

The BeaconNews

Candidate Questionnaire

If the economy continues on its current path, and continues to impact the city the way it has, what is the first step you would take to reduce spending? Would you cut city jobs as a first resort or last resort in that effort?

In the past 4 years the city has wasted money on half-baked development schemes and poor management of basic city services. Consider that the city asked electricians to drive snowplows, resulting in damaged snow plows and exorbitant overtime wages. Further, consider the freewheeling spending that occurs with the Ward Funds. There are no guidelines that would help guarantee that these funds are used efficiently. Inefficient and wasteful spending occurs while much needed projects go unfunded.

Has Aurora effectively used its lobbyist? What are specific examples of how he has or hasn't had a direct impact on particular city projects?

The fact that the city is all but forgotten by state government is a testament to the lack of leadership on this front. We have no presence at the federal level. The City's lobbyist should be working directly with all of representatives and senators, including Senator Chris Lauzen. Unfortunately the current Mayor has let his personal preferences prevent us from getting the most from our local members of the General Assembly. Perhaps the lobbyist could be better utilized as a facilitator on the issues arising from Canadian National's railroad purchase? An experienced lobbyist, with the right leadership from the Mayor's office, could help us move road projects forward, help with the vacant Copley building, and even some of our environmental cleanup issues. A visionary new leader could take steps to make sure that Aurora benefits from federal programs, up to and including the economic stimulus package that is being debated right now. Aurora is the second largest city, a critical industrial ingredient of the Illinois and national economy, and it is only fitting that the difficulties of our fellow Aurorans are considered alongside the other items to be addressed by the stimulus package.

How, specifically, can voters distinguish your record and approach from your opponents' on economic development? On job growth? On taxes?

The Mayor has to personally focus on all levels of economic development. Not only do we have to attract businesses on a national and international level, we have to extend and grow our existing businesses through local preference. Unlike my opponents, I have lived in Aurora my entire life (except for my military service) and I have built a small business here from scratch. I know the difficulties and obstacles that exist for businesspeople in Aurora – and I know the rewards. This gives me a

special insight on what can be done better to encourage more employers to locate in Aurora. I know first hand what it takes to build a positive business climate here in Aurora. I recognize the type of business climate that is necessary to create good paying jobs and stimulate our economy.

The first thing the current Mayor did after he was elected was raise taxes. He raised taxes and he increased wasteful spending. Raising taxes and wasteful spending are business killers. Mayor Weisner thinks that people should not be trusted with their own money. He wants to take more and more of the tax dollars of hard-working Aurorans and waste them.

It is no accident that neighboring Naperville is thriving when you consider that their property tax is about half of what we pay in Aurora. During times of economic hardship, like those we are now experiencing on the current Mayor's watch, the last thing you want to do is raise people's taxes. Families all across our city are being forced to make tough decisions about how they spend their money, and the City should do the same.

It is more important than ever that our government needs to be leaner and more friendly to business. That includes the businesses that are here already as well as the businesses that are looking for a new home.

The economy and job creation are the most important issues in this campaign. The current Mayor's record of raising taxes and wasteful spending have hurt average Aurorans. That is his record and we need change.

What is your philosophy regarding revitalizing downtown? What has or hasn't worked over the last four years, and what should be done differently?

I believe we must take a serious and objective look at our downtown. I watch people come to our beautiful Paramount Theater, valet their car, and leave immediately after the show. I watch restaurants and taverns struggle to bring in business while we limit the parking and break even on the parking meters.

We should look to neighboring cities and see why their downtowns are thriving while ours is not. We need to emulate those approaches that work and eliminate those that do not. It is going to take new leadership and a change in the Mayor's office to take a fresh look at what can be done to enhance our unique and historic downtown.

For example, Aurora has an attractive river running right through downtown creating a unique opportunity for pedestrians to spend time, take in the attractions, and enjoy their visit. We need to do the simple things to encourage people to enjoy themselves and extend their visit. This should include lowering taxes to make it

easier for existing businesses to get by, highlighting those businesses that appeal to folks outside of Aurora, and making visitors feel welcome and safe.

What has not worked? The current administration has not worked. Giving five million dollars away to a developer who failed to get his project off the ground has not worked. Giving 70% of the Mayor's campaign donors a city contract has not worked.

Consider the hotel and convention project that the Vanstrand company was working on. The deal soured when the Mayor cancelled his meetings with the developer. The project was in the preliminary design stage but the developer had already paid \$3.5 million to buy the property and spent approximately \$1 million on his due diligence. There was a commitment for significant funding from a bank and talks with a major hotel chain. But personal issues caused the Mayor to refuse to meet and discuss the project and it has come to a dead halt. Since this is exactly the kind of rejuvenating development our downtown needs, I would fully explore this project with the intent to revive it if possible.

When I am Mayor, I will run the most transparent and ethical city government that Aurora has ever seen. Decisions will be made based upon what is best for Aurora. I will encourage fresh thinking and the participation of everyone in my plans so that we can really start to benefit from our past strengths, our cultural diversity, and our future assets.

Please list a few ways you would encourage new businesses to locate in Aurora. Do you believe financial incentives, such as tax rebates, are a good tool for commercial development, or should they be used sparingly?

Businesspeople make decisions about location for a number of varied, but not complex reasons. For example, if a business owner thinks the city is looking to target him or her through exorbitant tax increases to supplement a bloated budget, they will stay away. If a businessperson has a meeting with city government and then gets a campaign contribution demand, they will stay away. If businesspeople do not feel their efforts will be appreciated, or that the city will ignore them and turn against them when times are tough, they will stay away.

My administration will be open, honest, and I will demonstrate by my own actions that I understand that business development is of primary importance. I am the only candidate that grew up in Aurora and started a business here and I will champion the efforts of any businessperson who wants to base their efforts here. I will make sure that our schools are improved to provide employers with an educated workforce – a workforce that can compete in the complex 21st century economy. I will cut wasteful and inefficient spending so that taxes can be lowered. I will continue strong and effective efforts to minimize crime and maximize the charisma of our downtown. I will do everything in my power to encourage people

from other communities to look at Aurora as an exciting place to spend time, hold meetings, and entertain their families.

What are your thoughts on Aurora's debt load?

The city's debt load has increased because of bad decisions about spending, maintenance, over-hiring of middle management, and heavy singular reliance on failing casino revenues. The incumbent Mayor's first action four years ago was to increase taxes. Wasteful spending and higher taxes discourages the type of development that will be necessary to create a tax base that in turn can lower Aurora's debt load. And now we have guaranteed \$6.6 million in park bonds and \$7.2 million in bonds for the Shodeen Project based upon casino revenues. This puts us in an increasingly risky position as the casino revenue has decreased in the current economic situation.

What strides has Aurora made since 2005 that are most overlooked?

The cooperation between the federal government and the county prosecutor has yielded real reductions in crime but most Aurorans, including the mayor do not understand why their efforts worked. We need a mayor who understands how this was done and how to keep it going. We must be as vocal as we can about that success so that folks in and outside of Aurora know that they can feel safe here.

Do you agree that Aurora's government is too top heavy? Why or why not?

Absolutely our government is too top heavy. The incumbent Mayor has hired layer after layer of middle management and made expensive decisions about our legal representation. The growth in city employees who merely push paper and warm up chairs in offices is an embarrassment. The city employees who actually provide the services, the streets and sanitation, the protection of our lives and property, have become outnumbered by bureaucrats under the current administration. I would examine every department and city manager and determine whether the tasks they perform are 1) necessary city functions, 2) efficient city functions, and 3) whether the functions can be completed with fewer employees.

One way to make city government more efficient would be to create an overall road plan. We need a real and comprehensive road plan that is tied into sewer projects and other maintenance so that we are getting the most from our money and not paying to pave and repave only a few streets. It is a basic responsibility of city government and it needs some attention.

What reasons should make residents believe the Shodeen project will be completed by 2013?

No reason exists. The incumbent Mayor has not made the right decisions about the Shodeen project and change is needed to move things forward. It is clear that the current administration did its due diligence. Approximately 100 tons of contaminated materials have been removed and the site is in no better condition. We may need \$50 to \$70 million in subsidies to get the project moving forward.

From conceptual and financial perspectives, what is right and wrong about the RiverEdge Park project?

The RiverEdge project is a worthwhile goal, but the question we have to ask is can the city afford it at this time? Are we even sure that there is sufficient parking available? It is a massive and poorly planned undertaking and unlike Millennium Park in Chicago, we cannot expect rich socialites to come to our rescue when the costs spiral out of control. During these tough economic times, we need leadership that can prioritize and make the tough decisions about how we spend limited tax dollars.

In your role as an elected official, who specifically – names, not groups -- do you lean on to establish your priorities for the city?

My own experience as someone born and raised in Aurora. My mother, who raised two boys on her own while working two and three jobs and loves this city for all that it is. My wife who loves Aurora as much as I do, and shares the hopes and joys of raising children in this great city. My law partners, who choose to do business in Aurora with me and represent people from all walks of life who live here with us. My colleagues on the city council, whose job is to listen to the concerns of their wards and do what is best for their constituents without regard for their own benefit or the benefit of their campaign coffers.

Does Aurora need – and can it enforce – a campaign finance ordinance? How does such an ordinance become law without becoming as politically charged an issue as it was in 2008?

I held an Ethics Townhall Meeting on January 29th, to learn more ideas from experts and hear the concerns of the citizens of Aurora on how to reform ethics in city government. I already knew that just as sunlight is the greatest disinfectant, transparency in government is the best way to reduce the ability to sell city resources for campaign contributions. And when there is a 70% chance that an elected official's campaign donors obtain a city contract, I know we need to scrutinize the decisions made by that elected official. We must eliminate pay-to-play politics in Aurora and restore the voters' faith in our political process.

As to whether an ordinance is needed or enforceable, I can say that I will act ethically about campaign financing without having to be told to. And when I am mayor and an alderman comes up with an innovative reform, I will not react by stealing that idea and then stalling both in committee. I will make the Aldermen new partners in my administration. I will encourage new thinking and will encourage the debate of any reform idea that shows promise.

As Mayor I will establish a commission to study the feasibility of publicly-financed campaigns for elected offices in Aurora. We need to restore confidence in our elected officials and the operation of our government.

What other issues do you believe will shape the city over the next four years?

The primary issue we face is how to survive and thrive in a time of economic uncertainty. We must maintain excellent city services and improve our schools. We are home to some of the best high schools in the nation and one of the finest small universities in the state. We should look to them as the resources they are and use those institutions the way other cities do. They can help bring in business and visitors and they can help provide ideas about how to improve our city.

We must also continue our fight against crime and the perception that Aurora is a dangerous place to spend time. I have worked to control the problems in housing projects like the Aurora Housing Authority's Jericho Circle on the west side and Forest Ridge Apartments on Aurora's east side. We need to show more support for our police officers when they are on the street. Their morale is very low and it is a shame that they were put in a position by this administration where they felt the need to picket the Mayor. Our police and firemen put their lives in harms way every day and their morale is critical to their efficient and effective operation.

