

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2021 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.

a. Name:

Kris Larson

b. Occupation:

Small Business Owner

c. List any community activities you are involved with:

Currently co-chair Downtown Oshkosh Business Improvement District
Immediate past president Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau
Treasurer WI Restaurant Association
Board member Oshkosh Celebration of Lights

2. Please outline what you consider to be the City of Oshkosh 3 – 5 most critical issues.

1. Refinement and reinforcement of our Council/Manager for of Government that includes better accountability of Council to the Citizens of Oshkosh and better accountability of City Manager to the Council.

2. Better and more engagement from City Hall with the community, including working to get more folks involved in the governing process from small steps like encouraging voting, to larger steps of increasing inclusiveness on Council, boards and commissions and through greater transparency and discourse in general.

3. Finding a balance between taxation and services. We are nearing a tipping point where these two items relate less and less to one another. The above 2 items will be helpful in the long run to solving this third.

3. There are a number of geographic locations within the city that 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 that you will champion as a member of the city council?

As a general principle, I believe that private development often knows better than municipalities what is best for a particular city or location, and that, at times, we may be steering too hard on a particular site or region. I am a firm believer that the 'but for' proposition of TIF funding is the most important part.

However, particularly in a post-pandemic time, I realize it is important to consider and encourage as much growth as we possibly can, so I am not specifically opposed to any facilitation of economic growth. I am willing and would champion any viable development brought forth without regard to any specific location at this time.

4. 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 do support any and all discussion on ways to improve our street repair and the financial ramifications that come with it to the citizens of Oshkosh. In particular, I also support a fee-based program to replace our current method of assessment. The basis to establish a fee should be the benefit to the municipality and general financial position thereof (of course, whilst operating within state guidelines, which is perpetually the most difficult part of programs as proposed).

To provide a bit of specific fidelity on statement above (without making this far too long to read): I believe the benefits of establishing a flat-rate fee for assessments are greater than the current method not only because they are ultimately less expensive to a majority of property owners, but also because programs like this would provide near instant capital allowing a municipality to not borrow money to repair roads. Having funds in advance of projects removes many expensive pieces that come with current model such as inspecting sidewalks and processing bills for assessments. The efficiency of the method combined with cost savings of a program like this would ultimately, I believe, go a long way toward improving the current budget situation and would allow for better and theoretically more infrastructure repairs going forward.

5. Municipalities across the State are moving to Fee for Service approaches to pay for the delivery 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 taxpayers receive an equal, proportionate tax levy credit?

I think I answered a lot of this one above (sorry!... got ahead).

Yes! I do support, in theory, a fee-based approach for services, especially in instances where other benefits in refinement of processes come with them (as above with assessments). And absolutely yes!, if a new fee for service is imposed where funding currently comes from the levy, especially if there are benefits and cost savings that come with it residually, wherever possible there should be a tax levy credit. I believe that there are already guidelines in place as to which types of services might necessitate a levy credit and which ones might not.

6. 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 storm water utility fee in 2003 was \$19.10 per ERU and has grown to \$196.92 per ERU, a 14.7% annual rate increase. Do you believe this increase is reasonable? Please outline your ideas to curtail the growth in storm water utility fees.

No, the increase in fees in this case is not reasonable.

I do understand the importance of managing runoff, the increasing costs that come with it and are, at least in part, caused by growth (which is great). I am very grateful that, in general, we have less street flooding that Oshkosh had historically. However, I cannot justify an increase as large as this one and feel the subject is in need of further examination.

My hopes, fairly broad stroke, are that we can continue to look at other options (again, as above and I read ahead, one below as well!) for all sorts of expenses, and that savings can be applied to other less equitable categories as well.

7. Local governments have asked the Legislature to prohibit the use of physically comparable vacant properties as comparable sales to occupied properties for property tax assessment purposes, known as the “dark store” loophole. The result of this policy would allow tax collectors to more subjectively assess property value and taxes, and make it harder for businesses to challenge their tax bill. Do you support the eliminating the so-called “dark store” loophole to allow municipal assessors to disproportionately assess commercial property owners? Please discuss.

This question is phrased in an interesting manner! I absolutely support eliminating the so-called ‘dark store’ loophole, as it has, and will continue to totally unnecessarily burden taxpayers with taxes that should be paid by others. The process of comparing a fully operational business to a shuttered one is completely unfair to not only homeowners, but also to business owners who are not greedily

looking to pass their tax burden to someone else.

Additionally, the framing of this question in the context of ‘allow(s) tax collectors to more subjectively assess property value and make it harder for businesses to challenge their tax bill’ is untrue and only serves to muddy this already very murky subject. To the question above directly: closing the dark store loophole does not and will not allow municipal assessors to disproportionately do anything. Closing the loophole, however, will prevent large multinational companies from taking advantage of local homeowners.

8. 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 definitely support levy increases based on net new construction. In general, many municipalities, Oshkosh included, are increasingly hamstrung by reductions in shared revenue and less general transportation aids from the state. I fear that if a cycle persists where municipalities must perpetually not increase or lower spending, as costs continue to increase, that we deter growth in general by not having services that spur new development. It’s sort of putting the cart before the horse. I have faith that Oshkosh government officials can appropriately manage increases in a levy and use those funds in a manner that improves the quality of life for those who live here and spurs new growth.

9. Over the past year, the State of Wisconsin has imposed a number of restrictions on businesses and individuals aimed at reducing the spread of Covid-19. As a City Council member, would in support imposing further restrictions on the citizenry of Oshkosh? If so, please outline what those restrictions might be. Please discuss your answer.

As someone who owns businesses directly affected by restraints placed, my answer to this has not wavered from the very beginning of the pandemic. I am not a doctor but am in an industry governed by science and required to adhere to safety guidelines based in science at all times. I am in favor, and will remain in favor, of any and all regulations aimed toward collectively getting our local economy back to normal as soon as possible.

10. In the proposed 2021-22 Biennial State Budget, Gov. Evers proposed the creation of a ½-cent municipal sales tax that communities over 30,000 could enact if approved by local referendum. If this proposal were to be retained, would you support the creation of a ½-cent city-wide sales tax? Please discuss.

One. Million. Percent. Yes! This question is a perfect way to end the survey as it ties in to nearly every single question asked above. Primarily, municipalities, especially ones like Oshkosh that have a flourishing tourism and hospitality business, would benefit greatly from this proposal. Revenues collected in this

manner could go a long way toward positively impacting every other question asked here.