

PEORIA PEOPLE'S PROJECT
P.O. BOX 6165 PEORIA, IL 61601
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Peoria People's Project Candidate Questionnaire 2019
City Council at-Large

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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?

Peoria's success is closely tied to the success and reputation of our schools within the City. Thus, the City Council should support all of our schools in the City and bring initiatives forward such as closing the City's near northside TIF which I brought forward and proposed to the Council in the spring of 2018 shortly after Board of Education adopted a resolution asking the City Council to close that TIF.

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?

See answer to number 5. The programs and initiatives discussed for integrating our neighborhoods will also assist in integrating our schools.

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?

I would advocate that the City allow citizens to file reports to the City's recently reactivated Equal Opportunity Office run by our new Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Once such reports are filed, then the Equality Opportunity Office should investigate and report any employers

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that are not complying with the applicable State minimum wage to the Illinois Department of Labor. Additionally, if a higher minimum wage by region or with exceptions for small businesses is adopted by the State, I would support adding higher wages as a criterion for businesses seeking economic incentives from the City for developing or expanding a business.

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?

I am encouraged by the people that the Governor has surrounded himself with, including Deputy Governor Dan Hynes, a law school classmate and longtime friend and look forward to reviewing any specific proposal that is presented. I will advocate for any plan that is good for the City of Peoria.

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

Improve the availability of affordable housing throughout the City, by continuing to support Southside Office of Concern's and Peoria Opportunity Foundation's projects and developments to provide affordable housing in the City. Develop a comprehensive plan with community and public input on the development of that plan to address our affordable housing needs, not piecemealed together and done behind closed doors. Continue to advocate for mixed income housing developments. Advocate for providing inclusion zoning and requiring a certain percentage of all new residential developments to include affordable and low-income housing units as well as use as a criterion for City economic development incentives. Explore removing barriers such as zoning prohibitions against multi-unit buildings in some residential districts.

Continue to advocate to strengthen and reinvest in the City's older neighborhoods as I have since I have been on the Council, this has been one of my top priorities. Continue to support, promote, and facilitate small scale development which has been successful in revitalizing Main Street/Sheridan corridor and parts of the Warehouse District. These efforts which the City helped facilitate are growing and gaining strength helping spur reinvestment in our older neighborhoods, attracting people and businesses to the neighborhoods. I will advocate for focusing on other similar areas in our City like the East Bluff and near northside, near the Greeley school and Morton Park where the new Habitat homes have been built. I will continue to support Habitat for Humanity and Paul Joseph's efforts on the near north side/north valley to build homes. Continue supporting the Romains Art Center in the old Greeley school and Peoria's entire arts community including artists who have studios in the north valley and south Peoria, Big Picture Peoria, First Fridays and mural programs.

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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?

I will continue to support and advocate that the City adopt the 100 percent green solution to the CSO. If this solution is agreed to by the City and EPA and implemented, a whole new economic sector will be developed in the City of Peoria which will include new jobs and businesses for all citizens including the currently unemployed black community. I will continue to support and expand Peoria Corps which is part of the CSO pilot project which provides basic soft and environmental job skills training to unemployed residents who work on the City's environmental and CSO programs. I am advocating for this program to be expanded into a construction corps similar to Project Jumpstart in Baltimore, Maryland in which contractors and construction trade workers train individuals recently released from prison, recovering addicts and unemployed individuals and assist them in obtaining employment in the construction sector. I will continue to support and work to expand the Well Farm Initiative's agricultural apprentice program in which the City and GITM provide training to unemployed residents of the southside on growing, harvesting and selling food and flowers at the farmer's market. I will advocate for the City to start a program similar to the Pathways program in Washington DC in which the City provides a six-week basic life skill training to individuals who are unemployed and have criminal convictions. After the training the City employs these individuals for 6 months while providing further job skills training.

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?

Specifically, regarding the Edwards Plant, national environmental groups and their local members as standing plaintiffs won a Clean Air Act case in Federal Court in 2016 finding the plant liable for emissions exceedances. The penalty phase is ongoing and may cause the shutdown of the plant or force it to spend money to clean up its act. I have monitored and spoken out against Governor Rauner's attempt to rewrite the pollution rules to allow the Edwards plant to continue to pollute. Fortunately, the Illinois Pollution Control Board denied the request. I will request the City legal department to research whether the City can file a claim against the plant on behalf of its citizens.

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

Food deserts should be treated as a public health emergency by the City and City County Health Department. The City should use economic opportunity zone designations to leverage

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City resources to incentivize and attract retailers to the Southside, East Bluff, Central Bluff and Near Northside. Additionally, wellness checks should be conducted of existing groceries stores that serve our poorer communities such as the Kroger on Sterling to determine its continued economic viability and to see if they need assistance, we need to focus on prevention of any further store closings. Smart growth should be implemented so that competitors such as the dollar store on Western which opened at the same time as the Save A Lot which impacted the failure of the store are not allowed to open near potentially struggling grocery stores that take customers away.

I will continue to support and expand the Wells Farm Initiative on the southside, particularly the Urban Agricultural Apprentice Program run by Gift in the Moment (GITM) which trains unemployed residents of the southside in urban agricultural job skills including the planting and raising of fruits, vegetables and flowers providing employment and food access to an area that is a food desert. We should continue to explore and support efforts to set up a food hub in the southside, east bluff or near northside which would include provide education on growing and cooking food, and assistance in developing microenterprises such as making jelly and jam and selling it, as well as be a location for an urban famer's market where the link card is accepted. We should also continue to explore food coops similar to the coops in Bloomington and Champaign. I will continue to support and encourage community gardens and urban farming, such as the urban farm that Andres Diaz has developed with his family on the near northside. As a note, I proposed, assisted in developing and lobbied the council to approve the Urban Farm Ordinance which was adopted by the Council two to three years ago. I support exploring the development of a food salvage outlet that carries dented cans, damaged cardboard boxes, items past sell by dates but not expired and ugly fruit in one of the neighborhoods where there is a food desert.

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9. Our schools and our city need 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?

Yes. I have been advocate for closing the City's TIFs when they expire and sending the remaining funds back to the other taxing bodies (the public school districts and park district, the Peoria Public Library is part of the City of Peoria, so remaining TIF funds do not go to the Peoria Public Library) rather than shifting any remaining funding to adjoining TIFs as the City has done in the past. This spring, I started the effort and advocated for the close of the City's near northside TIF rather than moving the funding to another adjoining TIF. I also requested the City Manager to provide the Council a report on all of the City's TIF's, their location, the amount of funding in each TIF, the length of time left in each TIF, whether they qualify under the law for a renewal, as well as the notice and hearing requirements for renewing TIFs or shifting remaining funding to an adjoining TIF in order to ensure that the public is aware and that those of us on the Council in support of returning TIF funds to the other taxing bodies know the process and serve as a check on City staff and other council members who might have other plans.

Additionally, I proposed and will advocate that any future TIFs adopted by the City include a carve out for the Peoria Public Schools District similar to what was done for the most recent TIF adopted by Peoria Heights for the Peoria Heights School District, when I was representing the Peoria Heights School District. I have negotiated and included such carve outs during my legal representation of other school districts.

Thank you for your participation.