

Brent Harris

He/Him • Saint John Harbour • Green Party

Candidate #05

1. Why are you running in this election?

So for me, I got involved with a bunch of different community development work in my past when I was living in Hamilton, Ontario, actually. And from that, I just fell in love with local community based development, activism, and just different ideas around social enterprise development to solve problems creatively. And when I moved back to Saint John it very quickly became apparent to me that the housing issues were unlike any I had kind of seen with the other place, just at least in how apparent they were and how intertwined they were to other problems. Like just the overall systemic poverty you know, our city as well as investment development economically. And so that really grabbed my attention. And of course, with the tool library, there was a bunch of us kind of batting around ideas, living in the South End of what might be kind of a grassroots initiative.

We could develop to rally people around this idea of maintaining and coming together to work on each other's homes and keep them up to try to interrupt some of that narrative that was taking place. We saw with our neighbors with, you know, you walk out your door and you see these buildings in the state, they are, it's hard to develop a positive narrative, which makes it hard to develop a positive feelings about where you live, which usually means we don't take risks in our community or care to invest in it or those things. So for me personally, that's what got the ball rolling. And over the years of being involved with that just seeing so many different pieces of the puzzle that are in government's hands that we won't, I don't think we'll be able to solve the housing crisis unless they change, unless there's significant housing reforms around the Tenancies Act also as well as just how development is done around housing and who gets funding for what purposes and who gets focused on and all those things. So that was really the issue that kind of, I guess, focused on, but since then a number of other issues have kind of come to the front. So food sovereignty and just different ways of doing localized development economically have just become something I care about. So I found a home with the [party name hidden] and over time they asked me to run. So here we are.

2. Describe how the time living in your riding has informed your qualifications as a candidate.

Yeah, because I rallied a bunch of different people to do an issue that I was involved with, it allowed me to create a network, I guess, that is very different. And a lot of us aren't necessarily people who were at the table of making decisions or talking about policy before, but now many of us are. And so I think that probably is my strongest qualification. I mean, I do have some education background, but I think for any person in government, your strongest qualification has to be, can you bring people together to solve this problem? And can you build a team and do

you know how to collaborate? So that's something I've been able to accomplish and hope to continue to do.

3. Describe how your time living in New Brunswick has informed your qualifications as a candidate.

So being born in Blacks Harbor, New Brunswick, I was brought up in a rural environment, but having lived in Saint John, having lived in Sackville, having lived in Fredericton, I've been around different communities. And I think one of the things I continue to see is that there has been a momentum shift just across the province in the past number of years. And again, that network that had been developing mostly around social entrepreneurial development with groups like B4 Change that I think will allow me to tap into some of those potentials. So I think that's probably my strongest qualification there.

4. How does your experience (ie. education, lived experience, workplace) contribute to your qualifications as a candidate?

So as far as lived experience goes, I've had a chance to see, you know, other perspectives and other cities like Hamilton and Toronto and Sackville and whatnot. So I've also had the opportunity to live among people who live on the margins, so refugees, immigrants, but also just the poor in the riding of Saint John Harbour when I was living in the South End. And I think having had those experiences has informed certainly my education because my education, you know, it was always done at university. And so that was a way from those people away from those specifics. And I think having those specific examples with specific people in situations really has developed my ability to see solutions that are achievable, not just that are, you know, ideal.

5. If elected, what will be your top 5 priorities for your riding?

Top five priorities for the riding? Well, first and foremost, it's attracting the proper attention. We need that stuff in school. And that's not just because it's a hot topic that people have rallied around. It's because it's very important for that part of our city to receive a level of investment that it hasn't had beyond that we want to look at municipal reform, which includes governance reform, which means changing the relationship and the partnership between our city and Fredericton. Food sovereignty is a big one that I've been involved with and the [party name hidden] is moving towards pretty rapidly. And then beyond that, just looking at again, social enterprise development and how we actually can empower change makers in the communities and what would go on with those types of investments.

6. LGBTQ+ and reproductive healthcare

So my thoughts on that issue are that, you know, compared to other places I've lived, New Brunswick really has lagged around it's involvement and it's support of that group. And it's, to me, it's so clear that we have an opportunity and we have examples elsewhere of access to, you know, places to have a safe abortion, places to receive support through counseling, places

to receive, you know an environment where you're not in a big, huge hospital that's busy and has lots of people in it. There's a, you know, a person that you're in a little more of an intimate environment to talk about some of these bigger challenges. So to me, when it comes to funding that stuff there is just a way forward has to be through decentralized healthcare. And we've seen that work in other provinces. And I think it's just about time we catch up and get that done.

7. Access to mental health and/or addictions services

So along the same lines when it comes to mental health, our leader, David Coon has been battling for many years to raise the awareness and attention and on what the levels of access to and what the levels of supports are for people who have that. And there's been some good policy work done around that. And that's, I think what the general basic areas that Guaranteed Basic Income is aimed at for the [party name hidden] platform. And it's something that I think would go a long way stabilizing just the amount of opportunity that people who are in those situations of needing mental health support and access to that kind of healthcare can get to those places a little more easily. And certainly again, when you have decentralized healthcare, when you're not focusing everything on three schools versus only three hospitals, for the most part, then you're making the access. So it's not just based if you can get a ride to Fredericton or the Regional there's something closer to where you live with people who, you know, to be able to get that support.

8. Glyphosate use in New Brunswick

Is abhorrent. Glyphosate use... it's ludicrous to me, and there was an article that just went out about how farmers don't want to abandon it, because it's the only thing that works. And we know from regenerative agriculture practices that have been well-documented scientifically for the past 20 years by individuals like John Kemp is absolutely not necessary to use that. Absolutely degrades the soil. It destroys biodiversity in our forest. And that creates forests that get sick more often. And not, you know, when you look at Dutch Elm disease, or when you look at the Ash borer beetle, or the pine beetle, those pests thrive in areas where there is lack of diversity because the diversity is what keeps some of those things in check and same with our soil. So a device that you use has to be ended and farmers need to get the support they need. They only know what they've been taught in many ways, and that we need to use poisons to grow food, and it's not true.

9. Access to affordable housing in Saint John

So access to affordable housing is, of course, you know, the main hat for me as far as where I want to go after. And I mean, I, myself ran into issues with when I was trying to find housing and we ran into struggles with our landlord. So to me, there's a number of solutions we can apply. One of them needs to be that we reset the Landlord Tendencies Act because some of the housing that we have right now is affordable, but it's not stable because there is a lot of issues either with the building themselves and the building isn't safe, and the landlords don't necessarily have the supports. They need to maintain them, or the landlords aren't practicing responsible practices and there's very little resources for recourse for tenants. And so, I mean, we fixed that by amending legislation. That's a hundred years old and hasn't been touched and

we put in safeguards for tenants, but we also build in supports for our landlords so that they can receive the help they need on those buildings. And things like rent controls, things like different supports from the tribunal for landlords difficulties, with tenants, not just having to go to evictions and things like that are important steps to make, for sure.

10. Police funding in Saint John

So as a rule, I think across the board, we have looked at police funding in the wrong way. And I think the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted this. And as we look at defunding the police, we want to have safe neighborhoods, but we want to focus the jobs that our police are supposed to be doing in those areas. Instead of having them respond to every other type of incident, that's kind of not in their wheelhouse of skills. So that means funding our social system properly. And it means, you know, funding social workers to be able to be in those situations and not be so stretched that they're burnt out all the time, which is something that's a real problem for social workers in this province. And so you know, we have to look more holistically about how we fund police and municipalities need to have leadership in the province on how to do that. And I don't see that happening right now. I see openness from our municipalities to explore that. And then I see concern from the police associations to kind of shut those conversations down because they don't want to lose funding and the province is silent and that's not what we need. We need an alternative and we need some leadership on that I believe.

11. Reporting and investigations of sexual assaults

Right. So around sexual assault reporting there has been a lot of troubling stories that have come out in just recent history, but I know that this problem is far more protracted than that. And so with no third party investigative body in New Brunswick around policing, you know, anytime we need somebody to investigate the actions of the police, we have to call them from Nova Scotia or Quebec. And that's something David Coon has called for. He's even proposed an amendment to legislation, I believe, I don't know if it ever reached the floor, but around having a watchdog that is in New Brunswick that can investigate these issues because there's been a lot loss of trust for sure, among people who have encountered sexual assault and not received the support or the justice that they sought to receive. And that needs to be something that is addressed. And I think an easy way for that is to start with the police watchdog and then to move from there.

12. Municipal and Industrial Tax reform

So how we govern as a province for the last 150 years has been mostly around rural policy. And that's because we were mostly a rural province, but we have three large cities and we have six other, what we call cities, in this province that have all begun to feel the pain of how that policy works for cities. We have different issues. And when you're encumbered with lots of industry, like we are in Saint John, you know, the way that the tax system works in rural areas does not work for us. And so we need major reforms there. We need to remove the exemptions that have been put on mills. We need to remove the tax reductions that have been put on our refinery, but that goes across the board to our other jurisdictions, machinery that's for forests and things like that because again, for cities specifically, we're never going to be able to provide

our citizens with the service they need and to solve the problems, cities know how to solve best without some sort of intervention. And I think, you know, a quick way to look at that is to amend the percentages that our cities hold within that they get back from that, from that tax system currently. But ideally it would be the move to a land value tax system for our big cities, so that we put pressure on the right assets and land use not being idle, rather than putting pressure on landlords and homeowners with high tax rates.

13. Access to public transit in Saint John

So public transit, you know, so many people rely on it just to be able to function day to day activities. And in Saint John for a long time, there has been a struggle to figure out how to fund transit well, and we see a good movement right now of people trying to lobby for active transportation. And I know that will help some of the pieces of that puzzle for sure, around how we get around, how do we get from point A to point B, but transit needs to be stable. It needs to be accessible. And right now our city is just constantly going back to the drawing board on 'how do we pay for this thing and get people the access they need'? And as we've seen, we have a government that doesn't seem to care too much about that struggle and went off for help from the federal government around transit, turned it down, and that's not the kind of partner I want to be for Saint John in Fredericton. We need somebody who understands that it is hard work getting around on a bus and to not have the right routes and the right bus structures around that or transit structure is just holding everybody back.

14. Access to affordable childcare in Saint John

Right. So if we're expecting people to contribute you know, in our communities, but we're not giving anybody the supports or the opportunity to have their children looked after I don't see how we can move the needle forward on a number of issues like poverty and education. So there has been federally, I know there has been good legislation around universal childcare, and I see that in Quebec and as we have the tax situation and as we fix our revenue problem by taxing people properly, I know we can find money in our budget to begin targeted approach to childcare centers being developed where they're not currently developed. And it also means pushing for our workers who are working in that industry to receive fair wages and compensation because there's a lot of turnover in that industry because the pay isn't always great. And nor is it sustainable, it's certainly not a living wage for many people. So I think that's something that we can stabilize the current model we have, but also go further and try to target legislation that can help develop further centers in cities.

15. Media Ownership in New Brunswick

So media ownership is a tough nut to crack because we certainly can't, unless somebody stepping up to start their own media outlet and fork over the money, it's hard to throw stones at people who have bought it up at the same time. It isn't right. That we see such a centralized force in our media ownership, in New Brunswick, being basically within one family. And because of that, I don't think people have the trust in our reporting. And because of that, I think people are just disenchanted. And so there needs to be steps taken. And how that happens is still still a bit of a mystery to me. And what you do to try to break up that monopoly? Certainly there's

government actions that can be taken around legislation to break up the monopoly. And where do we go when it's broken up? Like who takes it over? That's where we need to do more work as a community to figure out how we can support good and resilient media ownership and reporting for our communities.