

thescope's

2013 ST. JOHN'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Sherwin Flight, Ward 5 Candidate

Please describe yourself in a few words.

My name is Sherwin Flight. I was born in Newfoundland in April of 1984, which makes me 29 years old.

Throughout my time in St. John's I have always been involved in municipal politics, and have publicly spoken out about a number of issues I have felt were not handled property, or given the priority they deserve. Public engagement is something I have always been interested in, and over the past few years I have spoken to, and met, many residents of St. John's and listened to their concerns on many issues. I enjoy discussing a wide variety of issues and concerns, whether it's public transit, sidewalk snow clearing, how the city can better involve the public in the decision making process, or anywhere in between, I'm always interested in hearing what people have to say.

What is your present occupation?

I am currently a student, enrolled in an Information Technology program at Eastern College.

Why are you running in this election?

There are a number of reason why I am running in this election. First and foremost I enjoy working with people, and helping them solve their issues. I have advocated a number of issues over the past few years, and believe that I could benefit many more people if elected to Council. I also believe that a lot of people are looking for the younger generation to get involved in municipal politics, to bring a fresh perspective to the table, and a new way of looking at things. I am bringing those things to the table for the residents of Ward 5, and the city as a whole.

Finally, I believe that the entire election process, and democracy in general, depends on the fact that people get to choose who they want to represent them. In Ward 5, which is

where I live, there was nobody running against the incumbent, Councillor Wally Collins. If there are residents in Ward 5 that are not happy with Councillor Collins, or are just looking for change, they had no choice, nobody else was running for this ward.

What should be the city's top three priorities?

Affordable housing, infrastructure maintenance/upgrading, and community equality in terms of available services like recreational facilities, transit, municipal water and sewer, etc.

What has been the present council's biggest blunder?

I believe that one of the biggest mistakes of the current council is not engaging the public more often, and in a more meaningful way. In many cases they held public meetings to 'explain' things to us, after decisions have already been made. Rather than come to the public after the fact, I think the public should be more engaged before decisions are made.

What has been the present council's biggest achievement?

I think the curbside recycling programs deserves some recognition here.

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

I tend to work well with almost everyone. So I have no doubt that I could work with anyone running in this election. Council is about working together to achieve a common goal.

Opinions & Issues

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

Heritage building regulations

5 - I'm going to say 5 on this one because, unlike the other issues, I'm not overly familiar with this one. I do know of the heritage building regulations, but am not sure how residents affected by these regulation feel. I could see it being rather tedious having to get heritage approval before doing something like replacing a window or door. This is one area I would like to learn more about.

City support for the arts

7 - I do believe arts and cultural activities are important, and should be supported by the city.

Downtown parking

9 - Downtown parking is a major issue. However, I don't necessarily believe the answer to this problem is to keep building more parking spaces. Downtown St. John's is a pretty compact place, and there's only so many parking spaces we are going to be able to fit in there. We need to look at other ways of relieving traffic congestion, and reducing the demand for parking in the downtown core. One possible way of reducing the demand for parking, and reducing traffic congestion, is a park-and-ride service for commuters from outside of the city. They could park on the outskirts of the city in a designated lot, and take a bus from there into the city.

Public transit

10- I have been a huge advocate for the improvement of public transit over the past few years. The city has commissioned two studies since 2007, each costing tens of thousands of dollars, to review the operations of Metrobus, with a view of improving the service and increasing ridership. The first report highlighted several areas for improvement, not all of which were implemented. Then in 2011 the city began a second review, again to determine why ridership wasn't increasing, even though they still hadn't followed through on the recommendations from the 2007 report.

If we want people to use public transit, and we want it to become a viable alternative to using a private vehicle, we really need to start looking at what can be done to improve the service. An excellent place to start would be the recommendations contained in the reports we already paid for. There's not much point in paying for a study to be done, and recommendations being made, if we are not going to implement them.

Urban density

9 - The more space a city takes up, the more it costs to service. For example, water, sewer, snow clearing, and garbage collection all cost more as the city grows outwards. By building up, instead of out, you can reduce the costs of servicing the population as they are confined to a smaller area. Things like public transit become more viable, since there is a larger number of people in a given area to take advantage of the service. Also, the more spread out the population is the more we need to rely on vehicles to get us from our homes to the things we need to do, like grocery shopping, recreation activities, etc. By building up higher density areas, with good connections to public transit, we may be able to get more people on the bus and out of their cars.

Full-time council positions

5 - I'm going to sit in the middle on this one as well, and give it a 5. It is hard to know if council positions should be full-time or not without conducting a review of council, its duties, and functions, to get a better understanding of the big picture. If the job actually

requires full-time councillors, or councillors are working full-time but not being compensated accordingly, we need to take a look at that. However, a review may also indicate that council positions should remain part-time. It's hard to make that determination without understanding the full scope of what council does and how they operate.

Amalgamation

0 - Amalgamation is something we should only consider if the neighboring city/community decides this is a route they'd like to pursue. We shouldn't try to force amalgamation upon them. That being said there is lot that we could achieve by working with our regional neighbours. However, these results can be obtained through good regional cooperation without the need to amalgamate.

Height restriction for buildings

5 - I'm going to give this a 5, because it all depends on the context. Generally speaking, the higher the city grows, the less we need to grow outwards. Urban sprawl is an issue that needs to be addressed, and higher density buildings are part of the solution. That being said, there are certain areas of the city where a tall building may not be appropriate, or may not fit well with the heritage aspect of the area. So, I guess, we either need to develop some solid guidelines for building heights in different areas of the city, or we need to look at each development on an individual basis to determine if the height is reasonable in the circumstances. I would prefer to have a strong set of development guidelines so that it is clear to developers what is, and is not, acceptable in a given area.

Sidewalk snow clearing

10 - This is an important issue. Without cleared sidewalks pedestrians are forced to share the roads with motorists during the winter months, when the roads are often slippery and dangerous. It puts unnecessary stress on pedestrians and motorists alike, as neither group wants to be involved in an accident. There are also liability issues with providing sidewalks, but not maintaining them in a safe condition.

Affordable housing

10 - This is a MAJOR issue in St. John's. It seems like every month that goes by it's becoming more and more expensive to live in St. John's. Since housing is one of the most basic needs of all people, we need to work to ensure that everyone has access to accommodations that they can afford. The ones hit the hardest with rent increases are often those at a disadvantage, seniors on fixed incomes, students, people unable to work due to medical conditions, and single parents that are already struggling to put food on the table. A proactive approach needs to be developed now before this situation becomes even more dire for those affected the most.