

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2022 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.
 - a. Name: Lynnsey Erickson
 - b. Occupation: Community Health Strategist
 - c. List any community activities you are involved with
 - i. Oshkosh Housing Authority Board
 - ii. City of Oshkosh Rental Housing Advisory Board
 - iii. City of Oshkosh Transit Advisory Board
 - iv. Winnebagoland Housing Coalition
 - v. Wisconsin Women’s Network

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

The most critical issues I’ve heard from community residents over the past two years have been the need for more affordable housing, the expansion and maintenance of transportation options, and the need for us to work together to build a welcoming community.

1. Affordable housing: Both Oshkosh renters and homeowners have seen housing costs increase over the last year and it has been difficult to find housing options. There are a number of policy solutions outlined in the city’s upcoming Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy Plan that I support and will champion, including preserving and maintaining existing affordable housing through incentivizing low rents and reinvesting in the city’s housing rehabilitation programs. This could be funded through more targeted Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocations and utilizing the “Affordable Housing Extension” of tax incremental financing (TIF). When a TIF district is about to expire, the city could extend the life of the district for one year to “benefit affordable housing”. Oshkosh already does this to fund some of its neighborhood revitalization work, but we could focus these funds on the creation and maintenance of affordable housing units. This would be successful if there is a decrease in the number of Oshkosh residents spending more than a third of their income on housing costs, which is currently around 44% of residents (ECWRPC, 2019).
2. Expanding and maintaining transportation options, including transit and street reconstruction: There are major transportation needs in Oshkosh and more needs to be done to have a well-maintained transportation system for everyone. People need to be able to get to where they need to go, whether it’s biking, walking, taking GO Transit, or driving. We have a great public service through GO Transit, but funding limitations have not allowed them to run past 6pm or on Sundays. I’m glad that the city and school district reached an agreement to provide all K-12

students in Oshkosh free rides on GO Transit, and we have seen enormous demand with over 86,000 rides to students in 2021. We need to examine other funding options to expand our transit service to meet the needs of riders. Over the next year, the city will also be challenged with how to pay for street reconstruction. I will address that in question #3.

3. Building a welcoming community: There are people in our city who do not feel welcome here even though they call Oshkosh home. We need to continue the work we have started, not just forming a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee for the city and conducting some trainings for staff, but also supporting the internal work to make sure that the city as an employer and role model is being equitable in hiring practices, strategies, and decision-making. I support the DEI Committee's goal to approve city departments' internal equity performance measures. I also support the city manager in incorporating equity and inclusion into the day-to-day operations and structures of the city. If we are committed to this work, we must fund it and allocate resources through our operating budget. This work takes time, but if successful, we will have greater representation and retention of the community's diversity within city departments, improved quality of life, and an increased sense of belonging by people of color within our community.

3. 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.

Building and maintaining our sidewalks and roads should not place an undue burden on our residents. I look forward to discussing the possibility of a transportation utility fee, a yearly fee based on the type of property, which would fund our streets without assessing thousands of dollars onto property owners. If this type of utility were to be proposed, the basis for the fee should be closely related to property occupants' use of the local street network. I hope to see community involvement and input in this process as we figure out how to pay for and maintain a quality local street system.

4. 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 tax payers receive an equal, proportionate tax levy credit?

This is a complex issue for cities. The perspective I bring to these types of issues is asking who is most impacted and what data do we need to make a more equitable decision. Too often, when cities collect revenue through fees for

services, the burden on residents can multiply and create a cascading series of consequences for families with little to no savings. These fees for service and municipal collection processes can be costly for both residents and the city. I am open to hearing different options and approaches to ensure that how the city delivers municipal services meets residents' needs and is effective and equitable.

5. 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 \$210.60 per ERU, a 14.2% annual rate increase. Do you believe this increase is reasonable? Please outline your ideas to curtail the growth in storm water utility fees.

Oshkosh has made a lot of progress over the last ten years improving the ability to manage stormwater and prevent overburdened water systems and flooding. The increases since 2003 reflect the increased need for flood control. As we see these mitigation efforts pay off, I hope we can taper off these increases and improve the use of credits for private improvements. As I would with any other issue in the city, I would like to hear from both non-residential and residential property owners to hear their concerns and how they have been impacted by city decisions. I am open to re-examining how we pay for our stormwater management program to ensure that fees are fair and equitable while also ensuring a reduction in storm water pollution and flooding.

6. 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.

The dark store loophole has resulted in shifting more of the tax burden from commercial property owners to homeowners and small businesses. If a big box retailer uses the dark store loophole to cut the amount they pay in property taxes, cities are forced to cut services to the entire community, or increase taxes across the board, which impacts homeowners and residents. I am open to hearing different perspectives about this issue and its impact on our community.

7. 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.

Wisconsin municipalities are forced into a position of needing to meet increasing needs and costs for services while also being limited to how we are funded. Tying tax increases to net new construction has slowed the growth of levies to the benefit of property owners, but this has also made it difficult to maintain services levels over time and created a vicious cycle for low-growth communities with fewer resources to invest. I think that this is an issue that needs to be reconsidered at the state level with voice from local governments and those impacted on whether these limits are creating unintended consequences that need to be addressed.