

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?

We must assume the economy will continue on its current path. There are too many inherent risks to think otherwise. Responsible government stems from an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of the situation. In my experience, government officials hide from the truth and “sugar coat” the results. I believe that the residents need to know the truth of our situation. I would begin with a complete financial audit of our expenditures. We need to eliminate the presumption of “use it or lose it” and replace it with the responsible sense of “use what we need to”.

In the private sector, financial audits are used to categorize expenditures into two categories: essential and non-essential expenditures. This is similar to managing and maintaining a household budget. I will conduct a financial audit of the spending of the City. The essential expenditures are those that have to be made to maintain the core function of government.

The non-essential expenditures need to be reviewed. Non-essential expenditures that I would consider removing from the budget are the Franklin Covey WIG program, promotional items with the City of Aurora logo, and dues and fees that do not produce value for the City. The key to efficiency is to understand what the City is truly the best at, and conversely identifying what the City is unable to do. In a time of recession, government cannot be all things to all people, nor should it try.

The financial audit will also focus on personnel expenditures as well. There is duplication of responsibilities in upper and middle management. I will restructure these positions, and whether it results in job loss remains to be seen. To be more efficient the City of Aurora must be more streamlined and reduced in shape and size while increasing productivity. The financial audit will start at the Mayor's office and work its way down to the other departments.

I would look to expand the use of new technologies, institute work from home programs, and restructure the work week for eligible employees to four 10-hour days instead of the traditional five day work week. By working with employees, and not consultants, we can have a more efficient and productive City of Aurora.

The City of Aurora cannot afford to rely on the president's economic recovery plan or funding from the State of Illinois. The economic recovery plan is a one-time opportunity, not a permanent funding stream and if awarded, should be a compliment to a sound fiscal plan; not a savior for a weak budget. The State of Illinois simply is not financially sound and cannot be relied on for additional funding sources. The City of Aurora needs to have

a long-term resolve to maintain fiscal stability. True fiscal stability is not measure by a bond rating alone, but is measured by how effectively the City of Aurora can achieve affordable and stable funding for maintenance and repairs to our roads, bridges and ailing infrastructure. This can be done without burdening the taxpayers further or increasing our debt load.

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?

Due to the fact that City Council is only given a report once a year, when the contract is up for renewal, I cannot answer this question. As an Alderman we are not privy to the Lobbyist's monthly reports.

Thus, I will focus on the facts. We are experiencing the worst economic condition in more than a quarter of a century. The nation's financial system teetered on the brink of collapse and there is no end in sight. Any *honest* assessment of our City's economy, and the economy of our State and Nation, has to recognize that things are likely to get worse before they get better. That being said, non-essential expenditures need to be realized and eliminated.

I feel that the expenditure of the lobbyist should be eliminated. This is a duplication of services, due to the fact that we have both our State Representative and State Senator living in Aurora. As an involved Mayor, I will work with our elected representatives in Springfield to promote Aurora's legislative agenda. If specific items arise that warrant a lobbyist, then I would bid out the package to ensure competitive bidding on the work needed. This is similar to the method used by the City of Naperville and the Kane County Board. Using this technique, the City of Aurora would reduce expenditures and deliver the best result for the least amount of cost.

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

Economic development in the City of Aurora has struggled for many years. The introduction of the Riverboat Casino into the downtown of Aurora was promised to be the answer to revitalizing downtown Aurora and providing economic development opportunities. While other Cities used their riverboat money wisely, the City of Aurora has allowed the Riverboat money to be used for recurring city expenditures and has little to show for the over \$100 million it has received. I view economic development in terms of jobs created, providing a diversified job base, and new avenues for entrepreneurial endeavors.

The City has lost sight of the fact that more jobs are created by promoting small businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises than in large corporations. I will support the small business community. The economic development department will be instructed to conduct a survey on which stores or shopping opportunities the citizens of Aurora would like to envision in their downtown, (this is similar to the initiative taken by the Village of

Montgomery) and I will work diligently to bring them into our downtown. Providing a district where small businesses can flourish automatically increases the job availability.

We cannot ignore the demand for wind and solar power in this country is about to explode. President Obama has announced ambitious plans to double our nation's use of these renewable energy sources in just three years. As the nation's demand for renewable energy goes up, so, too, does the demand for the technologies and products that are critical to the new energy industry. The City of Aurora can seize upon this surge in demand for renewable energy by creating sustainable energy financing districts. These districts will promote weatherizing homes, businesses and other public buildings. Installing energy efficiency and renewable energy technology will provide a new avenue for job creation.

I have consistently opposed unjustified taxes and increased fees as Alderman for the past 6 years. Unreasonably high property taxes force residents to move out of the City. I will continue to strive to maintain taxes as low as possible. I have voted against excessive taxes and spending, irresponsible borrowing and deficit budgets.

When the City of New York lowered its Hotel/Motel tax, contrary to popular belief, the City experienced an increase in revenue. The City of Aurora needs to lower its unreasonably high food and beverage tax and sales tax to spur more spending in this down economy and make our vendors more competitive with adjacent communities.

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

The City of Aurora, under my administration, will start thinking strategically and act comprehensively. The process of focusing on single projects and not a comprehensive downtown redevelopment plan with adequate funding has continued to stifle economic downtown development plans. Large projects, like the East Bank i.e. Shodeen project has cost millions with a high risk of failure, when those funds could have been more beneficial to generate small business retention and creation in the downtown.

Downtown redevelopment is feasible. I will work to change the overall perception of downtown, identify which stores are desirable for shoppers, create a mixture of franchise owners and small business specialty shops, create a two way entry system which would include changing the one way direction of New York Street, provide additional parking and remove the parking meters.

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?

The City of Aurora needs to live within its means and break away from the status quo. I will focus on what everyone in Aurora needs and cares most about: **jobs**. The City of Aurora needs to refocus the view of economic development and diversify our job base.

I will create the Small Employer Quality Jobs Five-Year Incentive. This program would promote job creation and expansion by providing an annual incentive for the first five years of a new or expanded qualifying small business (90 employees or less). The annual incentive would be based on the number of new eligible employees making at least minimum wage and would be up to five percent (5%) of the taxable wages generated.

I will also create a Standardized Incentive Program for Large Employers. This program would also focus on new job creation and expansion, awarding up to 2.5% of taxable wages for the first five years of new or expanded qualifying businesses. The creation of sustainable energy financing districts would provide a demand for job creation in the green infrastructure employment field and thus attracting renewable energy companies.

Small business development zones will be created to assist small businesses that are not located in downtown, but are located in economically depressed areas. These zones would make available façade and assistance programs similar to the incentive programs offered in the downtown business district.

I would use financial incentives, such as tax rebates, to attract businesses. Financial incentives, such as property tax and sales tax rebates, are good tools for commercial development when used for qualifying businesses that generate jobs and revenue for the city. I believe that the City of Aurora should strive to eliminate the use of Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIF) due to the negative impact to the school districts. It is this reason why I voted against the extension of the downtown TIF district.

What are your thoughts on Aurora's debt load?

From December 31, 2005 to the present, based on City Audited financials and budgets, the City of Aurora's total debt load has increased approximately 92% since December 31, 2005. This administration has used the money from the Riverboat Casino as collateral and sole repayment source for many loans. This practice does not contribute to maintaining a long term goal towards fiscal stability.

Excessive loans and irresponsible borrowing has contributed to the State of Illinois being \$9 billion dollars behind its obligations. The City of Aurora is following down this path by a 92% increase in debt. Fiscal stability is not reflected by a bond rating alone; it is measured by how effectively the City of Aurora can achieve affordable but stable funding for maintenance and repairs to our roads, bridges and ailing infrastructure. Fiscal stability can be done without burdening the taxpayers further or increasing our debt load by eliminating excessive spending and borrowing, maintaining a sound financial plan and staying within our budget.

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

I truly believe that the attention to neighborhood roads and improvements that each and every ward alderman gives to their districts is often overlooked. While road repairs do

not make newspaper headlines, it is a constant struggle for each alderman to identify roads and infrastructure that is in need of repair.

The City of Aurora has shifted its neighborhood road repair obligation to be funded solely by Riverboat Casino funds. To be fiscally stable, the City of Aurora needs to shift this burden on to a more stable revenue source and use the Riverboat Casino funds for one time expenditures, downtown redevelopment and to help the schools. That was the original intent of the ordinance which allowed the Riverboat to come to Aurora, and we should strive to use the Riverboat funds for what they were originally intended for.

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

There is duplication of responsibilities in upper and middle management. I will restructure these positions, and whether it results in job loss remains to be seen; however, to be more efficient the City of Aurora needs to be more streamlined and reduced in shape and size while increasing productivity. I will start by reducing the size of the Mayor's office. Expenditures for the Mayor's office have increased by 36% since January 2005; and I will work to reduce them.

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

The only thing that would make residents believe that the Shodeen project will be completed is the announcement that ComEd will move its substation. To date, there has been no announcement. The City of Aurora has foolishly entered into an agreement with no definitive date of completion, no avenue for recapture of the millions of dollars already spent and no guarantee that ComEd will move the substation. The Beacon News reported a cost of moving the substation to be around \$13 million and ComEd stated that they will not pay for the move. Representatives from Shodeen have stated that they will not build if the substation remains

Again, I will focus on the facts. We are experiencing the worst economic condition in more than a quarter of a century. The nation's financial system teetered on the brink of collapse and there is no end in sight. Any *honest* assessment of our City's economy, and the economy of our State and Nation, has to recognize that things are likely to get worse before they get better. That being said, I do not believe that this project will be built by 2013 nor do I believe the City will have the financial ability to fulfill the obligations it agreed to in the Development agreement, which I voted against.

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

Financial perspective:

Again, we have to look at the current state of our economy. We are experiencing the worst economic condition in more than a quarter of a century. This park was another

project that was not properly planned. The park was presented with a first phase cost of over \$12 million dollars. There is no funding plan to pay for this park, and the city has again taken a loan out with only the Riverboat casino money as collateral and the sole repayment source.

This park was presented with charitable gifting providing 52% of the first phase cost. It is unreasonable to spend taxpayer's money on this lavish of a park much less expect 52% of the costs to be donated by companies in this current economic time of high unemployment. In addition, there are no plans in place to complete this project beyond where we are now, which is the first half of Phase 1 only. It is, in part, because of these reasons that I voted against the RiversEdge Park.

Conceptual perspective:

According to flood plain data, this site would be difficult to develop into high-rise condominium buildings. With the train station in close proximity, the City of Aurora should have realized that the highest and best use for this land was to maintain the river walk and compliment it with small businesses and commercial uses for both commuters and walkers alike. The economic potential of this site would have created jobs and stability in addition to creating an enjoyable destination for walkers along the river walk path. The more ideal location for a park / entertainment venue would be the current site of the Shodeen (or East Bank) project. Studies have shown that land which is highly contaminated, the highest and best use for it is park space. In addition, we need an attraction to draw people into the downtown core.

The RiversEdge Park is designed to be a full service entertainment venue. The creation of this park also creates additional expenditures that the City cannot afford. This park would require increased staff to monitor the site, remove trash and debris not only from the green space and amphitheater, but potentially from the Fox River, in addition to electrical and general maintenance costs. We have already seen additional landscaping fees over \$94,000 with proposed landscaping to be \$958,000.

The amphitheater area is proposed to hold ticketed events with seating for 6,000 people. This would require extra overtime staff to manage and coordinate events that are not free and open to the public. The large amount of proposed people crossing Route 25/Broadway will generate the need for police officers to monitor traffic and ensure pedestrian safety during events. Large events would cause traffic disruption and create safety concerns for drivers as well as pedestrians. I do not believe this is the proper site for this type of entertainment venue.

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

Throughout my role as an alderman, I have met the most amazing people. At every event and function I meet people and ask them their view of the city and what changes they

think should be made. I do not rely on one person or a group of individuals, because I believe you have to listen to all the different residents that make Aurora unique.

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?

After collecting over \$4 million dollars in campaign contributions, on November 7, 2006, then Governor Blagojevich stated “The legislation I proposed would have also limited individual contributions to \$2,000 per election”. What we have in the City of Aurora is exactly the same, after collecting over \$195,000 in campaign contributions; we now have a Mayor who claims to be collecting only \$1,500 from city contractors and developers less than a year before re-election. Someone who has been part of the system for so many years cannot change it. I will bring true ethics reform to the Mayors office, which the current administration has not done. We have learned from Springfield that comprehensive ethics reform is needed.

Government is created to protect the governed, not the governing. I will ensure that all individuals and companies are treated fairly and equally. At the Government Operations Committee last year, I called for a complete ban on contributions from contractors, businesses and developers who have a vested interest with the City of Aurora as a start towards ethics reform.

My first action as Mayor will be to present a comprehensive Campaign Finance Ordinance which includes:

- (1) Elected officials shall disclose the receipt of any campaign contribution as defined in Section 9-1.4 of the Election Code (10 ILCS 5/9-1.4) which is in excess of one hundred and fifty dollars (\$150.00) and which was received within one year prior to any vote involving directly or indirectly the party that made the contribution. The elected official shall disclose such contributions by announcing his/her receipt of such in an open meeting prior to such vote.
- (2) Elected officials shall not knowingly solicit or accept a campaign contribution from a City employee or an immediate family member of a City employee.
- (3) Elected officials or their agents may not knowingly approach any City employee to seek their signature on a nominating petition.
- (4) Elected officials are prohibited from knowingly seeking and/or accepting campaign contributions, as defined in Section 9-1.4 of the State Election Code, from: (a) vendors currently doing business with the City; or (b) individuals or entities with petitions, requests, bid proposals and/or RFP/RFQ submissions pending before the City and requiring City Council approval or similar action.
- (5) All vendor contracts to which the City is a party shall contain a provision wherein the

vendor agrees to refrain from making campaign contributions, as defined in Section 9-1.4 of the State Election Code, directly or indirectly to elected officials and any challengers seeking to serve as elected officials. As part of the Village RFP/RFQ process, potential vendors shall be required to disclose any campaign contributions made by them to elected officials within the three (3) year period preceding the date of the current RFP/RFQ.

(6) Violation of the ordinance will result in a fine up to \$1,500 to the contributor and the immediate return of the contribution. Repeat violations could result in the removal of the elected official for misconduct.

(7) The creation of an independent ethics review board is needed to ensure fair and equal enforcement of this ordinance.

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

I cannot stress this point enough. We are experiencing the worst economic condition in more than a quarter of a century. The nation's financial system teetered on the brink of collapse and there is no end in sight. Any *honest* assessment of our City's economy, and the economy of our State and Nation, has to recognize that things are likely to get worse before they get better. The City of Aurora needs to realize the dire consequences of irresponsible spending, deficit budgets and excessive debt obligations. This economic slump is not going to resolve itself quickly, and unemployment figures will continue to rise, property values will decline and foreclosure rates will increase. These issues coupled with rising costs will affect the City of Aurora. I will work to achieve a stable financial plan to pay for our infrastructure needs; promote neighborhood quality so that our property values stay stable, and strive to reduce the burden of taxation and fees. I will restructure the City, reduce irresponsible spending and excessive debt obligations, and streamline operations to become more efficient in order to weather out these tough economic times.