

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2024 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.
 - a. Name **Thomas Asuma**
 - b. Occupation **Business Consultant**
 - c. List any community activities you are involved with:
Council member at St. John's Lutheran Church.
Member of the Property; Music and Worship Committees at St. John's.
Coach at Oshkosh West Basketball Club.
Past volunteer at YMCA.

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

My interest in public service began in high school with a week at Badger Boys State. My college education included a major in Public Management and my first work assignment was with the Oshkosh Industrial Development Committee. Our group was instrumental in attracting new businesses to Oshkosh at a time when the Sawdust companies were closing. I am blessed with leadership abilities which were developed during my 40 years in management roles in the private sector. I want to use these abilities to continue building a brighter future for the residents of Oshkosh.

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

My priorities are not personal but rather developed with conversations and listening to the citizens of Oshkosh. Increasing city taxes are a concern of many residents. I will fight for responsible budgeting and smart spending to reduce the tax burden without compromising essential services. Lean principles and implementing servant leadership management proved successful in the private sector in eliminating non-value-added costs and putting the focus on the people we serve.

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.

Additional city housing is identified as a priority to support business growth and development. Continued support of private investment in current plans increasing housing availability will facilitate this priority. Oshkosh has developed outstanding industrial parks over the years to entice manufacturers to locate in our community. Continued support of marketing efforts for industrial development is imperative for ongoing success in attracting new business.

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.

I am not in favor of the wheel tax. However, I do support assessing our citizens for improvements in the water/sewer delivery system, which dates back to the 1800s in some instances, to help defray the future costs of the street/sidewalk improvements to the homeowners.

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?

Fee for Service approach needs to be evaluated against the current cost of providing these services by our city employees. Property taxpayers need to be assured that these services can be provided at significantly lower cost on an on-going basis and the tax levy is credited appropriately. Garbage removal service is provided by private contractors in adjoining government entities. However, with the city equipment and employee expertise in providing this service I believe private contractors will have a difficult time in providing lower cost service in this area.

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.

On the surface this astronomical increase in the ERU appears appalling and future increases of this magnitude are unacceptable. However, the burden is carried by both residential and non-residential property owners which is acceptable. Stormwater runoff has been an issue for many years and continues to be an issue in Oshkosh. North side improvements have successfully mitigated issues of flooding of taxpayer properties. Current work on the south side addressing issues with the South Park watershed will alleviate flooding along Ohio street. Hopefully, additional storm water improvement costs will be less in future years and the ERU can be maintained at current levels or adjusted downward accordingly.

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.

The electorate voted for the current state of city management in the past and should be afforded the opportunity to let their voice be heard for any future decisions on this matter.

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?

Available housing and reduced city taxes are a start to attracting and retaining a talented workforce.

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.

We are well on our way to providing the required housing identified in the study with current and future planned projects. Continued city support of private investment and eliminating bureaucratic red tape will ensure we meet the objectives for 2030.