

Candidate Responses from Central Nova

- CANYON, George (Conservative)
- FRASER, Sean (Liberal)
- FRAZER, Chris (Communist)
- MACDONALD, Betsy (NDP-New Democratic Party)
- MUIR, Al (People's Party)
- RANDLE, Barry (Green Party)
- SLOWIK, Michael (Independent)

1. **Internet/Cellular Connectivity:** Communities need internet and cell service to attract residents and businesses. The federal government committed \$1.7 billion to internet funding in the 2019 budget. While a good start, this is not enough money, and municipal governments can't afford what is needed.

What are you prepared to do to connect Nova Scotia's communities?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: If we want to keep people in Central Nova and attract new residents, we have to consider high-speed internet to be infrastructure as important as electricity, roads and bridges. In 2019 we announced High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy. We set a national target to ensure that 95 per cent of Canadian homes and businesses will have high-speed internet by 2026, and 100 per cent by 2030, no matter where they are located in the country. Enhanced cellular service is also addressed. We are working with the Province of Nova Scotia through Develop Nova Scotia and partners like the Municipality of the County of Pictou to connect all areas of the province. We are pleased that the doubling of the Federal Gas Tax transfer to all municipalities in the 2019 budget prompted Pictou County to embark upon its affordable high-speed internet project. Our Connect to Innovate program has already designated funding to two remote regions in Central Nova. This will allow individuals and businesses large and small to put down roots and build community in rural areas. There is more opportunity for this essential infrastructure on the horizon. I believe in Central Nova because of its great people and stunning natural beauty. Connectivity for all means we are open for business. After all, would you rather look out the window of your office and see a busy city street or an ocean view?

Barry Randle, Green Party: To a great extent, the Green economy is a digital economy. To participate fully, individuals and communities across the country need access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet. Such infrastructure is as essential today as power and telephone lines were early last century.

2. **Program Design:** The Gas Tax Fund (GTF) is a great federal-municipal partnership. Other federal programs aren't as straightforward, requiring provincial matching funds or administrative approvals.

Do you support more programs designed like the GTF, to ensure that Nova Scotian municipalities with limited resources are able to partner directly with the federal government to respond to local needs?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: The best ideas come from people who understand the communities in which they live. Governments partner with groups with great ideas that have wide-spread

community support. Of the three levels of government in Canada municipal governments are closest to home, dealing with the day-to-day issues that matter to residents. It was interesting to see how municipalities chose to use their extra Federal Gas Tax transfer announced in the 2019 Federal Budget. In discussions with municipal leaders I learned that thoughtful, smart decisions were being made to serve the needs of their constituents with these extra and unexpected funds. I certainly support any program that delivers services directly to those who need them using local insight and resources.

Barry Randle, Green Party: We will, institutionalize federal transfers to municipalities through the creation of a Municipal Fund, renaming the Gas Tax funds, which were delinked from gas tax revenue years ago. Ensure a doubling of current funding to ensure predictable and reliable funding to municipalities.

3. **Infrastructure Funding:** Municipalities own close to 60% of public infrastructure but receive just ten cents of every tax dollar collected. Many federal infrastructure funding programs are available, but applying to them requires staff capacity that many small municipalities lack.

Would you commit to funding staff and program resources at NSFAM to support small and rural municipalities to access much-needed infrastructure funding?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: We have civil servants in all government departments who know their programs better than anyone. During the past four years as an MP I was delighted to see how available they are to speak directly to individuals, organizations and local government employees. This is especially helpful when staff is located in regional centres, and I certainly would support more of that. For example, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Employment Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Canadian Heritage have people in Nova Scotia who can help with local needs.

Barry Randle, Green Party: Around the world, cities are taking leadership on critical issues such as climate change, immigration and refugee protection. Canadian cities are hobbled in this respect because the 1867 constitutional designation of the municipal order of government as creations of the provinces severely limits their autonomy and authority. With only 10 cents out of every tax dollar flowing to municipalities, and no direct powers of taxation, vast inequities in our governance structures and financial stability have been created. Successive governments have skirted the issue; there is no appetite for re-opening the Constitution. Prime Minister Harper, quite rightly, made the gas tax a permanent form of municipal taxation. The Trudeau administration has also made some progress on funding housing and transit infrastructure. These have helped to stabilize municipal budgets, but it is still insufficient. Give municipal governments a seat at the policy-making table through the Council of Canadian Governments. Encourage the use of City Charters which give greater autonomy to cities. Make changes to the Canada Infrastructure Bank to reduce interest rates to municipalities on loans for infrastructure projects. Institutionalize federal transfers to municipalities through the creation of a Municipal Fund, renaming the Gas Tax funds, which were delinked from gas tax revenue years ago. Ensure a doubling of current funding to ensure predictable and reliable funding to municipalities. Allocate one per cent of GST to housing and other municipal infrastructure on an ongoing basis to provide a consistent baseline of funding. Answer the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' and Vancouver Mayor's Council's call for a permanent, dedicated federal public transit fund of \$3.4 billion annually starting in 2028, once the existing transit funding program expires.

4. **Cannabis:** The federal government promised a significant portion of cannabis tax revenues would be shared with municipalities. Despite multiple requests for revenue-sharing arrangements, no long-term commitment has been achieved here in Nova Scotia.

What will you do to work with municipalities to ensure they are delivered a portion of cannabis-related excise tax?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: Certainly, revenue from legal cannabis sales should be shared across all three levels of government in proportion to the cost of monitoring the industry and enforcing laws. As the industry matures revenue levels should stabilize so that profits can be shared appropriately. This is something that the Federal government should monitor to ensure that all provinces come to timely agreements with their municipalities.

Barry Randle, Green Party: A year into the legalization of cannabis, the flaws in the regulatory framework for cannabis production and sale are evident and a reform agenda is emerging. Although one of the goals of legalization was to undermine the black market, since October 2018 the percentage of Canadians obtaining cannabis from illegal sources has not dropped below 38 per cent. [22] Contributing to this is an approach to legalization that treats the production of cannabis as uniquely dangerous. Security requirements mean growers must use more energy and water and deal with diseases and pests that thrive in greenhouses, increasing costs and hobbling their ability to meet production expectations. CBD (cannabidiol), used medicinally to reduce pain and anxiety, is not available to many who have prescriptions, increasing the illegal market for cannabis. A Green government will: Lower the federally set price for cannabis to make it competitive with illegal supplies. Eliminate requirements for excess plastic packaging on legal cannabis. Remove federal excise duties and sales tax on medicinal cannabis products. Allow outdoor production and impose organic production standards. Exempt CBD from the restrictions of the Prescriptions List, allowing hemp growers to produce it as a natural health product. This would strengthen the hemp industry and increase supply so those who use it for medicinal purposes do not have to purchase it illegally.

5. **Affordable Housing:** If elected, what would you and your party do to increase the supply of affordable housing in your communities?

Would your government honour the commitments made under the \$40-billion National Housing Strategy?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: I am incredibly proud of the National Housing Strategy, as having a safe and secure place to live must come before all other things. Programs and services such as those that provide food, health, transportation and education are not effective if an individual does not know where he or she will sleep each night. CMHC has many programs for individual, groups and developers and Affordable Housing specialists living and working in Nova Scotia. The Province of Nova Scotia administers housing subsidies that match tenants with landlords to keep rents at no more than 30% of household income. "Housing First" strengthens our communities and I am committed to more and better housing for all.

Barry Randle, Green Party: Federal incentives for purpose-built rental housing were eliminated in the 1970s. During decades of encouraging home ownership, federal support for co-ops, rental housing, social housing and supportive housing has languished. We now face a national shortage of affordable housing and as a result, a growing problem of homelessness and

housing insecurity. The Liberal government's National Housing Strategy does not address immediate core housing needs across Canada. Funding for affordable housing will roll out over 15 years but it is needed now. The first-time home buyer grant has been criticized for exacerbating housing speculation and commodification. It is past time that the government of Canada moves to ensure that everyone has access to safe, affordable housing. The Green Party will enhance the federal government's contribution to meeting the housing needs of Canadians through direct investments, changes to tax policies, and lending and granting programs, putting the government's focus where it is urgently needed. **DIRECT INVESTMENTS BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:** Legislate housing as a legally protected fundamental human right for all Canadians and permanent residents. Appoint a Minister of Housing to strengthen the National Housing Strategy so that it meets the needs for affordable housing that are unique to each province and oversee its implementation in collaboration with provincial ministers. This recognizes that housing is provincial jurisdiction. The target would be 25,000 new and 15,000 rehabilitated units annually for the next 10 years. Increase the National Housing Co-investment Fund by \$750 million for new builds, and the Canada Housing Benefit by \$750 million for rent assistance for 125,000 households. Create a Canada Co-op Housing Strategy that would update the mechanisms for financing co-op housing, in partnership with CMHC, co-op societies, credit unions and other lenders. Eliminate the first-time home buyer grant. **FINANCING:** Include new and existing housing as eligible infrastructure for funding purposes, allowing the Canada Infrastructure Bank to support provincial and municipal housing projects. Provide financing to non-profit housing organizations and cooperatives to build and restore quality, energy efficient housing for seniors, people with special needs and low-income families. Restore tax incentives for building purpose-built rental housing and provide tax credits for gifts of lands, or of land and buildings, to community land trusts to provide affordable housing. Remove the "deemed" GST whenever a developer with empty condo units places them on the market as rentals. Re-focus the core mandate of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on supporting the development of affordable, non-market and cooperative housing, as opposed to its current priority of supporting Canadian lenders to de-risk investment in housing ownership. With many housing markets demonstrably overvalued, and home ownership rates among the highest in the world, individual home ownership should not be the preoccupation of a public service housing agency and a national housing strategy. Change the legislation that prevents Indigenous organizations from accessing financing through CMHC to invest in self-determined housing needs.

6. **Immigration:** Immigration must play a key part in helping our communities remain viable, but numbers show that many immigrants to Nova Scotia forge westward in search of healthier economies.

What will you and your party do to help Nova Scotian communities, especially rural communities, attract - and more importantly, retain - immigrants?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: I am proud to have spent time with many immigrants and their families who found their way to Central Nova and are now our neighbours, coworkers and friends. Our communities are stronger, wiser and richer because of them and we must continue to give newcomers our warm, East Coast welcome. So many new residents have commented to me how friendly and helpful people are around here, especially in small towns and rural communities. I believe that resources for settlement services such as language, education and employment delivered locally by caring, committed staff and volunteers are the key to immigrant retention. And like most good things, we will get just as much out of these activities as those receiving them.

Barry Randle, Green Party: Immigration is what Canada is built upon and in the future, there will be many more immigrants looking for refuge and the chance at a better life for themselves and their families. We must welcome these people and make them feel at home. Having local support networks in place is critical in the attraction and retention of people. Allowing families to reform in their new communities also helps new immigrants forge bonds with places.

7. **Climate Change:** The aftermath of Hurricane Dorian has exposed Nova Scotians to the costs of new weather extremes. Federal representatives from all parties need to commit to long-term tools that will empower our municipal leaders to protect Canadians from these changing conditions.

How will your government ensure municipalities are helped to make their communities more resilient and to green our economies?

Sean Fraser, Liberal: That we are in the midst of a climate emergency cannot be over-emphasized. Urgent action is needed now, and we have to embrace the change and opportunity that sustainable living will bring. I believe we are up to the task, and all levels of government have to work together to repair and reverse the damage to our environment and climate that we have all caused. Municipalities are leaders in this effort, and we must work with them and learn from them. For example, the Town of Antigonish is a partner in the AREA wind farm in Ellershous. The County of Antigonish and Paqtnkek First Nation are collaborating on renewable energy projects beginning with solar power. There are countless examples of sustainable municipal projects throughout Central Nova and beyond.

Barry Randle, Green Party: The climate crisis is the greatest threat we have faced as a society. It is a non-partisan issue and our responses should be dictated by science not policy. We have to do everything we can to eliminate our emissions as soon as possible. We also have to empower and fund the protections necessary for each community to be able to deal with the changes that are coming, and in many cases are already here.