentive for people considering moving to St. John's.

Urban density

We need to address this issue as our city grows. A higher density will provide more space for future growth, will provide a better opportunity to develop green space and will lessen the burden on city services. However, not all new developments can be high density. We need to carefully plan all future developments to ensure we have a mix that best fits our needs.

Full-time council positions

Many councillors have careers outside of politics and a full-time council position would mean forcing them to put that career on hold. This would result in individuals being much less willing to put their name forward and would lessen the range in types of candidates we see.

Amalgamation

Amalgamation is not the solution to regional issues. Instead, we should focus on working with the surrounding municipalities to regionalize services such as fire services and public transit.

Height restriction for buildings

There are appropriate places for buildings of all sizes. Obviously the downtown core is not the place for a 20 story apartment building, but there are areas of the city where higher buildings are not only acceptable, but should be encouraged.

Sidewalk snow clearing

While it is ideal to have all sidewalks cleared all of the time, the reality is this is often not possible. The amount of snow we get means that sidewalks in some areas are needed for storing snow. The frequency of snowfalls also means that it can be difficult keeping sidewalks consistently cleared. However, this doesn't mean that we can't do a better job. We should always be looking for more efficient ways of making sure this is done as efficiently as possible.

Affordable housing

Affordable housing – particularly for vulnerable groups in our society – is a major concern of mine. The best way to address this issue is to work with developers to ensure we have the volume of affordable housing that we need.