

REDACTED*

**The interest group that sent me this questionnaire has asked that their name be redacted. The following topics are discussed: public education, diversity, and community development.*

1. What issues will you prioritize if you are elected?

Equity, and especially **racial and economic equity**, are priorities of mine. As a City staffer, I studied our challenges of racial segregation and poverty - and I became very uncomfortable knowing they plagued our City but that we had no comprehensive plan to address them.

I believe that as elected leaders, we have a responsibility to not only acknowledge the inequities in our City, but also to create a long-term plan to eliminate them. I will advocate for a focused and measured strategic planning process that sets aspirational but realistic goals for improving outcomes for all people 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.

In addition to comprehensive strategic planning, I have been advocating for policies that will immediately improve the situation of those who bear the burden of inequity in our City, such as **eliminating fines for the possession of marijuana**, **equitable development policies** like Community Benefit Agreements and Inclusionary Zoning, passing a **Welcoming City Ordinance** to make our City more welcoming and safe for immigrants, and I was **the only candidate to publicly support raising the minimum wage to a living wage in Peoria** prior to Governor Pritzker's most recent action.

2. What are your views/thoughts on public education? What do you perceive as the role/function of teacher unions in public education?

We cannot be surprised that as City Hall and other institutions disinvested from our older neighborhoods, that our students have found it increasingly harder to succeed in school. I know that **education is the great equalizer**, but for this to be true, **there needs to be equity in the access to education**. This means investing in neighborhoods to help stabilize the tax base, empowering families with higher wages, and supporting our schools in providing social emotional supports as well as college and career readiness

[REDACTED] This work will help redefine student success and support students in being successful after high school.

My father was a member of the Solidarity labor union in Poland that organized millions of Polish people in opposition to the oppressive communist regime that was ruling the country. For taking a nonviolent action in his capacity as a union leader, he spent 5

months in prison. The right to organize and form a labor association is one that I cherish as a fundamental human right. My life is a direct result of its power to unite people and work for good.

3. What issues do you believe affect public education the most?

Environmental factors, funding, and education policy.

Environmental factors - these are the factors that affect public education over which City Hall has the most control. This includes:

- *Economic opportunities* in neighborhoods where students live
- *Quality affordable housing* that improves health and financial outcomes
- *Infrastructure* that supports safe transportation to and from school
- *Public Health* that provides preventative care and reduces environmental causes of illness
- *Crime*, which is directly related to the previous factors, but has traditionally been made worse by a “tough on crime” approach that elected officials have directed law enforcement to carry out.

Funding - City Council does not allocate Peoria Public School’s budget. However, if the City makes serious reinvestments in declining neighborhoods, it will build back the taxbase that provides revenue and population for the School District.

Policy - City Council does not pass educational policy for Peoria Public Schools. However, I believe that City Council should work closely with the School District to ensure Peoria Public Schools is prepared to meet and exceed Every Student Succeed Act standards, as well as advocate for policies that improve the equity of access to education for our students at the State and Federal level.

4. What are your views/thoughts on TIFs?

Like other economic development tools, **TIFs meet the goals that we have set for them**. If the priorities of neighborhoods of color and low-income are not explicitly considered in these goals, then resulting TIF-funded projects are not guaranteed to benefit them.

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.**

5. What do you think the Peoria City Council's involvement in Peoria Public Schools and education should be?

Councilmembers do not control Peoria Public School District's budget or the strategies teachers employ in the classroom, but **City Hall has a direct impact on the environmental factors that a student needs to succeed:** like the sidewalks that children walk on their way to school, the economic opportunities their parents have access to in their neighborhood, and the quality and quantity of affordable housing that they are able to live in.

As a City Councilmember, **I will advocate for policies and institutional partnerships that reinvest in declining neighborhoods** with older schools, to build back the population in those areas and ensure students are not held back by the traumas of poverty and crime.

As we formulate a long-term strategic plan for the City of Peoria, **it is absolutely necessary that City Council works hand-in-hand with the teacher unions, administration, and the School Board** to ensure we are working *with* each other towards *shared goals* for the next 5, 10, 20 years and beyond.

6. What are your views on diversity?

Diversity is an important consideration at all levels of public education because **inequity can occur simply through the lack of diversity.** Whether it's between the board and management, between management and staff, or between staff and students, if one group isn't aware of the barriers another group faces, then they won't see them and be motivated to remove them.

I recognize that when it comes to racial diversity, we need more teachers in Peoria Public Schools that are representative of the student body. I will use my platform as Councilperson to support the Grown Your Own program that empowers Peorians to become teachers, while also recruiting and retaining teachers of color here in Peoria.

Finally, I believe that **diversity** is an important goal that will improve **equity**, but the two are not the same. Even as statistics for diversity among the various levels of public education improve, City leaders need to be laser focused on improving equity in the neighborhoods that surround our schools.

7. What are your ideas/plans for community involvement and community infrastructure improvement?

The City's strategic plan is the guiding document for our over 600 staff and is a guidepost for our institutional partners. I will advocate that **when our next strategic plan is created, it involves deep and meaningful community feedback**. When we decide our priorities as a City, residents should have a say. I am also 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 the community-informed strategic plan. Then, we fund the programs that achieve those goals most effectively, regardless of what department those programs are located in.

I believe we need to do more to **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.

For decades, our elected officials have pushed to annex land further north. In the short term, we saw development in these parts of town, but in the long term, this "growth" increased our liabilities as we took on more infrastructure to maintain. This means more roads to fix, potholes to fill, and longer response times for Police Officers and Firefighters. I am an advocate for **smart growth**, which means redirecting growth towards density and walkability in our urban core.