



**City of Peoria District 1**  
**City Council Candidate Surveys**  
**Spring 2021 Election**

# **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PEORIA**

## **City of Peoria District Council Candidate Survey**

### **Aaron Chess, Jr. 1<sup>st</sup> District Candidate**

**1. What do you see as the top three issues in District 1? How will you work with the other members of the Council to address these issues?**

The three main issues facing District 1 today is the food desert crisis, infrastructure, lack of opportunities/Jobs. I plan to work with my colleagues on the city council by proposing and spearheading various projects that will help bring solutions to our problems. One project for instance is the Buy the Block Project, this initiative will drive our district forward by putting community members back to work. This impact will multiply by helping teach community members the importance of financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and by driving pride back in our community. This program will help rehabilitate our vacant homes and businesses. That revamp will usher in our economic comeback by bringing jobs and a sigh of relief back to our district.

**2. What are your recommendations for spending priorities, revenue opportunities and/or spending cuts? For instance, in addition to addressing the revenue shortfalls caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you deal with the pressing issue of spending on police and fire pensions?**

My recommendation for spending priorities is as simple as this: if we do not have the money, then we should dig our self into deeper debt by continuing to bail out failed businesses and start investing more in our small businesses and assisting them with resources that have caused majority of them to have to close their doors due to the shutdown. When it does come to cuts, I genuinely believe we must cut from areas in the budget which are not needed for the time being. And with the

Police and Fire pension problem it will taking working with our state officials to come up with a better way to properly fund our pensions.

**3. Please describe what you believe are the most important qualifications to serve as a District Councilperson and how your previous paid or volunteer experience has prepared you to serve.**

I believe the most important qualifications to serve as a district council member are that you are willing to do whatever it takes to serve your constituents, you must be transparent with your constituents, the business community and community leaders. My previous experiences which have prepared me to serve are that this past summer I led three city wide neighborhood clean ups. I have worked alongside various organizations such as Peoria Grown to help deliver healthy nutritious meals to families in district 1 who have been affected by the food desert. I have also over the years been able to mentor a few young men from my community and help ensure that they are on the right path to become successful in life.

**4. Please explain how you will provide information to the public regarding City operations and Council decisions? How will you reach out to your constituents for input? For instance, how will you provide for transparency in the upcoming redistricting process?**

I plan to utilize social media to the best of my advantage when it comes to updating my constituents on what is going on in city hall. I also plan on hosting town halls throughout my district to get my constituents more involved in the civic process and become better informed of the different proposals being brought up and voted on, on the council floor. And with the redistricting process as I mentioned before I plan to host various town halls on this issue to better inform my constituents.

Aaron Chess, Jr.

12/23/20

Date

# **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PEORIA**

## **City of Peoria District Council Candidate Survey**

### **Denise Jackson 1st District Candidate**

**1. What do you see as the top three issues in District 1? How will you work with the other members of the Council to address these issues?**

I believe that a lack of new and affordable housing, inadequate street and alley lighting and a poor infrastructure are among the top issues within the 1<sup>st</sup> District. The city of Peoria could partner with federal groups like the National Resource Network to redevelop the Southside and North Valley neighborhoods. Using the same approach city leaders did with the redevelopment that's taken place within the Warehouse District, the city would apply for federal dollars to revitalize these communities including the downtown. City leaders collaborated to get 30 million dollars in federal funds to redevelop the Warehouse District. As a result, we have seen new businesses and restaurants locate in that area and housing. I would use a similar approach to get support from residents, city council members and community partners to create a redevelopment plan for those areas. Redevelopment is vital in order to attract more businesses and homeowners to the 1<sup>st</sup> District. Once this is accomplished it will increase property taxes and sales tax revenue for the city.

**2. What are your recommendations for spending priorities, revenue opportunities and/or spending cuts? For instance, in addition to addressing the revenue shortfalls caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you deal with the pressing issue of spending on police and fire pensions?**

I believe spending priorities must always include basic, essential services like police, fire and code enforcement. When the economy tanks and cuts are necessary, we should always ask residents especially those with higher incomes if they would be willing to pay higher fees to help offset the burden. This is done in states like California. As for seeking new revenue sources, the city should always explore and market itself for new businesses and industries. Peoria, with its history of being a test market, must always broaden and diversify its economy.

Police and fire pensions make up more than half of the city's operating budget. For several years the city failed to pay into the pension system and now we're having to catch up. Regardless of the costs city leaders must be proactive when dealing with pension and other pressing obligations. Ignoring the problem for years only makes it more expensive in the long run. Unfortunately, voters are bearing the burden with the pension fees now being levied. One possible solution is to lobby the state legislature to amend the law in the Illinois Constitution. This could stop future unearned benefits

from growing faster than inflation. The result would end the 3 percent annual raise in pension income. This would protect pension funds and taxpayers. Or again we could ask residents whose incomes are over \$100,00 or \$200,00 if they would be willing to bear a higher tax burden to help cover pension costs.

**3. Please describe what you believe are the most important qualifications to serve as a District Councilperson and how your previous paid or volunteer experience has prepared you to serve.**

I am currently 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of Southside Community United for Change. SCUC is a nonprofit group which makes up several neighborhood associations in South Peoria. I am also president of my neighborhood association. I love doing the work of a neighborhood association president. I host cleanups 2-3 times a year, monitor activities and work with code enforcement, public works the police department and other groups to help solve constituent problems. It is very rewarding. I also gained a lot of knowledge about city and state government while covering stories as a reporter for WEEK TV. As an elected city council member, I will be able to achieve the goals of improving roads, increasing housing stock and assisting residents with enhancement/improvements to their homes. As their 1<sup>st</sup> District representative, we will work together to accomplish the goals of strengthening neighborhoods and increasing the overall quality of life for residents.

**4. Please explain how you will provide information to the public regarding City operations and Council decisions? How will you reach out to your constituents for input? For instance, how will you provide for transparency in the upcoming redistricting process?**

As the 1<sup>st</sup> District representative, I will meet regularly with residents to update them on council decisions, also seek their input for guidance on projects. This will be accomplished by attending neighborhood association meetings and providing updates on my city council Facebook page. I will provide updates on progress concerning their established goals and objectives. I also will invite other at large city council members to neighborhood association meetings in order to build and strengthen partnerships between the two. This is the best way to promote harmony and diversity across cultural, social and economic lines.

Denise Jackson

12/30/20

Date

Denise Moore, candidate for the 1st District Council position, did not submit survey responses by the deadline.

Alexander Sierra, candidate for the 1<sup>st</sup> District Council position, did not submit survey responses by the deadline.