

Jennifer Watts' Speech - All Candidates Meeting Sept. 26

Good evening and thank you for coming. My name is Jennifer Watts and I would like to be your councillor for District 14.

Halifax is a great city. I was born and raised here and have been a resident of District 14 on Duncan Street since 1992. I am trained as an urban and rural planner. I understand municipal issues. I have years of experience working with children, youth and adults including seniors in both paid employment and volunteer positions. I have raised my family here, participating in recreation, sports and library programs; walking in our neighbourhoods; playing in our neighbourhood parks.

I want to share with you the issues that moved me to enter this race.

The number one issue I hear on doorsteps is transportation. Residents have told me about serious pedestrian accidents and the speed and volume of traffic on our streets. What we lack in this city is strong council leadership to move beyond the politics of paving, to a culture that embraces sustainable transportation.

In my vision of HRM there are pedestrian- and bike-friendly neighbourhoods. I want to see more efficient and more frequent buses, and bus shelters that are clean, well-lit and provide adequate shelter from rain and snow. If we invest in the transit system, people will choose to use it.

I am committed to creating this culture of sustainable transportation throughout HRM. This will require education and leadership by example. I support the Neighbourhood Pace car program and trail development like the Halifax Urban Greenway that will link District 14 with Point Pleasant Park. As your councillor, I will vote for the expansion of our bike lanes. We need less emphasis on the fast movement of cars through our neighbourhoods and more attention to the safe movement of people.

HRM also needs affordable housing and we need to ensure that it is a required part of new development on the peninsula. On the doorsteps, I have heard about dissatisfaction with nearby rooming houses. I will work with neighbours, and with our provincial and federal counterparts to ensure that housing is a top priority. Great cities respond effectively to the crisis of housing poverty.

A great city also needs neighbourhood schools - they form the backbone of our communities. Increasing density on the peninsula does not make sense if there are no schools that our children can walk to. I will advocate for neighbourhood schools with both school boards and the provincial government.

Great cities are also accessible to everyone regardless of income or location. Our recreation programs and our facilities must be accessible to all. We need to work to keep these based in our neighbourhoods. Addressing poverty in our community is a key part of ensuring social inclusion. People living in poverty are our neighbours. I will advocate on behalf of those who are seldom heard.

HRM also needs to be an environmental champion. We can't rest on the praise we earned for our composting program. I will support 'buy local' policies, an increase in green spaces and protection of urban forests. I'd like to see enhanced recycling programs, and support for renewable energy alternatives. I will insist that we stick with our regional plan to manage growth and development in our municipality.

Development is an important part of our growth and legacy to the future. We can have great new development without sacrificing our unique character or limiting public involvement. We have an opportunity to create an exciting legacy downtown with a new central library and a great facility for our Farmers' Market. The beautification project for Quinpool Road will be a tremendous boost for one of our main business areas. The revitalization of the Oxford St business area is a vibrant example of great small business development.

I am a listener, an advocate, a leader and I follow through. I will work full-time to represent you on Council. I understand that the municipal budget is your money and our collective treasury. As councillor, I will ensure it is used on our priorities in the most efficient and cost effective way.

Our Council is facing many challenges. I believe that with strong leadership, cooperative effort and good planning, Council can work in the best interests of all districts.

I have spent most of my life here in Halifax, but I have also traveled to and lived in other cities and countries: Toronto, Saskatoon, Nicaragua and most recently in Qatar in the Middle East. Each time, I have returned home tremendously grateful to belong to such a wonderful community as Halifax. I'm ready to express that gratitude in hard work on your behalf on Council. My door will always be open to you. This is who I am and I am asking for your vote on October 18th.

Thankyou.