

## SLDC questionnaire - Cynthia Block, Candidate in Ward 6

September 2, 2016

To David McGrane, Charles Smith, and the Saskatoon and District Labour Council

Thank you for the opportunity to present my views on the important issues your questionnaire raises.

The City of Saskatoon and its employees provide vital public services. The City should pay its employees living wages, provide adequate benefits, and ensure that its workplaces foster dignity and ensure safety. Unions are among the few remaining institutions in our society with a strong voice to encourage good middleclass jobs. Their role is vital to the health and wellbeing of our community and economy.

If elected, I expect there to be a steep learning curve. I look forward to that learning. Right now, I can offer my general views regarding our city and its workers along with some feedback from Ward 6 residents.

1. Ward 6 residents have been vocal about a few key issues, but the most consistent complaint concerns basic infrastructure. Potholes, dangerous sidewalks, back lane flooding and tree roots are a few key issues. They have also complained about sub-standard work when workers attempt to fix these problems. I have learned that, in many cases, those working to repair our infrastructure are not City employees. I would like to better understand why we don't use City workers especially if private contractors are providing substandard work.

Public transportation is another big issue for Ward 6 residents who say the City has failed to design good routing and reliable schedules. In light of climate change, the City of Saskatoon needs to work aggressively to build a system that encourages more riders, especially into the downtown core.

I believe the overall cost for both of these issues would be less if we look at our city as a whole, instead of a microcosm of City Hall. When seen against the backdrop of creating a thriving city with smart, sustainable infrastructure, jobs and more local businesses, the City must weigh its costs against the benefits to the city overall.

2. As outlined above, taxpayers don't save money when private contractors do sub-standard work. While this may not always be the case, I think we need to promote and protect public workers. Without understanding the details

around how privatization decisions were made, I won't comment further. However, I support living wages/adequate benefits etc as outlined above.

3. I think that positive labour relations are shaped from the top. City Council and management need to demonstrate pride and confidence in civic employees. I would like to see our city foster an environment of mutual respect, whereby decisions are seen in the context of the whole city. When people earn a decent living they spend more, businesses do better and we all move forward together. The same is true for the City's tendering process. The lowest bidder doesn't necessarily mean that it costs taxpayers less - even when there are no cost over-runs. We need to factor in how local bidders impact the overall economy. Tendering for recent mega-projects seem to have been shortsighted and costly to taxpayers.
4. I've been impressed with some of the efforts made in recent years to rejuvenate Riversdale and encourage affordable housing. I'd like to see more of that.

I also support the "Housing First" program, where people are given shelter, food and basic living standards before addressing issues such as mental health, addiction or poverty. Research suggests this approach improves outcomes and saves taxpayers money. I'd like to see Saskatoon expand its Housing First program.

I don't know how to encourage more participation of marginalized citizens in civic decisions, but I'm interested to learn from those who do.

5. I think the City needs to do a better job of viewing economic opportunities through a wider lens. As stated above, the economic impact of local contractors and local workers adds up to more than the wages and profits from one building or project. I also think we need to do more to encourage the right kinds of economic activity. As we plan for growth, are we really going to create ever more parking spaces downtown? Planning for our future with evidence and data today will drive a more sustainable economy tomorrow.
6. Here is my list:
  - More and better public transportation
  - Electric car charging stations
  - Better building codes
  - Work with managers and employees at Saskatoon Light and Power to determine how the utility can accelerate the installation of solar panel arrays in the city

- Promote lawn/park designs that use less water
  - Tax breaks for developers/homeowners who develop lane housing (\*Note: I am aware that some homeowners in Ward 6 are strongly against lane housing. Integrity of neighbourhoods should be considered in deciding where/how to encourage increased density. Collaboration with citizens/neighbourhoods is vital to the success of any density plan)
  - Keep designing great housing like the Banks, that encourages smaller homes with more services, enhancing lifestyle without sacrificing style
  - Smart urban planning that considers walking distance to basic services
  - Find out if driverless cars are safe, efficient and a viable option for the future. If they are, that changes a lot in terms of planning for the future
  - Lead by example - research ideas/programs for Mayor and Council to set examples for citizens.
7. The City can do a lot to promote reconciliation between indigenous people and the rest of us.

I wrote and produced all of the videos for Teaching Treaties in the Classroom for K – 12 through the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. I was VP of the Saskatoon Chapter of the Inter-Provincial Association on Native Employment. I am a strong advocate for implementing the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. It offers an opportunity to finally build the future that the Treaties were designed to create. With the second highest indigenous population in Canada and nearly 50% of our schools filled with students of indigenous descent, our economy and collective wellbeing depend on it.

Here are a few things the City should consider:

- If 15% of Saskatoon's population is indigenous and the City's staff at all levels does not reflect this, City Hall must show leadership to remedy. Systemic racism is invisible to most outside of a marginalized group, but it impacts all of us. From health and wellbeing, taxes and the criminal justice system, evidence strongly suggests that removing barriers improves society for all, not only the marginalized group.
- Remai Modern, Canada's modern art museum, will open in the same year as the country's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. The City should use this opportunity to embrace reconciliation with its indigenous citizens. From the opening and the art to hiring employees of indigenous descent, Saskatoon must demonstrate leadership with this extremely significant cultural icon.
- Saskatoon needs to think outside the box to foster inclusion, harmony and hope for all people. The City should encourage collaboration with other cities in the province to find innovative ways to tackle systemic racism and celebrate our indigenous roots.