

GUEST OPINION

Municipal candidates should stick to promises they can keep



Saint John City Hall at dusk. Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce CEO David Duplisea writes: 'As your champions for business, we encourage candidates to understand the value of large and small businesses for our region.'

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Photo: Brunswick News Archive

David Duplisea | Commentary

On May 10, after a 12-month delay because of the COVID-19 pandemic, municipal elections will be held in our region and across New Brunswick.

It is a critical time for us; previous council efforts have identified new strategies and developed plans to advance our growth priorities. We need to keep our eyes on the outcomes and continue our momentum.

Running for and holding office is a huge responsibility. We extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to all candidates and elected officials who have dedicated their time to our local governments. A special thanks goes out to those who served an extra year in this term.

While serving in government is a significant act of citizenship, we suggest that electing the right leaders is an even greater civic duty.

As voters, we are the ultimate decision-makers. Voters choose the direction our community will take. It is up to each of us to ensure we know what our candidates stand for and how they see our path forward.

In his 2002 Dartmouth College Commencement Address, Fred Rogers said, "Deep down, we know that what matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What really matters is helping others win, too."

Strong leadership is not doing what works for one. Strong leadership is about making difficult decisions with the collective good in mind – even if they may be unpopular with some.

So it is up to us as voters to identify strong candidates who are focused on the greater good of our region: those who share our values and can best represent us. Voting is not simply about putting an "X" beside the name you recognize; it should not be a contest about who has the most social media popularity. It is about informing yourself, so you can choose the candidate who best represents our region's shared needs.

That's why we encourage municipal candidates to be clear on what they can control and what they can not. Municipal governments are responsible for city road maintenance, police and fire services, drinking water, public transit, recreation, zoning (land use), garbage, compost and recycling. Any promises or discussions about topics outside this scope are distractions that lead to confusion.

As your champions for business, we encourage candidates to understand the value of large and small businesses for our region. Being business-friendly does not mean turning a blind eye to any harmful business practices. Instead, it means a focus on cutting out the barriers to business growth.

When more people in our city earn a good wage, more people will spend money at retail stores, rent or buy housing, and give to charity fundraisers. When our workforce is strong and our business climate is confident, more money gets spent on goods, services and taxes. That means more money for services such as road repair, recreation and public transportation.

In addition, we encourage candidates to find new ways to leverage our current assets to promote growth. Unlocking the potential of Saint John Energy, for example, could make Saint John one of the most affordable and greenest energy cities in the country. This is a unique selling proposition and sets us apart from other jurisdictions.

Other resources like Rockwood Park, the Imperial Theatre, the Canada Games Aquatic Centre, and active transportation and recreation opportunities like Harbour Passage are precisely the types of amenities that motivate people to move to our region.

It's estimated that our region needs to grow by 2,000 people per year for the next 20 years to maintain our economy. To achieve that population growth, we need our municipal leaders to stay focused on meeting those growth targets. Business growth and population growth will lead to better services for all. Growth is the key to leading for the greater good.

As we have done for the past municipal elections, The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce is hosting Our Region Matters – a meet the mayoralty candidates (online) event. These events will be held at the end of April. We invite you to join us and learn more about our region's 2021 mayoral candidates, their visions, platforms, and plans regarding business and economic development for our region's future. Details for the event will soon be available on the chamber's website.

The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, representing business in our region, is eager to be part of a solution that brings people and investment to New Brunswick.

David Duplisea is the CEO of The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.