

1. Please provide some personal background information: Name, Occupation, Community activities.

Paul Esslinger; Real Estate Agent; City Council

2. Please describe your background and qualifications for serving on the City Council, and explain the personal strengths and perspectives you would bring to the role?

I served on the Common Council from 2000-2011. 2000-2009 as Council Member, 2009-2011 as Mayor. Served on several boards and commissions. Re-elected Council member in 2013. I have a substantial knowledge of local politics and the perspectives involved.

3. What are your top priorities for the City of Oshkosh, and how do you plan to achieve these goals as a member of the City Council?

Communication, infrastructure, debt, housing. City staff need to be using more social media outlets to let the citizens know what is going on in the community and to provide accurate information when asked what is going on. We seem to continue to struggle getting a handle on infrastructure issues in Oshkosh. We were supposed to have an aggressive schedule set forth years ago to address the poor roads in Oshkosh, but I'm not sure if we are making much progress. Also, many dollars have been spent on storm water run-off projects through the years and taxpayers are being asked to spend more money on these efforts. I would like to see an analysis on what we've done and what the taxpayers are going to be asked to do in the future. And then we have debt. If I read it right, the City has about \$120,000,000 in debt and we pay about 30 cents on a dollar of taxes to pay our debt service. This is too much debt! The Council also needs to continue with efforts like the former Lincoln school to provide affordable housing in Oshkosh to lower the tax burden for the taxpayer.

4. Which areas of Oshkosh do you believe should be prioritized for economic growth, and what two or three key economic development initiatives would you champion on the City Council to support that growth?

Filling the business parks with strong companies that pay great wages is always something we should be focusing on. We should also continue efforts to make the Fox River corridor a place for new development, both residential and commercial. Places downtown could also be turned into new development. I would continue to champion Community Development being more builder friendly.

5. It has been reported that the City of Oshkosh is considering purchasing City Center. What role do you believe the City of Oshkosh should play in the redevelopment of City Center, and how should the city approach the potential relocation of City Hall as part of its long term capital improvement planning?

All plans and opportunities should be reviewed to make sure the best plan ultimately is used where it is best for the citizens fiscally and logistically. If the City does ultimately purchase City Center then clearly the City will be highly involved with remodeling it. If the City doesn't purchase it, then it will be the responsibility of the owners to find new tenants.

6. Municipalities across Wisconsin are increasingly exploring Fee for Service models as a way to fund programs that have traditionally been supported through 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?

We should ask, if we are to go to a fee for service, will that be on top of the already high taxes we pay? Is this revenue on top of the already high revenue the City collects? If we move to a fee for service, and reduce the amount collected by property taxes and offset the amount for the fee for service, I would entertain that idea however, just looking at another taxing scheme is not a good idea. Our property taxes are too high and I feel we need to slow the growth of our budget. According to surveys I've seen, the share of Americans living paycheck to paycheck is about 63%. Having high water bills, storm water fees, drop off fees, and high property taxes is not helping our neighbors who are struggling financially. If elected, I will focus on making sure any fee or tax increase is absolutely necessary and only approved after all other options have been exhausted. We cannot continue to pass on an unlimited wish list on to the hard working taxpayers that are struggling to pay their bills.

7. The City created its stormwater utility in 2003 to manage runoff and comply with environmental regulations. Residential properties are charged for one Equivalent Runoff Unit (ERU), while non residential parcels pay based on the amount of impervious surface they contain. The fee has increased from \$19.10 per ERU in 2003 to \$243.84 in 2025, with a projected 1.1% increase in 2026. Do you find this rate of increase acceptable? Do you believe that similar increases over the next 20 years would be acceptable? Please share any ideas you have for controlling the long term growth of stormwater utility fees.

My idea to curtail starts with no more increases in run-off fees. This council seems to not have the word “no” in their vocabulary. Water bills in Oshkosh are out of control and passing more taxing schemes to mask out local government is poor at living within our means has to stop. My plan is to tap the breaks on the growth in local government and let taxpayers wallets catch up to council members’ ideas. We must also remember that the State may require us to eliminate contaminants from our water which may increase runoff fees. Unfortunately unfunded mandates are out of the Council’s control but must be addressed which would force increases in fees.

8. Commercial properties in Oshkosh saw an average 22% increase in assessed values in 2025 following the latest reassessment process last year. This resulted in higher tax bills for many. In your opinion, is this acceptable and what would be the best avenue for you as a city council member to communicate important issues such as this to taxpayers?

It’s time we work with the State and ELIMINATE property taxes once and for all!! A sales tax INSTEAD of property taxes would be much better.

9. With a low unemployment rate and strong local economy, many employers report difficulty attracting and retaining talent. What role should the city play in attracting new residents and ensuring that Oshkosh remains an appealing place to live and work?

I believe we first must properly budget and prioritize our public safety, fire department, police, and streets and support the core mission of the City government with our budget. Having a safe and clean city will better attract people who work here to live here. The government should basically set up a fair playing field for all to use and then get out of the way and let capitalism work.

10. A housing study completed for the City of Oshkosh in March 2022 projected that the city will grow by more than 3,200 residents by 2030, requiring the construction of nearly 1,700 new housing units. While Oshkosh has made meaningful progress, a significant gap remains. What do you see as the primary barriers to expanding the housing stock in Oshkosh? What steps would you take to support the development of additional workforce housing in the community?”

With a new City Manager and Community Development Director I’m looking forward to seeing what idea(s) they may have in this area. I’ve been pleased with the efforts the City has

undertaken in regards to the former Lincoln School, Farmington Ave development and Highway 41/45 interchange, the Mill and downtown projects.

11. If elected to the City Council, how would you support Oshkosh's business community and help create an environment where local employers can thrive?

I would support them like I support any entity in Oshkosh. Treat them with respect, listen to their concerns and ideas, meet with them when and implement any ideas/suggestions that will help Oshkosh succeed in the future.

12. What specific issue or challenge would you most like to address as a City Council member, and why is this issue particularly important to you?

I'm pleased that we now have a communications director. I felt that the city lacked the communications of what it is/was doing. I also want the Council to work more with representatives from the state on finding ways to better serve our constituents. As I mentioned before, getting rid of property taxes and getting rid of the wheel tax.