

Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce

Candidate Questionnaire

2021 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.

Name and occupation Lori Palmeri, MUP. I currently work part time supporting essential health care needs as an on demand Medical Courier. I also provide at large Planning Consultant services to organizations throughout the State of Wisconsin. Community activities, aside from the many in connection with the Mayoral role, personally I am also engaged in Central City Neighborhood support activities, community gardens, urban beekeeping/and native planting efforts. I am also engaged with regional and state organizations on a variety of issues.

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

- i. Continuing to deliver existing services/ maintaining infrastructure with declining shared revenue/state aid*
- ii. Affordable housing and transportation for service sector workforce earning less than a living wage*
- iii. Building resiliency from disruptive events while also advancing equitable policy*
- iv. advancing green infrastructure proactively and in response to climate change impacts*
- v. continuing to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within and outside City Hall so that Oshkosh becomes the most welcoming city in the valley.*

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 professional geographer, I depend upon relationships, both spatial (the where) and ecological (the living/environment) perspectives to identify and understand people and places.

We need both perspectives for communities that share land use, in order to represent fairly and equitably. This provides the frame to problem solve and allocate resources through policy which supports the community.

i. I believe we need to prioritize infill development across the city. I do not limit my view of economic development to a specific geographic location as I believe we should encourage micro-preneurial opportunities and build an entrepreneurial ecosphere (“six Cs”: confidence, courage, capital, capacity, collaboration and critical mass) to support creation of small and scalable business with an eye to economic resiliency. One creative example is reviewing opportunities for home-based business municipal code review.

ii. With that said, some specific areas we should continue to support, with a discerning eye towards equitable access and impacts, include the Sawdust District, downtown North Main Street, and North Jackson corridor.

iii. A gap study of business needs and creation of a “hot list” derived from a gap analysis/leakage study for priority assistance. This could include for example, childcare and green jobs (alternative energy, urban agriculture/food production, building green infrastructure) prioritized assistance to said needs.

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.

Currently, there is an opportunity to support the Governor’s budget proposal which includes an item of a local sales tax at municipal level which could be an option.

I do support a TUF on the basis of impervious surface area along with consideration of

the (currently in process) customized study being done regarding trip generation as a method for possible calculation. We could also look at a hybrid of including a Vehicle Registration Fee in combination. The least desirable is a general levy increase.

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.

Please be more specific,... EMS services? Water....Garbage....Fire Prevention?

☐ which communities and what examples (aside from the Transportation Utility Fee discussed above)

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?

It depends. We have a schedule of fees currently. The idea that additional fees should be credited on tax levy credit is like the conversation that goes "...if we don't have kids in school we shouldn't pay school district..."

1. 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.

First, we need to keep in mind the fact that a Storm Water Utility was not established until

2003 means prior Common Councils delayed critical infrastructure needs. The lesson for today is that the Common Council cannot defer maintenance and leave it to future Councils and taxpayers to address all of our critical needs. Second, I do not think a 14.7% annual rate increase is reasonable. What we need is better forecasting and education, so that rate payers know exactly what kinds of increases to expect over the next ten years, and WHY the rate hikes are necessary. And, finally, we must invest in green infrastructure to get the costs, to this and future generations, reined in as we build out resiliency (adaptive management) in a proactive not just reactive manner to climate change.

1. 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.

Yes, I do support closing the dark store loophole as currently residents and small businesses have to cover the reduced taxes paid by the stores roughly 5% statewide - shifting the burden on others. The dark store loophole is a classic and unfortunate example of how the special interest politics dominating our state legislature result in punishing the residential taxpayer at the local level. This could be compared to a homeowner claiming they should pay less tax because vacant foreclosure homes are valued less in the city.

1. 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.

This is a bigger discussion and a good question. When it comes to the issue of local control, the State Legislature “talks the talk” but does not “walk the walk.” Levy limits is but one of many issues that could or should be modified if we really did have local control. Minimum wage would be another.

1. 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.

Ideally, the State of Wisconsin DHS would be respected for their expertise, but in the absence of State or County abilities, yes we should address local needs in any extraordinary crisis. We have a number of ordinances that address health, safety and welfare which have been advised for the benefit of the public. I would support further expectations if reasonably (based on science) proposed. It does not need to be viewed as restrictive, but additional cautionary measures which have proven to reduce disease based on CDC information. While opponents of public health measures are loud, the majority of feedback I get from residents is that they want us to take whatever actions are necessary to enable us to reopen completely as soon as possible in a safe manner. They believe that taking shortcuts on public health will ultimately make it more difficult to get the virus under control, and I agree with them.

1. 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.

I would and do support this for both the city and county. I have lived in municipalities (outside of Wisconsin) that also have a municipal income tax. This is not an option here. However, similar to the discussion above, it would be one of numerous ways in which to address challenged budgets. When the State Legislature refuses to fully fund the Shared Revenue program and places other limits on local ability to raise revenue, it becomes almost impossible to maintain the quality of services that citizens have become accustomed to.