

Rita Ali

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?

The city council should be a major partner working in collaboration with schools (pre-school, primary, secondary, postsecondary) within the city to assure that their needs for adequately educating children and adults is fully met. The city can help to leverage resources, solicit funding, and attract teachers and other professionals to our area. They can be a partner in helping to build character for youth, securing opportunities for summer youth employment, introducing public safety careers (police, fire, dispatch, etc.), and addressing environmental barriers to student success

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?

School segregation is most associated with where people live, where people can afford to live, and where people want to live. White flight from economically depressed and predominately black neighborhoods, decades of disinvestment in older neighborhoods, urban sprawl, and poor performing inner city schools have all contributed to segregated school systems. We must address issues of equity in a comprehensive and intentional manner. I am proposing a Peoria Plan for Social Justice and Equity similar to that of King County, Washington.
<https://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/strategic-plan.aspx>

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- 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 state has, indeed, raised the minimum wage to \$15/hour to be implemented on a graduated time schedule. Businesses will be required to comply with the new law or face penalties including the loss of their ability to employ workers. Businesses not complying with the law can be reported to the state and other regulatory authorities. Those that choose to pay people less under the table will risk losing their business license.

- 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 certainly support a fair tax structure in Illinois. My strategy would be to work through our elected state officials to address these concerns.

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

The only way to accomplish this is to have provisions for affordable housing throughout the city. Affordable housing doesn't just mean public housing through the Peoria Housing Authority or Section 8 vouchers although Section 8 is a good program. Affordable housing includes privately owned property or property purchased with an FHA loan (up to \$172,000e). We have a lack of affordable housing in all parts of the city. Integration will come about as a result of increased skills, opportunities, and wages for all people, attractive and quality schools in older neighborhoods, reduced crime in areas such as the South Side and East Bluff, and expanded affordable housing options throughout the city. This cannot be accomplished in a haphazard manner – there must be a strategic plan with measurable goals and objectives.

- 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?**

This is a focus of my work with Illinois Central College. It must be expanded to include additional partners and stakeholders. We must address education and skill shortages among African American residents. They must obtain a credential beyond high school in order to acquire a living wage. There is great need for expanded GED training opportunities, preapprentice and apprenticeship training, career development, and soft skills training. We must remove barriers to employment for ex-offenders in our city. The work of Rep. Jehan Gordon Booth to expunge and seal records should be supported and expanded. We must make our citizens more employable. Education, employment training, and diversity has been my life's work.

- 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?**

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I would work to establish a city Commission on Environmental Justice. This group, appointed by the city council and comprised of concerned and informed citizens, Sierra Club member(s), health professionals, and other individuals would determine environmental risks, make them known, and propose action to mitigate them.

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

I would like for Peoria to explore a relationship with Whole Foods and visit those cities and stakeholders where Whole Foods has set up stores in economically depressed areas similar to what we have on the South Side and Near North Valley. Whole Foods located in the very poor Englewood area of Chicago. Whole Foods has provided jobs, support for local vendors, and has boosted healthy food options, ultimately improving the quality of life for area residents and paving the way for future large-scale investment in Englewood:
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-englewood-whole-foods-one-year-later20170920-story.html>

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 would want to examine each of the TIFs before saying yes to closing all TIFs. In general, I support this idea and the decision to close the most recent TIF and return those funds to other governmental bodies. I am not 100% opposed to TIFs, however, as used properly, they can be a useful tool for development projects such as passenger rail. There are numerous other incentive tools that might be used instead of TIFs. One of these is Opportunity Zones which allow private investors to delay their capital gain taxes for a period of time.

Thank you for your participation.