

The BeaconNews

Candidate Questionnaire

If the economy continues on its current path, what is the first step you would take to reduce spending? Would you recommend jobs cuts in that effort?

As a resident of more than ten years, I've been very satisfied with how our local government has managed its finances. Our police department and fire department make us proud. Each time I visit the village hall I see a friendly, well-run team. I see no reasons at this time to justify job cuts. With the steady growth of businesses in the Randall-Orchard commerce area, I should expect that our fiscal situation would at least remain steady or improve due to increased tax revenue from those businesses. As I have campaigned door-to-door, what residents all over the community have repeatedly demanded is simply no "Taj Mahal" projects. It would be my goal to maintain our current fiscal situation, while seeking to improve things by investing with what we have - people, and their energy, insights and skills.

Would you consider raising taxes in order to plug a budget hole?

It's unrealistic & naïve to simply state "no". It's more genuine & practical to say "It depends", because – simply put – it does depend on several factors. If a challenging budget was reviewed and certain items re-evaluated by the community & removed, then the budget changes to fit the finances. On the other hand, if the community demands changes which cannot be addressed by a gradually-increasing business tax revenue, then the finances must change to fit the budget, and a tax increase may be justified. The point to take away here is that the city government must communicate more closely than ever before with the residents themselves when making such decisions.

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

Perhaps the greatest differentiator between myself and my opponents is our approach – or at least our focus – on North Aurora's riverfront downtown area. It would be my goal as Village President to focus almost exclusively on this area for the entire term. I'd start by harnessing & directing the participation of the residential community itself. We would first develop a detailed vision for the entire downtown area, then engage the business community to "temper" that vision, providing guidance & feedback which would transform it into a credible plan. This credible, comprehensive plan would then represent the best possible incentive for businesses to dare invest in re-developing our downtown, because each business would finally understand that it was playing a complementary role in a larger, synergistic picture, rather than pursue a risky solo venture. This effort would produce a downtown re-vitalized on several levels – cultural, commercial and civic. New businesses would mean local job growth, and the resulting increased tax revenue would

continue to fuel economic development. It all starts with the residents, and leading them to develop this plan...

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

After close to ten years of witnessing various such programs, I've concluded that such tools don't work by themselves; they're not magic. Instead, I've realized that – if I were a candidate business – what I would need in order to risk investing in re-developing a small piece of North Aurora's downtown – is the knowledge that there is a plan for all of it. Just as many of us have invested in homes, we needed to see the entire subdivision as a model on a board in a developer's office. We needed to see the streets, the parks, the sidewalks, the bike paths, the access to trains & highways. Once we saw that "plan", the whole picture became truly credible to us, and we became convinced to invest in our piece of it.

By approaching business development in a similar manner, it will be the creation of a genuine plan for North Aurora's downtown which convinces businesses to invest. Then – as with home sales – if incentives are provided (intelligently rather than sparingly) to interested businesses, our community may begin to realize the gradual transformation of its downtown into the commercial, civic & cultural soul that it is supposed to be.

Without an incumbent running, the village will have new leadership no matter who wins. What previous experience qualifies you more than your opponents to lead on day 1? I have lived in North Aurora for over 10 years now, and during that time have only seen our riverfront/downtown area continue to slide backwards when it should have been progressing. Every local politician I heard from seemed quite complacent about this situation - like he or she had simply accepted this as a problem without a solution. Yet whenever I looked at our neighbors to the north & south of us, I saw them making genuine, tangible progress re-developing their own communities. It dawned on me that what was needed was a different kind of politician. What was needed was a leader who actually knew how to analyze difficult problems, and then work with the one resource (not money) our community had available - its people, and their time & energy. I realized those skills were precisely what I had been using for most of my career.

For over 20 years I've been a professional consultant, project manager, engineer & educator, working with groups of people who are trying to face a challenge which they don't think they can surmount by themselves. I've made a successful career out of bringing people together and showing them how they CAN be successful with just a little investment in themselves.

What I bring to the role of village president is the ability to analyze large, complex problems, and decompose them down into a series of smaller, manageable problems. I also bring a talent for organizing large groups of people into large cohesive teams, and

leading them toward goals they all share. Additionally, my very career is centered on high-tech collaboration & communications technology, making me the type of leader who naturally communicates using all the latest technologies at his disposal. That means that poor communication simply ceases to exist in Mark Vogt's "connected" community...

I'm convinced these are precisely the skills needed for our community to come together and re-vitalize our riverfront/downtown area.

Communitywide, what are your top three specific priorities?

My top priority will be the re-vitalization of North Aurora's Riverfront/Downtown Area, which I will define as everything within 3 blocks of our State Street Bridge. This re-vitalizing would include 2 concurrent activities:

1. striving to get the empty commercial buildings within that area filled; and
2. working with the residential, commercial, cultural & civic communities to begin visioning & planning what that entire area could be / should be. For me, this second activity is critical to the achieving genuine progress for our village.

In both of these priorities I see it as essential that the residents themselves become actively engaged. The only way to tackle such challenges when there's no money is to involve what you do have - people. There are many added benefits to such an approach: communication issues disappear because the community itself is actively engaged; agenda conflicts disappear because the community itself is participating in the decisions being made.

This strategy of mass-participation, mass-communication, mass-"collaboration" would be a daunting task for candidates who did not actively leverage the technologies currently available. However, such technologies - texting, collaboration websites, social networking websites and even email - are the very technologies which I have worked to develop over my entire career, so the prospect of utilizing such tools to rally the residents and empower them to solve their own problems comes quite naturally to me.

What's working well in North Aurora these days? What's not?

North Aurora has enjoyed 40% residential growth in the past 7 years. Over the past few years the community has also enjoyed the strong beginning of a commercial area between Randall Road and Orchard Road. We have always had a river park area which is the envy of many other communities. North Aurora has a police department & fire department which are second to none. We're working on a new police station, and have a new-near fire station on the far western edge of the community. Our local elementary schools generate smart, happy students. North Aurora shares the new Herget Middle School, enjoying newfound identity and pride. The still-new Messenger Public Library continues to draw its residents toward the center of the community. Woodman's provides us our very own grocery store – something for which we waited far too long. Anchor stores like Target, JC Penney and even Best Buy now appear firmly-rooted in the commercial area, with more growth weekly in neighboring plots.

That all said, you can ask many people on the street about North Aurora's downtown, and at least half the people – residents all – would ask you “Where is that?” It seems to me that re-developing the downtown area has proven so daunting to past administrations that they understandably pursued less challenging problems. It is my hope that the success in these other areas will allow the next administration some “breathing room” to take action toward genuinely re-vitalizing the downtown area.