

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2024 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.
 - a. Name
Kris Larson
 - b. Occupation
Owner beckets restaurant and Wagner Market
 - c. List any community activities you are involved with
BID Board (14 years)
Oshkosh CVB (Discover Oshkosh) (12 years)
Numerous city of Oshkosh Visioning Committees
former Oshkosh Special Assessment Committee
former Oshkosh Farmers Market board
former Oshkosh Symphony board
Former Oshkosh Art and Beautification board
and a handful more things I am probably forgetting

2. What are your background and qualifications for this City Council position, and what value will you bring to the City Council personally?

Background as above to some degree as I have been very involved in this community for the last 16 years. I am immediate past chair of the WI Restaurant Association so lots of experience managing a large and active advocacy board there.

The value I bring personally is in my strong understanding of how municipal governance works, having seen it from both the in and outside, AND a very strong desire to see real change, progress and improvement here.

3. Please outline your personal top priorities for the City of Oshkosh and your plan for seeing these priorities realized.

More engagement, correspondence, and transparency. The council/manager form of government we have here is, I believe, the correct fit for a community this size. We can, however, improve on giving groups and individuals a stronger voice in the process and use that collaboration to affect real, meaningful, and faster change (perhaps you've noticed, but things seem to take a long time to get moving around here these days). I believe the role of councilor is conduit between the community and city staff/management. I intend to be that conduit in an effective, transparent, and forthcoming manner in order to keep and get things moving.

(and also, some specific goals with regard to housing and building code and more at my website...otherwise the answers here will get very long!)

4. Several geographic locations within the city can benefit from attention to facilitate economic growth and development. Please identify and discuss what you consider to be the top two or three economic development priorities you will champion as a member of the City Council.

1. There is a new downtown visioning plan coming soon (I was interviewed for it), included in are plans for expanding Opera House Square and more. This would be great.

2. I am hopeful that the Mill on Main project continues on the right path at the beginning of S. Main. This would be a great addition to a Sawdust District that is not progressing as quickly as some had hoped.

3. (Depending on the time of response of publication, this may already be in the works or announced)... I am hopeful for appropriate housing development on the soon to be former Washington School site. Lots of opportunity there to provide much needed low and market rate housing options.

5. The City of Oshkosh is considering or has considered (depending on the timing of your response) a Vehicle Registration Fee (VRF)/utility fee increase proposal to eliminate special assessments for street/sidewalk improvement projects. The Oshkosh Chamber recently surveyed its member businesses, and 26% of its respondents favored this approach, 33% favored maintaining the current special assessment system, and 41% favored including all street and sidewalk improvements in the general levy. Please discuss your position on this proposal.

Similar to above, many words on this subject at my website if anybody would like to fully dive in with me. As mentioned early on, I did serve the city on an ad-hoc committee to replace special assessments in 2018/2019. This is a subject I care deeply about (and probably have far too many opinions about).

To answer the specific question: The current proposal of wheel tax (let's call it what it is) and increase in utility fees is infinitely better than what we do at current. Period. 67% of those surveyed by the Chamber also believe that change is needed, and that I think is great. I was particularly enthused to hear mention by the Chamber President at city council meeting that members want to see MORE reconstruction annually! I completely agree!

If (and it's likely) the current proposal is approved, and I am elected, I look forward to refining it going forward as it is a good starting point...and we do need to change what we do now ASAP.

6. Municipalities across the State are moving to Fee for Service approaches to pay for the delivery of municipal services otherwise funded by the annual property tax levy. Do you support a funding approach like this? If so, what current city services would be appropriately funded as a Fee for Service? If a new Fee for Service is imposed, should property taxpayers receive an equal, proportionate tax levy credit?

I think more often now than perhaps a few years ago (this question has been asked for a while) that municipalities are looking for more creative ways to do what is being asked instead of adding a fee for service. Some of this is evidenced by the math involved in the assessment replacement proposal above. The contributions by utilities to the assessments is not a 1:1 ratio of dollars in to out. Rather, through a combination of interest generated by funds and bonding, the required funds are generated more easily than they might be with just a flat fee. More creative uses like this one I think are great (and as not mentioned in question #5, the utility increase portion of current proposal is widely agreeable for that reason).

7. The city established a stormwater utility in 2003 to manage stormwater run-off issues in the community. Residential property owners are assessed for one equivalent runoff unit (ERU). Non-residential property owners are assessed annual fees based on the amount of impervious space (parking lots and rooftops) to determine the amount of ERUs that exist on a parcel. The initial (annual) stormwater utility fee in 2003 was \$19.10 per ERU and grew to \$237.72 per ERU in 2023 while holding the increase flat in 2024. Do you find this rate of increase acceptable? Do you believe that continued increases at that level over the next 20 years are acceptable? Please outline any ideas you might have to curtail the growth in stormwater utility fees.

Nope... the increases are not reasonable or acceptable. And in all honesty, I have no idea how we can curtail this growth in fees any longer, but we need to find an answer, so I look forward to giving it some real thought and work if elected.

There are some bright spots that could be helpful if implemented. A few months ago, councilor Ford made mention of a UWO project that addressed this subject by allowing the use of material that would help in runoff in general (currently these items not allowed by our code, but they should be). This sort of thing would help some, however I truly fear we have broken this concept to a degree where it requires a thorough going through from start to finish.

8. There is currently a proposal being brought forth to change the title of "Mayor" to "Council President" to reflect the post's lack of executive powers. Furthermore, the proposal eventually has the position being selected by the City Council and not voted on by the electorate. Do you support or oppose this proposal? Please provide your reasons for your position.

I've been trying to keep these answers short, but you folks are asking ALL of my favorite questions...so here's the long answer to this one:

Yes, I support this proposal. The current position of mayor has zero legislative powers or prowess more than any other councilor,,,and this is wildly confusing to pretty much everyone and only serves to hurt the efficiency of our governance.

I do not want to fault the way this question was asked or whomever wrote it, but the phrasing above is precisely part of the problem and confusion at current:

'Furthermore the proposal eventually has the position being selected by the city council and NOT VOTED ON by the electorate'.

I have been blown away in the last month or so by how many folks believe that if the position of mayor goes away, that then the council will appoint a 'council president' from the community at-large. This is of course nowhere near the truth. Council president would be appointed in the same way, and for essentially the same purposes, as deputy mayor is now. From the ELECTED other councilors. This lack of understanding helps to perfectly support why we need to change our current system to something folks can understand as soon as we can.

It also provides the perfect segue to the best reason we should remove the position of mayor:

As was pointed out very succinctly by our current mayor at a recent council meeting...very often lately, the folks running for mayor are running from a currently held and out of cycle council seat. And...those folks lately are winning. It's easy to campaign from a seat that if you lose, you keep your seat! When this happens (and again, it's been frequent lately) THEN council DOES get to appoint an at-large member from the community to a council seat that any other time does need to be VOTED ON BY THE ELECTORATE'. The item we fear it seems the most is precisely the one we are left with by maintaining the current system.

(Sorry for all of the all caps. This makes absolutely no sense!)

9. With a low unemployment rate and strong local economy, many employers report difficulty attracting and retaining talent. What is the city's role in attracting people to Oshkosh and ensuring that Oshkosh is an attractive place to live and work?

The city's role in attracting and retaining talent is providing folks with a place they want to live. The question coming up next is a big part of that, as we have a lot of work to do regarding housing at all levels. We also need to focus more on a built environment that attracts folks in both amenities and aesthetics. A couple easy examples: like all forward-thinking communities, we should work to bury utilities

whenever possible on both new developments AND street reconstructions. Little things like small downtown dog parks go a long way toward attracting folks to live here.

10. A housing study completed for the City of Oshkosh in March of 2022 noted that Oshkosh is expected to grow by more than 3,200 residents by 2030, meaning the city will need to produce almost 1,700 new housing units. While Oshkosh has made significant progress in this area, there is still much work to be done. What do you see as the primary barriers to increasing the housing stock in Oshkosh? What will you do to address Oshkosh's need for additional workforce housing.

Again, a VERY long article at my site addressing this subject (www.voteoshkosh.com). As short as I can make it:

1. Refine city code to allow more developments in the places they are needed (shorter setbacks, more buildings per parcel, a refinement of code that actually allows ADUs as the one we have currently does about 10% of what it should).
2. Reinstate and make more meaningful a rental inspection program and tenant resource center that is not housed in the planning dept. with a newly formed RHAB as well.
3. Help the RDA to incentivize developers who want to build the types of housing we need (which, at current, is pretty much every level, but a focus on workforce and low-income preferred).
4. Explore options to incentivize a portion of units in all developments meeting certain income requirements.
5. Develop a policy to be certain that at all times we are using maximum available TIF options.