

thescope's

2013 ST. JOHN'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Scott Fitzgerald, Ward 2 candidate

Please describe yourself in a few words.

My full name is Scott Patrick Fitzgerald. I'm 45 years old, a university graduate with a degree in Political Science, and a married father of a boy and girl. My family and I live in Ward 2. I have been a very active volunteer for the past nine years and have always tried to make a positive contribution in the lives of young people.

What is your present occupation?

I have worked in the IT industry for the past 15 years. I am currently employed with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Office of The Chief Information Officer as a Senior Programmer/Analyst.

Why are you running in this election?

I'm running in this election because I want a better city for my kids; one where they will want to live when they grow up. I want them to have the world at their fingertips right here in St. John's. Our future has never looked brighter and our opportunities have never had more promise so we need people on Council who have a vision of what they want their city to be. We need to look ahead and recognize the importance of balance between developing our downtown and protecting and respecting our history, between work and recreation, between those who enjoy prosperity and those prosperity leaves behind.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

St. John's is facing many challenges and opportunities. Narrowing down the priorities is not easy but these are three things that stand out in my mind.
There's a quote I like that says "We do what we have to do so we can do what we want to

do." We have to continue to develop St. John's economically so that we have the means to tackle the issues that are important to people. So, I would pair economic development with smart downtown development because we can't have one without the other. Smart development means establishing an innovation strategy and framework to tackle the future development of our City as a whole. Innovation requires creativity and having an open mind to new ideas – ideas that come from citizens who share the desire to see St. John's prosper and flourish. With this innovation strategy in place St. John's can best tackle some of the more difficult issues that it faces like reducing the tax burden on seniors, affordable housing, public transit, downtown parking, recreation, and better snow clearing

Next I would invest in infrastructure for everything from roads and sidewalks to our aging and porous water system, to vanishing road paint, and recurring potholes. As municipal representatives, I believe we need to keep a strong focus on the basics of municipal services.

The third priority is fiscal responsibility. Our most recent budget was the largest ever so we need to make sure our expenditures stay in line with what we can afford. We do not want to burden our citizens unfairly. In concert with this, I believe that the City of St. John's needs to continue to work on a new fiscal arrangement and framework with the Provincial Government. We cannot continue to squeeze every last penny out of homeowners like the current system does.

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

Unfortunately I think the current Council made a big blunder with the way it handled the harbour fence issue. First, the entire Council voted for it, then some members of council backtracked. Was Council given all the facts? Did they ask enough questions and do their due diligence before voting yes? Why was it not known that access would be so limited? Big questions still remain around whether or not the fence is really required.
In the end, maybe we would still have this fence either way. But, if there was total transparency with this process and citizens had all the facts, and if there had been some public consultation, people could probably live with the fence even if they didn't like it. Unfortunately this issue was mishandled from the outset by Council and it just leaves a bad taste in people's mouths when you restrict their access to something they feel is theirs and then make them pay for the locks.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

I think one of the biggest achievements of the present council is the re-vitalization of Bannerman Park. One piece of it in particular stands out to me – the skating trail. This type of idea shows innovation and creativity. This type of thinking requires an open mind and a collaborative approach; two traits I will bring to council.

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

I've learned over the years that you're not going to become best friends with everyone you work with, nor are you going to agree on everything. However, if you treat people with respect, as long as everyone is working towards a common goal, I've found you can work with anyone.

Opinions & Issues

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

Heritage building regulations – 9

I like the heritage building regulations and I think its important that the City adhere to them. One of the biggest things that makes us unique is our rich history which is preserved in the distinct look and feel of old St. John's. As a candidate for Ward 2 I think its important to preserve what we have for future generations to enjoy because once its gone its gone for good.

City support for the arts – 9

I think that part of what makes St. John's such a great place is it's vibrant arts scene. It is what gives our City color, both literally and figuratively. I believe that support for artists, musicians, theatre etc helps to strengthen us as a City because the fruits of their labor enrich us.

Downtown parking - 9

Downtown parking continues to be a problem but I am pleased to hear so many people talking about it. When I ran in 2009 I proposed a park and ride system with continuous drop off throughout the downtown. This election I have heard similar ideas as well as others. This discussion is great and now we need to take action. I have called on city hall to create a committee dedicated solely to alleviating the parking issues plaguing our downtown. There may always be some parking problems but we can do better than what we have right now.

Public transit – 9

Efficient public transit is a key to a modern city. Right now there isn't enough service to the downtown area. If we want to build a more vibrant downtown we have to make the public transportation system work for those who live there and for those who want to visit and spend time and money there.

Urban density - 8

Ward 2 is the most densely populated area in the City but I believe we can still do better by looking at opportunities to build up a little. This is where we need to blend developing our future with respecting and preserving our past. We can do both.
No doubt the rest of the city will continue to grow with the demand for new housing but we need to make every effort to 'build in' wherever possible and leverage existing infrastructure as much as we can so we can reduce expenditure in the future.

Full-time council positions - 2

I'm obviously a little biased but I do not think we need full-time council positions. In my case I love my full-time job with the Provincial public service and I would not want to give that up. I also have a great desire to contribute to the growth and future of St. John's.

The current arrangement of part-time council positions allows me to do both. Term limits however, that's something I could get behind.

Amalgamation – 4

When I think about a long term plan for St. John's I think about a 5-10 year time frame. I don't see amalgamation as something that St. John's should be focused on within that plan. There are too many other things that require our focus and attention right now and bigger isn't always better.

Height restriction for buildings - 7

I think its good to have height restrictions for buildings, especially in the downtown but I think we also need to be able to demonstrate some minor flexibility at times. There may be times when the strength of a proposal and the benefit to the greater good warrants it.

Sidewalk snow clearing – 9

While the City has made great improvements with respect to snow clearing in general and sidewalk clearing but there is still a lot of room for improvement. The citizens of St. John's have made it very clear that they want better sidewalk snow clearing. As someone who runs year-round, I agree. This doesn't have to mean continually throwing money at the problem. Again, lets be innovative and creative.

Affordable housing - 9

Affordable housing has to be, and I believe it is right now, a priority for the City. The unprecedented level of prosperity in St. John's right now is making it difficult for many people to afford to live. People aren't able to buy their own homes because the exploding housing market has put even starter homes out of their reach. Affordable housing initiatives can help close that gap.

We have to expand on the work already underway with the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Affordable Housing to help as many people as we can share in the benefits of our prosperity rather than being left behind by it.