

PEORIA PEOPLE'S PROJECT
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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?

For decades, City Council has taken actions that have segregated and disinvested from Peoria's oldest and most diverse neighborhoods. The City annexed large amounts of land further north, subsidizing white flight that left the neighborhoods in the urban core facing increasing challenges, while dwindling the tax base that funds Peoria Public Schools.

To achieve a world class education system in our City, we do not need to invent a never-before-seen education policy. Our schools already have competent teachers, talented administrators, and students eager to learn. What City Council needs to do is to reinvest in our urban core communities, so that parents can live in dignified affordable housing and earn a living wage in their neighborhood, keeping their children from experiencing the poverty and crime that currently keep them from being able to succeed in school. Disinvestment happened over decades and the effects of reinvestment will not happen overnight, but elected officials should commit to collective impact efforts like Align Peoria that support institutional partners in engaging and hiring local high school youth right now.

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?

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School segregation is closely related to residential segregation. Along with reinvesting in our urban core neighborhoods, the City needs to be a vocal advocate for quality affordable housing throughout Peoria and work with institutional partners such as affordable housing developers, employers and Realtors to ensure we work together to not maintain our segregated metro area, but work actively and intentionally to integrate. We should make it easy and attractive for teachers to live close to schools and young families to remain within District 150.

Simultaneously, City Council can be a leader in making the case for consolidating units of government - such as our schools - that would enable resources to be shared across segregated communities, ensuring that a students' opportunities in the classroom are not dependent on the zipcode that they live in.

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?

If there is evidence that employers in Peoria are not paying workers the State of Illinois' minimum wage, I would direct City staff to cooperate with state agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Labor, to ensure that these employers comply with state laws. Additionally, I would look into how City Hall might be able to use its formal or informal powers to encourage employers to comply as quickly as possible, such as excluding employers in violation of state law from being able to benefit from City incentives or services.

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 have a lot of work to do in Peoria, but there's no denying that we are greatly affected by policy and programs that are made in Springfield, Illinois and Washington D.C. While 1 in 10 Illinoisians live in poverty, that statistic is doubly worse in Peoria: more than 1 in 5 people in our City live in poverty.

I will proudly and boldly use my leadership position and political capital as a representative of Peoria to fight for ensuring the rich in our state and country are paying their fair share of taxes based on their income and wealth.

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

For equity to be a result, equity needs to be set as a priority. I will advocate that our strategic plan includes equity as a necessary measurement of economic development's success.

For the past decade, City Council has been dragging its feet to resolve a pending lawsuit from the Environmental Protection Agency to stop polluting the Illinois River. When I worked at the City of Peoria, I was part of a team that built a framework for addressing the environmental and infrastructural challenges to resolve this lawsuit, while also making significant investments in

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public health, economic opportunity, and public infrastructure. Addressing this challenge would be one of the largest public infrastructure projects in our City's history and overwhelmingly benefit our most marginalized neighborhoods, reversing decades of disinvestment from our communities of color and low income.

To complement this investment, I would advocate for equitable development strategies that ensure current residents in neighborhoods are included at the table when developments are considered. Community Benefit Agreements are one way to do this, which invite residents to the table with developers to discuss what the needs of the community are. We can also enforce Inclusionary Zoning, which requires developers that build housing to reserve a portion of their units at an affordable rate. I'm also in favor of public or private land trusts, organizations that acquire vacant buildings and lots to later strategically transfer them in an equitable manner, preventing displacement, preserving affordable homeownership, and supporting generational wealth creation for marginalized communities.

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?

Since the beginning of my campaign - prior to Governor Pritzker's election - I was advocating for raising Peoria's minimum wage. Doing so would benefit all Peorians, but the positive effects would overwhelmingly benefit the Peorians of color that disproportionately represent our minimum wage workers. If our state representatives do not move forward along the path of raising the minimum wage, I will advocate for it at the municipal level.

Additionally, economic development - and especially prospective employers - should be encouraged and, when sustainable and responsible, incentivized to locate in our neighborhoods that have a disproportionately high rate of unemployed Peorians of color. I will support existing bridge programs, apprenticeships, and training opportunities in Peoria to be aligned with community based organizations and training providers in our most disinvested areas.

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?

We should take the lead of the Health Department in considering health outcomes in all of the policies that we consider as a City Council, including planning & zoning, infrastructure development, and economic development deals.

We won't achieve health equity when different parts of town are polluted equally - even if our poorest neighborhoods faced the same levels of environmental health challenges (*which they don't*), they lack economic and medical opportunities to deal with these challenges. We need to support medical services, infrastructure, transportation, and jobs in these communities so they don't face disproportionately negative health outcomes.

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Additionally, I'm a supporter of due diligence on our water company buyout. We need to know the numbers to make an educated decision, because if it makes sense to buy back the water company, we could use the profits to reinvest in our water infrastructure and remediate the lead service lines that exist in our community and impact residents' health.

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 rarely exist in neighborhoods that are experiencing investment, growth in population, and economic opportunity. By reinvesting in our urban core through public infrastructure and setting a vision for equitable economic development, the City of Peoria can build the foundation for grocery stores to return to food deserts. This is not an overnight solution, but is a necessary long-term shift to ensure sustainable access to food in Peoria.

In the short term, I will support creative small-scale food distribution, such as partnering with convenience stores, retail spaces, urban gardens and community centers to ensure every Peorian has access to food.

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?

Like other economic development tools, TIFs meet the goals that we have set for them. When equity and making investments in underserved communities that benefit residents of color and low income are not considered, then resulting TIF-funded projects will not address these challenges.

I will advocate for equity to be a guiding consideration when using TIF funds to support development in our neighborhoods that have the greatest need. Because most economic development projects impact other taxing bodies, these bodies should be consulted when we consider spending TIF funds.

However, if TIF funds are not able to be spent on equitable development, I would advocate for closing TIFs so that the dollars can be returned to the original taxing bodies.

Thank you for your participation.