

*These questions were asked by **Business PAC of Central Illinois**, “the premier independent, business-focused political action committee focusing on state and local races in the greater Peoria region.”*

NOTE: The distribution of this questionnaire should in no way be construed to represent an endorsement of Peter Kobak by the Business PAC of Central Illinois.

1. What relevant experience do you have to prepare yourself to serve on the City Council?

For the last two and a half years, I worked on the City of Peoria’s Innovation Team, a grant-funded initiative that provided me the opportunity to work with every department in City Hall, elected officials, and community partners. I partnered with engineers to host the City’s First Civic Hackathon, with building inspectors to process map the development process, and with urban planners and economic development specialists to host public meetings with community groups. Over the last year, I facilitated a series of department-level meetings in conjunction with the City Manager on change management and strategic planning. Throughout my time on the Innovation Team, I also forged a network with other innovative teams at city halls across the country to share best practices on government innovation. You will be hard pressed to find another candidate with the breadth of experience that I have working alongside staff, from front-line workers to department heads.

In addition to my time on the Innovation Team, my professional experience spans the private, public, and non-profit sector. I worked for the City of Chicago in the Mayor’s Office of International Relations and Protocol and for Cook County in the State’s Attorney’s Office. I know what it takes for small businesses to grow and thrive, as well. While living in Chicago, I helped grow a digital marketing agency as its first hire to 10 staff within 2 years. I also have spent years cultivating my own freelance web development and graphic design business in addition to my full-time work. Within the non-profit sector, I worked for 2 years as a Community Organizer and Communications Director at a statewide nonprofit that advocated for criminal justice reform.

I’m comfortable navigating and optimizing the bureaucracy that can exist in government, being creative with the slim budgets that exist in the non-profit sector, and understand what it takes to pay employees and grow as a small business.

2. If you are an incumbent, can you please list your accomplishments during this past term?

N/A

3. In your opinion, what is the biggest issue facing the City of Peoria?

The biggest issue facing the City of Peoria is that we don’t have a plan to tackle the biggest issues facing the City of Peoria. We’re missing a concise strategic plan, based on our collective

identity as a City, created in collaboration between City staff, residents, the business community, non-profit leaders, and elected representatives. This plan should articulate aspirational but achievable goals that we measure and revisit on a regular basis. Without this plan and the collective effort to deliver on it in tandem with community stakeholders, we are a ship without rudders, not taking advantage of prevailing winds or strong undercurrents: the talent, time, and treasure that is within Peorians, our region, and the natural assets that make it great.

Outside of City Hall, my experience in the community has showed me that some of our biggest specific issues include sprawl that has left our urban core (the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods) disinvested from, an unacceptable high- and rising- poverty rate, deep racial segregation, and a declining population that reflects a loss of young talent that we need to build up the future of our City.

4. Should the City of Peoria institute its own minimum wage requirement for area businesses and non-profits?

The minimum wage is five dollars lower than what research shows it needs to be for single person living in Peoria. That disparity increases as family size grows. I believe the minimum wage in Peoria should be raised gradually over five years to meet a standard in which workers and their families can afford a basic household budget, and enterprises remain competitive within a state and national context. Doing so will lift people out of poverty, resulting in lower crime and public savings with reduced need for public aid, local businesses will attract high quality and dedicated employees and reduce turnover, and entering the labor force becomes more attractive. I believe we can work out a strategy for raising the minimum wage that supports small businesses in making the gradual transition.

5. How did/how you you have voted on the CEO Council water due diligence assistance offer of \$700,000? Why?

I would have voted in favor of the due diligence assistance offer. I believe elected leaders have a responsibility to explore whether purchasing the water utility is a sound financial decision that would result in lower rates for Peorians, higher standards in water quality, and the possibility of additional funding for public infrastructure. If elected, I will work towards preparing a plan for the next buyout phase, so City Council and the community are prepared to make a decision long before the deadline nears.

6. How did/how would you have voted on the Parcel Fee recently implemented? Why?

I was disappointed with the way in which the Parcel Fee was constructed and implemented. As a councilmember, I will approach decisions that seek to raise any sort of revenue from taxpayers with a lens of equity. When absolutely necessary to implement, taxes should be progressive. The blunt tool of a few levels of taxation for parcels based on square footage does not take into account the value of the property or the owner and what their means are.

I believe that had I been on City Council, there would have been a much broader discussion of how we define, measure, and fund public safety in our community. I would have advocated for equitable and progressive revenue streams, if they were still necessary to have a balanced budget. However, if I had no control over the conversation that led up to the Parcel Fee and was asked to vote for it or cut additional Fire Department and Police Department services, I would have voted for it to avoid cutting the strategy that we currently employ to provide public safety services to Peorians.

7. What ideas do you have for the City to raise revenues or cut expenses?

While working on the Innovation Team, I led a number of projects that reduced expenses in City Hall, such as:

- Empowering front-line staff with process improvement skills borrowed from Lean, Six Sigma, and Denver's Peak Academy. After only a few months of these trainings, an initial pilot composed of a handful of Community Development was developing their own ideas for saving the City days in processing service requests, leading to tens of thousands of dollars in annualized cost savings.
- Using data to improve informed-decision making, like the Data Science Fellowship I started with an interdisciplinary staff of public employees that led to turning days-long reporting for the Fire Department into a few hours.
- Attracting external grants to fund innovative programs, like the AmeriCorps youth program PeoriaCorps, which used national and state funding to employ and train opportunity youth in maintaining public infrastructure.
- Forging public-private partnerships, like the Well Farm at Voris Field, which blended USDA funding and private social impact funding to build one of the nation's largest stormwater farms on a city-owned vacant lot, creating an asset that addresses our combined sewer overflow challenge from a former liability.

By thinking outside of the box with process improvements, investing in data-driven decision-making, external grants, and private partners, I believe the City can reduce its expenses while providing additional value for Peorians. As a Councilmember, I would support and empower staff in seeking these creative solutions that define a modern local government.

8. Should the City set aside revenues to replenish the General Fund or do we not have that luxury at this time?

It is incumbent upon elected leaders to take a long-term perspective on city issues. Otherwise, we might leave future generations in a worse position than we are in today. I believe the current council made a financially sound decision to replenish the General Fund's reserves with \$2 million and we should continue to maintain this level and increase it as our revenues allow for it.

9. Given the burden of public safety employee pensions on our budget, how can the City cut expenses in public safety without dramatically jeopardizing public safety? Or must the City look elsewhere for budget savings?

We need to revisit what it means to advance public safety in 2019, in the next decade, and the next quarter century. It cannot be simplified to the number of firefighters and police officers, but should be driven by a focus on outcomes, whether that be health outcomes, crime rates, or mortality rates. Many of these outcomes are impacted by economic and health opportunities, not only traditional city services like police on a beat or firefighters putting out a fire.

10. What are your plans to support economic growth in Peoria? What do you believe is the role of the City Council in economic development?

I believe crafting a meaningful strategic plan is critical to building a stronger future for our City. At a high level, such a plan serves as a guide for the community and invites the private and non-profit sector to focus efforts on shared priorities around economic development. For example, I believe that developing our urban core is a key focus for not only the City of Peoria, but the entire Peoria MSA. This will not be accomplished by unilateral multi-million dollar development deals by the City, but through coordination between business, the Downtown Development Corporation, labor, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, community groups, and others.

Grow-Your-Own Economic Development Initiatives:

- Support small-scale developers: people who want to incrementally invest in buildings in their neighborhoods through small mixed-use or residential redevelopments. In places where the market is not serving our neighborhoods, the City should empower current residents to develop community spaces that reimagine vacant or abandoned spaces, in order to create opportunities for community and attract additional residents to return to declining neighborhoods. Within this City Hall, this means providing a direction to shift a culture to one where employees are asked to “get to yes.” Rather than using regulations as a way to shutter a project, working with entrepreneurs to achieve their visions and dreams, while considering the health and safety of the community.
- Nurture our homegrown startups that have the potential to scale and become our City’s next large employers, such as Natural Fiber Welding, Bump Boxes, Tada, AutonomouStuff, and others. These businesses will benefit our community through attracting wealth from outside of Peoria by selling their goods and services, as opposed to relying on outside businesses that extract wealth from Peoria.
- Coordinating between Peoria Public Schools, local institutions of higher learning, the Chamber of Commerce, the trades, The Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, and other stakeholders in addressing our skills gap by preparing more young Peorians for the well-paying jobs that already exist in our community, as well as those that will make up the economy of the future.

11. Why should Biz PAC support your candidacy?

From my experience in strategic planning, facilitating diverse stakeholder groups, data-driven decision-making and process-improvement, I am driven by building consensus and setting measurable goals for the future of Peoria based on data. I am transparent in my core beliefs and values that are driving my decision to become a leader for our community. I believe we need to reinvest in our urban core, invest in individuals' economic opportunities, support small-scale development, and reduce our liabilities as a City by encouraging more dense and strategic infrastructure and economic growth.