

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2023 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.
 - a. Name: **Paul Esslinger**
 - b. Occupation: **Real Estate Agent**
 - c. List any community activities you are involved with

2. What are your background and qualifications for this City council position and what value will you bring to the City Council personally? **I served on the Common Council from 2000-2011. 2000-2009 as Council Member, 2009-2011 as Mayor. Served on several boards and commissions.**

3. Please outline what you consider to be the City of Oshkosh's 3 most critical issues. **Communication, infrastructure, debt. City staff needs 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!**

4. What are the biggest challenges the city faces currently and in the next 5 years? What should the city do to respond and overcome these challenges? **I would say the issues I spoke about in question 3 and I would add to address where we are with our business parks. I would like to see some more fortune 500 companies come to Oshkosh. So I'd like to know if land is appropriated for this and if the infrastructure is ready so we can attract this type of business. Another issue I believe we are going to have to address is the retirement of our current City Manager.**

5. Previous City Councils have considered proposals to change the policy on how to fund the current street improvement and sidewalk replacement program. Past proposals included establishing a Transportation Utility Fee Program or a Transportation Assessment Replacement Fee as a means to eliminate special assessments for street reconstruction/improvement projects and the sidewalk replacement program. Do you support this type of a program? If so, what should be the basis to establish a transportation fee? Please discuss your position. **I can't help but think of the thousands of dollars-thousands of households have paid to improve their own streets through their street assessments and now, the discussion has pivoted to changing the fee assessment method. Does that mean those that took a long-term payback will have to continue to pay their assessment and will also have to pay a monthly fee to pay for others? I don't support that arrangement and making a tough program worse is too common in government. Maybe if there were some hybrid plan that was fair, I might support it.**

6. Municipalities across the State are moving to Fee for Service approaches to pay for the delivery of municipal services that were 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 tax payers 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 established a Storm Water Utility in 2003 for the purposes of managing storm water 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 roof tops) to determine the amount of ERUs that exists on a parcel. The initial (annual) storm water utility fee in 2003 was \$19.10 per ERU and has grown to \$237.72 per ERU in 2023. Do you find this rate of increase acceptable? Do you believe that continued rates of increases at that level over the next 20 years is acceptable? Please outline any ideas you might have to curtail the growth in storm water utility fees.

My ideas to curtail starts with no more increases in water 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 scheme 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.

8. With a low unemployment rate and strong local economy, many employers are reporting difficulty in attracting and retaining talent. What is the role of the city in attracting people to Oshkosh an ensuring that Oshkosh is an attractive 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 City government with our budget. Having a safe and clean city will better attract people who work here to live here. Government should basically set up a fair playing field for all to use and then get out of the way and let capitalism work.**
9. The State of Wisconsin currently imposes levy limits on local municipalities, but allows for levy increases based on new development. Do you support the continuation of this? Should there be modifications? Should this be repealed? Please discuss. **I’m usually not a fan of State mandates however, for several years we’ve had spend happy local government so levy limits have done their job by holding increases at levels lower than if the limit wasn’t there. I certainly would be open to other ideas and if they made sense, implementing them.**