

thescope's

2013 ST. JOHN'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Sarah Colborne Penney, Ward 3

Please describe yourself in a few words.

I am a mother, wife, former lawyer (I hold non-practising status with the Law Society of NL) community volunteer and advocate. While I did practice law, for the past ten years I have focussed my life on volunteerism and on being a full-time parent to my three children.

I am active in numerous community groups and boards, including: West End High School Committee (spokesperson), Beaconsfield Junior High School Council (community representative), Bishops College School Council (Vice Chair) St. Matthews Elementary School Council (past parent rep and Chair), Federation of School Councils (past Vice President), Barachois Place Parents Association (Community rep), Cowan Heights Youth Basketball League (Uniform coordinator and fundraiser), Shallaway- NL Youth in Chorus (Board member), Seniors Resource Centre of NL (Board Member, Advocacy Committee-Chair, Communications Committee- member), The Rooms (Educational interpreter), Kiwanis Music Festival (volunteer), Community Editorial Board of The Telegram.

I worked for many years to have a new High School built here in the West End. This required collaboration with many groups and persistent advocacy to all levels of Government. It is gratifying to see this wonderful addition to our Community finally coming to fruition. As a result of this experience, I believe that City Council should act as a facilitator in the development and management of the city by using inclusive, frequent and consistent engagement of stakeholders, and by drawing on the expertise that already exists in our community

I will be an effective City Councillor because I am passionate about our community, I have the right mix of skills, experience, and education, and I have a demonstrated commitment to serve.

What is your present occupation?

While I did practice law for a time (I currently hold non-practising status with the Law Society of NL), for the past ten years I have focussed my life on volunteerism and on being a full-time parent to my three children. My children are older now and more self-sufficient, therefore, being a City Councillor will be my full-time job.

Why are you running in this election?

As a City, St. John's is coming of age – and doing so very rapidly. The City is growing and changing at an unprecedented pace. I would like to contribute to shaping the City for the future, as ultimately, I would like to see my children live here and raise their own families here. Additionally, I would argue that the municipal level of government is the most important, as it impacts citizens' daily lives directly. This is one of the reasons that I am interested in contributing to my community at this level.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

I am running in Ward 3, so firstly, some issues of importance specifically in Ward 3 include: Traffic and pedestrian safety (especially on Topsail Road at the site of the new high school and on Waterford Bridge Road where speed and volume of traffic are problematic); Revitalisation of our West End recreational facilities (particularly the Mews Centre), and additional recreational facilities are needed – the site of the New West End High School represents an opportunity for the school facility to be a focal point for the community – we need to act on the potential for the community use of this school. I also believe the Mundy Pond area should have a splash pad like the one enjoyed at Bowring Park; The protection of our watersheds and green space; Affordable housing options especially for seniors and other low-income earners; and the frequent and meaningful engagement with the residents – residents want to be heard.

Although I am running in Ward 3, I am very aware that every Councillor brings their voice to the Council table and must be mindful of the City as a whole, and must have a vision as to the direction in which the City develops. Therefore, some issues of importance on a City-wide level include: 1)Aging Infrastructure (specifically water mains and recreational facilities), 2)Affordable Housing, 3)Working to keep property taxes at a level which allows us to maintain City services while not over-burdening taxpayers; 4) improving public transit's efficiency and convenience while still maintaining a cost-effective service 5)Working towards improved cooperation between the various levels of Government, 5), and 6) the creation of vibrant, liveable neighbourhoods ("neighbourhoods not subdivisions").

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

In fairness, it is easy to look back in retrospect and criticize when you were not there in the moment, but going forward, I would work to ensure that council engages the citizenry on a regular basis, and earlier, in the decision-making process.
I believe that Council should act as a facilitator in the development and management of the city by using inclusive, frequent and consistent engagement of stakeholders, and by drawing on the expertise that already exists in our community.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

Council's biggest achievement has been the implementation of the curb side recycling program.

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

I could work with all other Councillors.

Opinions & Issues

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

It is difficult to rate the following issues on a scale from 1-10, as they are all important and most are inter-related. Parking and public transit are very closely connected, for example. The City is a dynamic system of inter-connected components, and I am very mindful of the fact that changing one aspect will have an impact on another. An example in Ward 3 is the effect that the traffic calming on Old Topsail Road has had on traffic flow on Waterford Bridge Road. Residents indicate that while the traffic-calming measures have worked for Old Topsail Road, they believe they have had the effect of increasing traffic volumes in areas like Road de Luxe and Waterford Bridge Road.

1. Downtown parking
Media Release, August 5, 2013: *Ward 3 Candidate, Sarah Colborne Penney: We Need to Rethink Parking in the Downtown Core*
Ward 3 Candidate, Sarah Colborne Penney stated today, "We need to change our mindset about driving downtown. We want people, not vehicles in the downtown core. That means we need to make the downtown (more) pedestrian friendly, and we need to make it more efficient and economical to use public transit and other environmentally-friendly modes of transportation to get into, and out of, our downtown core. This will allow for growth and sustainability."

Colborne Penney asserts that some options worth exploring include: Park and Ride East and West Terminals, Rewarding Carpooling, Potentially making both Water Street and Duckworth Street one-way with angled parking and greater usage of sidewalk by merchants, and Possible Pedestrian-only areas in the downtown.

2. Public transit:
Please see my Telegram Blog post on this topic:

http://www.thetelegram.com/Blog-Article/b/24771/So-Whats-My-Take-on-Public-Transit
I believe public transportation is essential and must be improved, and in order to achieve this, we should be looking at public transportation from a regional perspective. Thousands of people on the Northeast Avalon do not have access to public transit; however, at the same time, this same area is experiencing unprecedented growth. The status quo is untenable, and the City must engage all stakeholders to come up with solutions. I believe a challenge is an opportunity, and this is clearly an opportunity to do public transit right. The Provincial Government will have to come to the table, as well as other municipalities in order to shift our emphasis from building roads, to improving public transit.
I am interested in improving public transit's efficiency and convenience while still maintaining a cost-effective service. To do this, public transit should be an important part of planning and development – not an afterthought. I am interested in the creation of "neighbourhoods not subdivisions", in which residents can live, work, and engage in leisure activities without having to drive long distances. We need to engage in "intelligent development" – being mindful of the future environment we are creating today. The extension of infrastructure to accommodate low-density developments is wasteful of tax dollars."More roads" is not the answer; instead we must try to alleviate our over-reliance on cars by being mindful of creating communities, and by making public transit a more attractive alternative.
Currently public transit in the City of St. John's suffers an image problem, as well as some lack of convenience-to-riders issues, (lack of routes, long commute times, etc), which create barriers for its more widespread use. Public transit is essential, as it increases accessibility to City and other services, and aids in alleviating traffic congestion. As the City develops, we need to make a conscious effort to try to reduce our reliance on cars and utilise more environmentally-friendly modes of transportation.
With regard to parking downtown, for example, it should not be financially advantageous to drive into the City and park all day as compared to the cost of taking public transit. "The monthly cost to park in a municipal lot is $10.00 cheaper than a transit pass, and for this solution to be effective, parking costs should be greater than or equal to a transit pass." (Dillon Consulting Limited, St. John's Transportation Commission Metrobus, Market Assessment and Strategic Directions Study – Part D, 2011)
We need an animated and strong downtown core that is vibrant and pedestrian friendly. I am open to exploring "park and Ride" terminals as these would help achieve this goal, as well, I would be open to designating some "pedestrian only" areas in the downtown core.

In conclusion, an efficient regional transportation system would allow for continued growth and sustainability, and it is one of my goals. As a Councillor, I would not only focus on the issues in Ward 3, but also be mindful of the City as a whole and the interconnectedness of all components.

3. Affordable housing

I recognise that the cost of living's increasing should not force people to be left behind. I believe in supporting those who are working toward poverty elimination and I believe that affordable housing is fundamentally important and that both of these (related) issues require the co-operation between the various levels of government in order to effectively address them. I believe we should be encouraging mixed-use developments, such as the mixed-use affordable housing development in Pleasantville. Additionally, creative programs like "HomeShare NL" need to be encouraged and supported.

4. Urban density

Media Release,August 12, 2013: *Ward 3 Candidate, Sarah Colborne Penney: We Need to Build Neighbourhoods not Subdivisions*

Ward 3 Candidate, Sarah Colborne Penney stated today, "We need to engage in "intelligent development" – being mindful of the future environment we are creating today. It is neither fiscally nor environmentally responsible to continue to allow the City to sprawl with a continued emphasis on providing infrastructure to single-family and other low-density developments. The extension of infrastructure to accommodate low-density developments is wasteful of tax dollars, as the cost of supplying services to these outlying subdivisions costs more than we'll ever get back in taxes."

"Mixed-use developments and the creation of neighbourhoods within which residents can live, work and partake in recreational activities, is a strategy I believe will lead to sustainable development."

Colborne Penney asserts: "More roads is not the answer; instead we must try to alleviate our over-reliance on cars by being mindful of creating communities."

5. Heritage building regulations

We must balance new development with the preservation of our built heritage. Our uniqueness is our strength. We can both protect our built heritage, as well as capitalize on it. We need an animated and strong downtown core; that is vibrant and pedestrian friendly. This will require the careful stewardship of City Hall as well as the meaningful engagement of stakeholders.

6. Sidewalk snow clearing

This is a perennial problem. I am open to discussing new options (such as property owners clearing the sidewalk in front of their own property), and looking to best practices in other Cities, as our climate is not unique, though both our climate and our topography,

are very challenging. Additionally, although I recognise that the organic lay-out of many of our streets is very challenging, we want to encourage walking, we want our City to be pedestrian-friendly, and that will require some form of sidewalk snow-clearing.

7. City support for the arts

Again, our cultural heritage, not just our built heritage, is part of what makes us unique and marketable to the world. Supporting the Arts is a sound investment for the City.

8. Height restriction for buildings

Some restrictions are required in order to protect our built heritage as well as the uniqueness of the look and feel of our downtown core. Recognizing that, we must also be mindful of the economic constraints placed on developers by these regulations. Protection of heritage and economic growth require careful, thoughtful stewardship, with all stakeholders having a say.

9. Full-time council positions

I will not advocate for Council positions to be made full-time; however, I will treat serving as a City Councillor as my full-time job.

10. Amalgamation

I believe, with the cooperation of the Provincial Government, that we need to look at the regionalisation of some services like public transit. Greater cooperation between municipalities benefits citizens.