

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

2023 Spring Election – Oshkosh City Council

1. Please provide some personal background information.
 - a. Name: Joe Stephenson
 - b. Occupation: City Planner
 - c. List any community activities you are involved with: Chair of Midtown Neighborhood, Board Member of Oshkosh Long Range Finance, Judge for UWO Business Model Events, former member of the Parks Board, former member of the Museum Board, former member of the Oshkosh Food Co Op Board, volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, Good Shepherd Lutheran, and Winnebago County Literacy.

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

I have a nearly 10 year career in planning and economic development. I know what it takes to help support our local businesses and keep our downtown thriving and revitalize many of our tired neighborhoods. I've been a part of many committees and organizations (see above) and always tried to put my talents to work in Oshkosh. I bring years of commitment to Oshkosh, deep roots in the community and a passion for making Oshkosh THE place to be. I believe I can use my skills to continue all our success and help Oshkosh thrive.

3. Please outline what you consider to be the City of Oshkosh's 3 most critical issues. I would first like to say I look at this question as the City's greatest "threats".
 1. Lack of Housing and Affordability
 2. Lack of Workforce
 3. Keeping the City Running on an ever increasing budget.

I am running on solving these larger issues with the below focuses: to assist with the affordable housing/lack of units by getting aggressive with the City's housing plan. Fixing up old homes, advocating for adaptive reuse, and encouraging new development. Two, I believe in the revitalization effect of parks and the many health benefits associated with it. Having a park nearby is an amenity not all children throughout the city have. Three support neighborhood associations. Being a huge advocate for neighborhoods, I hope to get input and have my finger on the pulse of what neighborhoods need. In addition, I hope to give our neighborhoods resources to revitalize and help them thrive again, bringing folks back to older neighborhoods to work, live and play in our community. Four, support our small businesses. As I've said I'm an economic developer by trade and whether it's new development or supporting the businesses we already have, I want our economy to thrive. I believe the items I am running on help to address the

threats to the city and we can do them all in a fiscally responsible way. Attacking our housing crisis head on and making our community a place that all want to live in, will address many of the threats facing Oshkosh.

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?

See answer three. Housing, workforce, and funding. One of the biggest projects that will give us challenges is the Clearwater project. It's going to be expensive but we have to invest in our community and part of that is how our community looks.

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.

Yes, I support moving away from special assessments and using some kind of transportation Utility fee. Huge bills from street assessments can bankrupt a home or business. The church just down the street from us had a nearly \$75,000 bill that nearly made them close their doors. I would like to hear from staff on if a wheel tax or a utility fee, using average rides per use, would get the job done. I do not have an opinion on how it's funded until I hear more but we have to get rid of special assessments.

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?

In general, I do not support the fee for service approach and I find Oshkosh's fees to be ubiquitous and in some cases higher than their peers. I could support a fee if it was small and a service that directly impacted a person like a building permit or if we switched a currently collected fee to a new method but I don't like the idea of expanding new fee services.

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.

In general our storm water fees need to be looked at. If memory serves me right this account has a surplus but still raised its rates. I do not find that increase acceptable and we should be looking at what other communities charge to keep us in line with the norm. Without knowing more about the storm water utility budget I can't comment on further ideas but I can say that large of an increase means someone didn't do their math right when they first set up the utility. I'd be interested to see if the residential rate went up the same percent. If not that is an inequity.

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 and ensuring that Oshkosh is an attractive place to live and work.

The City needs to play an active role in recruiting and bringing folks to Oshkosh. The City's primary role is ensuring Oshkosh is investing in itself and making the City an attractive place to live. Trails, parks, night life, good schools, all attract people to the area and we need to invest in these amenities. Growing our population and keeping a thriving workforce is of the utmost importance. The City needs to get serious about this problem and maybe think outside the box. Working with the chamber to advertise moving here, maybe hire a workforce development position, even helping with family planning (while not an immediate population creator it is the best long term population solution) can help us bring new people to work play and live in our community.

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.

Yes this should be repealed. This comes down to local control. A city should control its own destiny and its own tax rate. I believe the current limits have encouraged many communities to always take the max tax limit every year because they don't know when they would get that growth again. Allowing the city to control its tax rate leaves room to not raise the rate or raise it very quickly in case of an emergency. I will always advocate for more local control and less state control.