

*These questions were asked by the **Peoria Journal Star**, the major daily newspaper for Peoria, Illinois, and surrounding area.*

NOTE: The distribution of this questionnaire should in no way be construed to represent an endorsement of Peter Kobak by the Peoria Journal Star.

Offices Previously Held: N/A

Occupation: Uber Driver

Previous Relevant Occupations:

Project Manager, City of Peoria Innovation Team

Organizer / IT and Digital Communications, Ohioans to Stop Executions

Digital Marketing Associate, SoMe, LLC (Digital Marketing Agency)

International Relations and Protocol Intern, City of Chicago Office of the Mayor

Undergraduate Clerk, Cook County State's Attorney's Office

Education:

B.A., Political Science, Loyola University Chicago

M.A., Human Rights and Democratization, European Inter-University Centre

Certificate, Data Science, General Assembly

Community Activities, detailing leadership roles:

- *PIAVotes.com* - Led a volunteer team in creating an online voter guide for Peorians in the 2017 local election that was visited 2,600 times over the course of the election.
- *League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria* - I was a board member until I announced my candidacy for City Council in October, when I stepped down because LWVGP is a non-partisan organization. I worked on efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organization, as well as make election information more readily available through online voter guides. In addition, I volunteered during past local candidate forums as needed.
- *WCBU Letter of Support*- In the fall of 2018, I organized my neighborhood association, as well as neighbors across Peoria in writing a letter of support for WCBU, amidst concern that Bradley University was considering closing the station. The letter garnered over 800 signatures and raised over \$400 for Peoria Public Radio in about 2 weeks.
- *Soulside Healing Arts* - Founding board member and board member until December, 2018. I worked with Executive Director Hannah Ramlo in founding Central Illinois' first non-profit pay-as-you-can yoga studio, which provides meditation, movement, and mindfulness services across the area and specializes in trauma-informed programming.
- *Moss Bradley Residential Association* - Board member. Youngest member of the board and active in neighborhood activities, such as hanging of the greens in the winter,

organizing a Fourth of July party in the summer, and recruiting community leaders to speak at neighborhood meetings.

- *Generation United, Heart of Illinois United Way* - Board member

What do you consider your 2 or 3 most accomplishments in office, in your profession or in the community?

1. Hosting the City's first ever Civic Hackathon - An all day free event where Peorians were invited to help develop solutions to City problems using publicly available City data.
2. Facilitating conversations around culture change at the City of Peoria - Acted as facilitator for change management discussions for the City's department heads as well as front line staff, in order to empower employees to actively create a more positive work culture.
3. Working with the community to create Help Shape West Main - Advocated for grassroots community planning for the West Bluff area, by inviting community organizations and residents into the creation of a series of public engagements that led to the building of the parklet in front of Las Delicias and the stage in the West Main Community Garden.

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Questionnaire

1. **What would you do to spur additional business development and improve property values in older areas of the city, including South peoria, the North Valley and the East Bluff? What about the ongoing problem of vacant homes and vacant lots there?**

These urban core neighborhoods used to be the economic engines of Peoria, but have been disinvested over time as our City's boundaries expanded northward. I would make it a priority to encourage development in these declining neighborhoods by:

1. **Naming the reinvestment of our urban core**, which includes these neighborhoods, as a key City priority in our strategic plan.
2. **Partnering with public and private organizations to create plans for development in these neighborhoods and Peoria's downtown.** As we continue to encourage development in pockets of the urban core, like the Warehouse District and the riverfront, the City should ensure that the residents in close proximity benefit and have their voices and needs considered. One way of doing this is by forming Community Benefit Agreements, which are formed between government, private entities, and community associations to ensure mutual benefit for all parties. Other possible actions might include inclusionary zoning requirements and community-led land trusts that act to distribute power and profits from developments equitably.
3. **Directing City staff to support small-scale development**, wherein residents of urban core neighborhoods take on small renovation and construction projects in

the places where they live. Building inspectors and planners should be given the autonomy, flexibility, and support to help entrepreneurs and small business owners navigate regulations.

4. When resources are available, through TIFs, grants, or otherwise, directing their impact in a focused, strategic, and equitable manner in these neighborhoods.

2. Besides the issues above, what additional roles and responsibilities do you see for City Hall in addressing the problems that have seen Peoria named for four years to a list of the “Worst Cities for African Americans” by the website 247wallst.com? How do you engage other areas of the city in those efforts?

As elected leaders, we have a responsibility to not only acknowledge the inequities in our City, but also to create a plan to eliminate them. I believe we need to embark on a focused and measured strategic planning process that sets aspirational but realistic goals for improving outcomes for people of color in Peoria. This includes health outcomes, economic outcomes, criminal justice-related outcomes, and others. Only when we provide the direction as leaders can our City staff and our public/private partners be fully aligned with the mission to address the plague of inequity in our City. Some examples of these measures might be:

Increase property values in 61605 by...

Increase population in 61605 by...

Reduce violent crime by...

Reduce non-violent crime by...

Increase health outcomes by...

Increase access to food by...

Reduce STIs by... (in partnership with the City/County Health Department)

Expand public transportation by... (in partnership with CityLink)

Increase high school graduation by... (in partnership with Peoria Public Schools)

In addition to this strategic planning, I am advocating for policies that will immediately improve the situation of those who bear the burden of inequity in our City, such as raising the minimum wage, eliminating fines for the possession of marijuana, and passing a Welcoming City Ordinance.

3. The city has cut its headcount by about 150 in the last decade. Is staffing where it needs to be? What departments are overstaffed, and what specific services should be reduced or eliminated? If you would increase staffing in any departments, how would you fund those increases?

As an employee in City Hall, I met many overworked City staff in every department, who were being asked to do more than one person can possibly accomplish, despite constantly making efforts to become more efficient. Simply put, that's not OK. But this issue of staff being overworked does not explain the direction our budgeting should move in.

I am an advocate of performance-based budgeting, which is a style of governance and budgeting that allocates resources based on performance outcomes, rather than line-items. This is a rigorously data-driven approach to government. First, we set our goals as a City through a strategic planning process. Second, we fund the programs that achieve those goals most effectively, regardless of what department those programs are located in. As an example, a public safety goal might be met with varying efficacy by Community Development (through addressing blighted properties that create space and opportunities for crime), Public Works (through road diets that reduce vehicle and pedestrian accidents), Economic Development (through providing affordable housing or job opportunities that keep people from resorting to crime to survive), Police (through resident officers that disrupt gang activity by building trust with neighborhood youth), or Fire (through preventing fires by performing residential and commercial inspections). The level of funding a department receives should be related to how we define public safety as a community and the particular public safety goals that we believe are most important for the future of Peoria.

4. City public safety pension obligations are going to continue to grow in the near future because of prior under-funding. The city approved a property fee for three years as part of this year's budget. How would you pay for those costs after 2021?

After a comprehensive strategic planning process and budgeting that reflects our priorities, we need to take into account what programs we need to create or continue funding given what our fixed long-term expenses will be, including public safety pensions. Simultaneously, we need to be pursuing a growth strategy within the urban core that reinvests in the people and places that we know provide the greatest value for the City per acre. As we craft our priorities, encourage growth, and study the impacts of the current parcel fee, we will be in a better position to know what steps we'll need to take in 2021. When the parcel fee sunsets in 2021, if there is a need to generate additional revenue, I will advocate for equitable and progressive tax structures.

5. Assuming sales tax revenues continue to decline and property tax revenues continue to struggle, where would you turn for additional income? Alternately, what other cuts to city services are on the table for you?

I worked on a number of projects on the City's Innovation Team that sought to improve the efficiency of our current processes without increasing our budget or increasing staff's workload. I worked with the Fire Department to increase staff's data science skills, which allowed them to run reports in hours that used to take days and improved data collection for improved accreditation. I also went through process mapping exercises with the Community Development Department that revealed how we can cut down the time it takes to resolve code violations, saving staff time and taxpayers money. To find more of these efficiencies, we need to empower staff to step back and suggest new changes, rather than stay in their lane and fulfill narrow responsibilities.

However, if cuts are necessary due to revenue shortfalls, those cuts need to be based on the objectives that we have decided as a City are a lower priority based on a rigorous community-involved strategic planning process - not the whims of a single councilperson.

6. Are fire and police protection adequate? Are the changes you'd seek in the city's public safety emphasis? Should the fire department provide more advanced paramedic services or even give the required five-year notice to take on ambulance service?

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 we believe the City should be focused on health outcomes, crime rates, mortality rates, or an entirely different measure, I believe the prioritization of these outcomes should derive from a comprehensive and collaborative process. 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.

7. The Pere Marquette is a prime example of a rushed economic development deal, with council members being told they had to act immediately or risk losing the deal. It ultimately cost the city, and taxpayers, millions. What would you do as a council member -- and what should the city do in terms of policy -- to prevent such rushes to action and better do its due diligence?

I don't believe the City should be in the business of making million-dollar bets on developments from which we are not guaranteed to be repaid or improve the lives of Peorians. However, the Pere Marquette has been shown through data to be one of the most valuable buildings in the region, producing more value per acre for the City and County than any other property in Peoria. We need to consider how the City can invest its social capital in bringing partners together to pave a sustainable path for the City. This requires a long-term perspective that builds on meaningful incremental change that benefits Peorians. I believe we can plan for this future without reliance on bad deals that might leave our taxpayers on the hook.

8. Fairly or unfairly, Peoria has a reputation as being unfriendly to business. What economic development tools are "off the tables" for you, and which do you support? Are there any the city is not using that it should be? How would you guarantee that businesses produce, and retain, a promised number of jobs?

I've worked with Economic Development Specialists, Urban Planners, and Small Business owners to study and improve our development process. There are a few things I would do to encourage more economic development:

1. 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. These small and incremental developments build a sense of place in our neighborhoods that builds community, attracts additional residents, and spurs follow-on development.

2. Build a culture of “getting to yes.” Our building inspectors and urban planners should feel empowered and supported in working with entrepreneurs to make their dreams come true. As things stand today, they often feel as if they are restricted to enforcing regulations. This is especially important for small-scale developers, who don’t have the resources to hire teams of architects or lawyers to navigate City regulations and standards.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Use TIF dollars to nurture development from the inside-out in our declining urban core neighborhoods. This means investing in projects that serve the residents in the neighborhoods that surround downtown and the Warehouse District through the creation of jobs that hire locally and improving the amount of quality and affordable housing.

9. In your opinion, how well is Peoria doing as smaller-scale economic and business development in its neighborhoods. Please provide examples.

When I was working on the City’s Innovation Team, we identified that Peoria was lacking in the number of small-scale developers: individuals or small businesses that make investments in their neighborhoods with smaller returns than larger developers are willing to accept. In order to grow our network of small-scale developers, we invited leaders in the field from across the country to come and speak to interested small-scale developers in Peoria, held an all-day training, supported the formation of a local network, and worked with City staff to improve the process that small-scale developers go through when working with City Hall to get plans approved.

I believe we will be strongest when Peorians are empowered and supported in rebuilding our neighborhoods, but we have a long way to go. I would encourage City staff to continue finding additional ways that these entrepreneurs can achieve their dreams in line with our necessary life and safety regulations.

10. If elected, you will be deciding how to redistrict council boundaries in 2021. Should the city keep five at-large seats and five district seats, move to 10 council districts, or reduce the number of at-large seats and increase the number of district seats?

We need to ensure our council district boundaries and positions encourage a City Council that is representative of the community. More than a quarter of Peorians identify as African-American; the way in which we draw our boundaries and elect our leaders should create a situation where we are likely to end up with more than a quarter of our elected leaders identifying as African-Americans as well. This is an area that I plan to conduct more research on before the decision comes in 2021. I'd like to study how other cities strategically composed their district boundaries with goals of equity and fairness in mind.

11. What is the single most important thing City Hall could do to make Peoria a better place to live?

As elected leaders, we need to craft 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 in a transparent manner. 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.

12. Should council members continue to be eligible for health care through the city? Is the salary appropriate for the position, or should it be changed for future councilors?

You shouldn't need to be independently wealthy, or be in a position where you have to work another full-time job, to be a city councilor in Peoria. That's why I support continuing councilor's eligibility for health care and oppose making reductions in the position's salary. If elected, I plan to pursue part-time employment that would allow me to spend a majority of my time serving the people of Peoria, not treat the position as a side-job. The future of our City is too important to delegate to free time in the evenings or weekends.