

PEORIA PEOPLE'S PROJECT
P.O. BOX 6165 PEORIA, IL 61601
TEL 309.423.3213
www.peoriapeoplesproject.org

Peoria People's Project Candidate Questionnaire 2019
City Council at-Large

Candidate Name: **Andre W. Allen**

Candidate Email: **allenforpeoria@gmail.com**

Campaign Email: **allenforpeoria@gmail.com**

Candidate Phone: **309-868-6867** Campaign Phone: **n/a**

Candidate Questions

Please provide written answer to the questions below. We encourage you to keep your responses to 1-2 paragraphs and to provide specific and concrete answers to your questions.

1. What do you believe City Council's role is in building a world class education system in Peoria?

The role of City Council is to ensure there's a productive relationship between the Board of Education and City Hall. It's important that these two entities have open communication and work collectively whenever possible to provide the best educational opportunities for our youth. Although Peoria Public Schools isn't a line item of the City's budget, the school system has a lastly impact on the city. Our education system defines our workforce and it's crucial we are increasing graduation rates, providing competency base learning opportunities, and developing recruitment strategies to address the more than 40 current teaching vacancies in Peoria Public Schools. As alumni and active volunteer of Peoria Public Schools, I will make it a priority to aid our education system and foster effective partnerships.

2. A recent study by Governing.com stated that the Peoria Metro Area schools were the most segregated in the country. What solutions would you offer to correct this glaring disparity?

The results from this study were disappointing, but not surprising. As someone who graduated from Peoria Public Schools(PPS), visits PPS frequently within the city of Peoria, the racial disparities between our inner-city schools and those outside areas is extreme. For this to change we need to continue develop strategies that address the unemployment

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rates of our black/minority citizens that can allow us access to fair wages, homeownership, and educational/vocational training opportunities. Addressing these areas would increase the amount of minority citizens able to live in these surrounding areas (Dunlap, Metamora, Washington, etc.) and go to those respective schools.

Honestly, I would like to see us focus on improving our local school district, Peoria Public Schools instead of putting so much effort into integrating school districts/systems that don't want huge number of minorities and low social economical citizens. I know that there has been discussion about integration/combination of school districts and I can't confirm that's the correct answer.

3. If the state of Illinois raises the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, how will you ensure that employers are paying workers in Peoria the new minimum wage?

The city will need to complete wage audits of businesses to ensure they are complaint with state law. A mechanism must be created that vets new/established businesses on an annual basis to ensure compliance. I would like there to be a resource to where citizens can make the city aware of those businesses who aren't cooperating. Citizens would have the option to report this anonymously if they don't feel comfortable giving their information.

4. Do you support a fair tax structure in Illinois where the rich pay their fair share of taxes? If so, would you use your political capital to move this agenda forward?

We need the economy to be fair for everyone regarding our tax structure. Often huge corporations and the wealthy are given tax incentives/breaks to which they're paying a lower tax rate than working families. We need to ensure we our working class is provided with tax relief, which allows us to reinvest in ourselves and the economy. At the local level, we are limited regarding tax brackets, but I would be interested discussion and tactics from those at the state and federal level.

5. What is your plan to equitably integrate our neighborhoods?

Affordable housing is necessary to integrate neighborhoods in our city because of social economic gap between white and minorities but it must be strategic. I would support small scale developments to push this agenda. I believe that if it's too extreme and we do large scale developments, we will see mass exodus of those neighborhoods that we are looking to integrate. If we start with duplexes, townhomes, or repurposing current homes into "affordable" housing options, we can integrate neighborhoods in a manner that will be ideally more receptive to current residents.

I truly believe in reinvesting in our current neighborhoods and making them desired places to live because of great homes, schools, commerce, and citizens. I feel that if we

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aggressively integrate neighborhoods in Peoria, we will see a continue trend of urban sprawl and we'll have this same conversation in 15 years.

6. Peoria as a whole has the highest black unemployment rate of any metropolitan area in the nation. What solutions do you have to lower the unemployment rate of members of the black community?

It's interesting that the national average for black unemployment is at a record now 6%, but is almost 3 times that amount in Peoria at 17.9%. We are truly getting left behind in our city and its unacceptable. We will need to seek employment opportunities that provide livable wages for black citizens, whether they're established or new businesses/companies.

Providing jobs, will not be enough as we must ensure our black citizens are receiving the education, vocational training, and specialty skills necessary to fill these roles. I would like to see improved collaboration between City Hall and our respective school systems in the city (i.e. public, private, vocational, etc)

City Hall can help support the expansion of vocational and educational programs in our city where graduates of these programs (healthcare, manufacturing, technology, etc) enter careers that provide wages above the median. Funding of these programs are always a challenge, so we will need to seek any grant or private monetary opportunities. We can also explore working with current companies and investors to shift the mindset of intentionally hiring black citizens to fill their roles. Companies will need to demonstrate they are doing their due diligence to hire qualified black applicants. Although this may not seem fair to other races in our city, we must educate them that this is an issue that we are all feeling, whether directly or indirectly. There are a variety of cultural competency based training opportunities that are available that we could explore and suggest for business who are looking to hire more black employees. When our black citizens begin to make more income, and receive the necessary skills/attributes to be successful, we will see a positive impact and decrease in our unemployment rate.

7. The south side community, which has the highest population of low income, black residents in Peoria, has twice the rates of breathing problems like asthma and COPD than the rest of the city of Peoria due to the coal electric plant that sits nearby. What will you do to ensure environmental justice on the south side?

I will ensure that policy is created and enforces equitable environmental practice to our citizens on the Southside to make up for the decades of harmful pollutions our citizens have endured. As a city, we need to explore possible restitution from this plant and if we can receive this, re-invest those funds into the Southside. I believe that environmental justice is a form of public safety.

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8. What ideas or solutions do you have to solve the food desert issues that currently exist within black and brown communities in Peoria?

The food desert issue is a crisis for our city. To solve this issue, we must develop a business development model, that supports sustaining a grocery store and other commerce in the 61605/03 areas. I would investigate and potentially suggest providing temporary tax break incentives to those who would be interested in establishing business and commerce in these areas, especially those that provide goods and services that are specifically addressing the needs of our residents (i.e. grocery stores) and looking to repurpose vacant properties. Tax break incentives that would have a “sunset” of 3 years. This would allow these businesses to conquer some of the startup cost and barriers that they run into early on. These businesses can gain some positive traction, while generating revenue, providing jobs (intentionally *targeting those who live in these areas if possible*), and sales tax to our city. Ideally after their “sunset” tax break has concluded they should be in a better financial place to pay established property taxes per city guidelines.

Adding productive business to these areas will have a direct impact on property values, as more money will begin to circulate. I would like to see us empower those living in these areas to be a part of this initiative. As residents in these areas, they should have some businesses who are owned by their local neighbors. Let's intentionally target those who have these aspirations and help them achieve their goals. They understand their local consumers/neighbors and will be able to establish a positive report and relationship the community. Relationship building will be essential in the success of any business entering our areas.

9. Our schools and our city needs additional revenue to make investments in underserved areas of the community. Would you support closing TIFs and returning money back to the taxing bodies such as Peoria Public Schools, Parks and Libraries?

I believe this should be a case by case basis. It's difficult to say that all TIF's should be closed as some are beneficial to our city. TIF's entice economic development in often neglected areas of our city. I would like us to perform studies, collect data, to make the best-informed decision with expiring TIF dollars. We saw this with the Northside Riverfront TIF that expired, which allowed Peoria Public Schools to be eligible for funds. It's important that the city and local entities are in discussion to determine what is the best landing spot(s) for these funds.

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