



City of Peoria District 4
City Council Candidate Surveys
Spring 2021 Election

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PEORIA

City of Peoria District Council Candidate Survey

Andre W. Allen 4th District

1. What do you see as the top three issues in District 4? How will you work with the other members of the Council to address these issues?

The top three issues in District 4 are the following:

Public safety, specifically law-enforcement of traffic signals and stop signs across the district. There was recently an unfortunate death on Reservoir Avenue due to speeding. This regularly occurs on Sterling Avenue and routine disregard for stop signs across all of the neighborhoods. I would also support adding additional bike and walking lanes through the district. A safe, family friendly district is essential to continuing and building on our thriving district

A joint focus on redeveloping empty commercial space in the district, including the Wardcliffe Shopping Center and Sterling Plaza. In addition, we have been strategic in the support and development of Northwoods Mall. We cannot afford for it not to be successful. I have recently connected with the staff of Washington Prime Group, and I want our city to be a part of development and redevelopment opportunities. For our district, we have some of the best retail space in the community and are a staple for Peoria's revenue; my plan focus is to build on these excellent commercial spaces fostering more homegrown business for these spaces, while also being an ambassador to entice large national chains to all take home in District 4.

Re-establishment or reinvigoration of neighborhood associations, in order to instill a greater sense of community within the district and the neighborhoods. I would like to establish city-sponsored neighborhood cleanups, mowing, and other landscaping that would teach skills to our youth, while combating blight in our district. Having functioning and effective neighborhood associations allows for improved communication of city correspondence and addresses other issues, including public safety and upkeep. Within my first 100 days of office, I will have met with every established neighborhood association.

As a city council member for District 4, I feel it is my job to ensure my district not only pulls its own weight, but also thrives in order to help Peoria grow. My focus will remain on initiatives that bring more residence to my district, more businesses to my district, but most importantly help the ones who are already there, flourish. District 4 is known for its great schools, safe neighborhoods, and long-standing businesses. We are a staple to Peoria, and I feel the key is to not only balance our budget issues, but also create a future surplus. I will be collaborative with my prospective colleagues around the horseshoe, to make sure the best decisions are made in a manner that is improving our communities, maintaining basic services and making Peoria the best place it can be.

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

As a council, we must work with our department leads within the city and other subject matter experts to determine the appropriate level of staffing needed to execute the basic core services of our city. Once that is determined, we must compare that to our projected budget to see if it aligns with the financial stability of the city. The unfunded pension obligation is hindering cities all over our state, causing reductions in our basic core services. We must develop and follow an intentional course of action to navigate this issue. At this time, I do not believe our city should make any additional service/staffing cuts. I do agree with our current city council's recent assessment, to not fill any vacant positions that we cannot afford now. I feel our government staff is at a minimal level, especially our police and fire officials, and I will not vote for any additional cuts to either department, as they are both essential to public safety. We will need to constantly review our services to ensure we are not sacrificing quality over quantity; and most importantly, cost savings over lives. Instead, we must increase revenue, as it is imperative to our city's longevity.

I would like to see a multi-tiered approach and stake in *business development, job creation, and property ownership*, in older communities of our city. This is including South Peoria, the North Valley, and the East Bluff. These areas have a lot of potential, and economic investment is a tide that raises all boats. I want to address our unemployment, underemployment, and poverty rates in our city. It will take a collective effort from our city government and other community stakeholders to be open to and provide any intentional opportunities to address the following issues: increasing median household income, education/vocational training, and homeownership. We will need to seek employment opportunities that provide livable wages for our citizens, whether they are established or new businesses/companies. Providing jobs will not be enough, as we must ensure our citizens are receiving the education and vocational training necessary to fill these roles. I would like to see improved collaboration between City Hall and our respective school systems in the city (i.e., public, private, vocational, etc.) When our citizens begin to make more income and receive the necessary skills/attributes to be successful, we will see a positive impact on increased homeownership, economic investment, increased commerce/revenues for our city.

Lastly, I believe our city and its leaders really should consider believing and investing in ourselves, and as such should consider using debt to fund our deficits and invest in our community. Over last 10 years, city council has been excellent at cutting expenses and raising taxes in order to try to meet pension obligations and close budget deficits, but this playbook has run its course. This is no longer an expenses issue, and with our tax base only been shrinking over these last 4 years our city must shift gears before it's too late. Our city is on a tipping point and the next four, eight, twelve years must be focused on growing our city revenues by increasing our workforce, bringing in new businesses, and while fostering and promoting the homegrown businesses we have. There isn't a balance the budget pill that we can take, but there is a balance the budget 10 year plan we can take, and I fully believe Peoria should invest in themselves for next 10 years and grow ourselves out of the deficit, not cut ourselves out of it. I would explore the possibility of issuing long-term debt at attractive interest rates similar to other cities around the country; I believe Peoria would be betting on itself.

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 have eight years of progressive higher education experience, working for both public and private institutions in a variety of roles/areas including academic advising, residential life, student activities, student retention, and senior-level administration. I have served as Dean of Students at Methodist College of UnityPoint Health in Peoria, Illinois since July 2017. As a current college administrator, I have experience with developing communication strategies to engage multiple stakeholders. I pride myself with having strong communication skills.

I enjoy participating in a variety of civic engagement and volunteer opportunities in my spare time, serving on multiple boards and committees including Police-Community Relations Advisory Committee (Chair), Peoria Public Schools Foundation, Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce and is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Kappa Pi Lambda Chapter of Peoria, Illinois. I am a candidate that is organically involved in the community prior to seeking elected office, allowing me to demonstrate my commitment to our city, and form relationships with various stakeholders. These established community and council relationships will allow me to navigate and be effective in this role. I have the ability build consensus on a team.

I am one of the few candidates who are prepared to use every tool at our collective offense to help Peoria reverse its disastrous course. TIF Funds, special tax breaks for certain businesses, to working with neighboring communities to help create new opportunities for all. I plan to reverse Peoria's declines and vulnerabilities with initiatives that promote economic growth and bring new residents to our city that will reverse our current population decline. Once we begin to grow revenue, I will support filling vacant positions and subsequently bringing our government back to full staff. Our job as city council is to find new forms of revenue for our city going forward. I will be a transparent, authentic, and confident councilman. Someone your organization can count on to make informed decisions, and truly serve as a liaison between City Hall and the citizens of Peoria.

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 will be a council member whose best ability is their availability to the constituents of District 4. All mediums of communication will be used including, phone/text, email, social media, and virtual platforms(Zoom/TEAMS). We have a very diverse population within the district, and it will be important to have councilpersons who can adapt and utilize multiple communication platforms to disseminate district focused and citywide information.

The pandemic has allowed us to become more innovative of how we stay connected with one another. I will provide current and constant information to the citizens in District 4, in a way that is intentional and transparent, using this tactic especially during the upcoming redistricting process.

Name: Andre W. Allen



Date: 1/11/2021

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PEORIA

City of Peoria District Council Candidate Survey

Stephen A. Kouri 4th District

1. What do you see as the top three issues in District 4? How will you work with the other members of the Council to address these issues?

The top three issues in the 4th District are 1) economic growth, 2) public safety including crime, and 3) taxes and fees. I will work with the city council by managing the budget in a way where all three are satisfied before addressing other services and priorities in our 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?

This is a serious question asked by a serious organization. It is perhaps the most important issue facing the city. It requires more than a brief answer. It requires more than a superficial understanding of a complex financial puzzle. My number one priority is the taxpayer, because I am the taxpayer's employee. Thus, a hard "no" to any proposed increases to taxes or fees. People have already been voting with their feet. We are an embarrassing joke on YouTube, listed as one of the "10 places in Illinois you should never move to." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fob5lJTASMI>) You don't change that image overnight, and you don't change it by raising taxes.

My second priority is developing the economy.

My third priority is public safety, and keeping the city safe.

The City has a 200+ million dollar budget, and we ought to be able to satisfy all three priorities by conservatively managing the budget in other areas. Many, including some counsel members, seem to have a superficial understanding of the complex budget, which lets a less than fiscally conservative bureaucracy drive the budget process (and thus spending). That has to be reversed. We need to start the process with how much we have to spend, not how much we want to spend. Here's a non-exclusive short list of things that can help address the budget issues, but first let me make clear that taxes and fees are NOT an option. People are voting with their feet, and the budget and EAV bleeding must be addressed immediately with well thought out, decisive action or the present budget problems will seem minor a few years from now. We are at a critical time in this city's evolution. Other candidates don't give specifics. Here is a non-exclusive short list:

- a. Focus on HRA and sales tax as a potential source for a revenue driver. The hidden lesson of 25 years of IHSA March Madness was the significant growth of HRA and sales tax revenue. It was two weekends a year of full hotel rooms (out of only 7 "full" weekends/year) with HRA and sales tax growth. Why not shoot for 40+ weekends a year of full hotel rooms by leveraging the Louisville Slugger Complex and incentivizing travel youth sports tournaments with the reserve fund no longer needed for March Madness? It's our niche in the broader sports market. It will drive higher HRA and sales tax revenues with "outside" dollars.
- b. Seek/demand a change in state law to allow fire departments to bill for medical services rendered (without impacting present division of transport duties between AMT and city). This is for services already being done. When a firefighter rides in an ambulance to assist in emergency care, as now frequently happens, AMT bills insurance for its employee, but the firefighter's time and service cannot be billed. This occurs countless times.

c. Top to bottom review of fleet management and purchase. At what age do we replace vehicles? You might be surprised at that answer. Do we really need 4 large latter firetrucks at a cost of \$1.2 million/vehicle going to traffic accidents? Anecdotaly, do we really need police vehicle parked all night at an East Peoria residence occupied by a Peoria Police Officer?

d. Top to bottom review of all franchise agreements. Have we negotiated fair deals for the taxpayer in exchange for monopolies? When was the last time that review was done, if ever?

e. Consider selling/assigning the water company option. Although there are pro's and con's to both sides of the argument, philosophically government should not buy a private sector company that provides good service. It is a reoccurring divisive issue for the council that seems to polarize the council into factions that carries over into other issues. If risky and expensive ownership of the water company is a revenue windfall boon, then the option itself is a valuable asset that has gathered dust sitting on the shelf (and no benefit to the city) for over 100 years, and has costs us millions in legal fees and judgments. It is time to explore other "options." The city should consult with a national investment banker to determine what value can be realized for the sale of the option itself. If there is significant value in owning the water company, there is significant value that can be realized by the sale of the option. If the option has little to no market value, then that answers the question of whether there is budgetary value in the city putting the taxpayer at significant risk and debt to purchase the water company.

f. At the end of the day, live within our means.

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 have served on the City's Zoning Board of Appeals, and Liquor Commission. My leadership skills let me become chairman of the liquor commission by unanimous vote. I don't have all the answers, but I know my way around city hall and its culture. It's easy to make promises, but I think I have the background to get things done that can make a difference to the citizens of Peoria. I was a former state's attorney in Peoria County, and am currently a solo practitioner running my own legal business in Peoria. My experience in the courtroom and on the city's commissions allows me to make difficult, unpopular decisions without hesitation. I am not afraid to make an unpopular decision if it is in the best interest of the community.

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 will have social media accounts set up for constituents to obtain updates

However, I think it is important to interact directly with constituents. I will ask for every constituent's email address, and put together an email list. I will email them issue summaries before every meeting, ask for input, and email summaries after every meeting with what had happened. I will also provide every constituent my contact information, and let them know that I have an open door policy. I am passionate about constituent services and communication. They will be able to contact me 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Stephen A. Kouri

1/9/2021

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PEORIA

City of Peoria District Council Candidate Survey

Patricia Melaik 4th District

1. What do you see as the top three issues in District 4? How will you work with the other members of the Council to address these issues?

There are many concerns about the different taxes and fees that the City of Peoria is imposing on residents because of the shortfalls in the budget crisis in recent years. The City needs to be aggressively attracting new business to Peoria to increase the tax base and not rely solely on its' residents for revenue. And when it does attract businesses, we need more diversity in our local economy instead of just relying on one type of service, such as medical services or restaurants and bars.

Another great concern is about public safety and cutting the budgets of the Fire and Police Departments. Cutting "essential city services" should only be used as a last resort in my opinion.

The third issue I would suggest as a priority is to work with Community Development and make sure that the City works with "landlords of rental houses" that they are adhering to the rules and regulations of being "responsible landlords". This has NOT been a huge issue in District 4, but there have been incidences where renters do not uphold their responsibilities by taking in their garbage cans, mowing their lawns on a regular basis and raking their leaves. There needs to be a clear understanding between the "landlords and the renters" of what their responsibilities are so that the "lack of" does not cause a de-valuing of owner properties in the neighborhoods of where these rental homes are located.

How to work with the other Council Members on these issues is to collaborate and come up with solutions but ALSO to work with neighborhood associations and engage their cooperation and activity to "get involved" as active residents. It is amazing what can be accomplished when neighbors get together and become engaged for the "common welfare of all"!!

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?

Spending Priorities: I feel strongly that "safety issues" must be a priority in the City of Peoria, which involves Fire and Police protection, safe roads and highways as well as safe communities. As for revenue opportunities, I believe that as a City we need to promote the practice of SHOP LOCAL and Often everywhere in the city. Many cities have been

promoting this all around us from Washington, IL to Bloomington to East Peoria. It seems that this is not a priority here and Why?? The Community Development Agency in Peoria needs to get more involved in “selling the City of Peoria” to its’ residents. I feel that Peoria is a wonderful city to live in and raise a family. We have so many beautiful assets from our wonderful Riverfront Museum and library system – one of the best in the State – to our two symphonies and City Park system and so much more. We as a city need to “tout” these achievements. And from that we need to attract more businesses to our city and be more competitive to accomplish that. As for spending cuts, there is a need to constantly be looking at how services can be streamlined more efficiently to save taxpayers money. We need to be coming up with solutions so that city taxes do not get raised again. Lots of Peoria residents are very unhappy about those taxes/fees. Pension issues are a serious problem not only in Peoria and other Illinois cities but across the country. There needs to be a State-sponsored solution to this problem, but also building the city’s tax base and more development in the business sector will help.

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 person are:

First, the willingness to serve the community --- to give back. A belief that one person can ‘make a difference’.

Strong Leadership skills, honesty, integrity, certainly ‘courage’ and commitment to making the City of Peoria a safer, friendlier place to live, work and raise a family.

Other skills should include: the ability to engage the public trust and to energize citizen engagement, great organizational skills and to provide an independent voice for all residents. The candidate should also be an active communicator with great social skills, an “engager” and be able to work with people on all sides of issues despite the differences we all have. Compassion and compromise are essential goals for this position.

How previous and past experiences have prepared me to serve?

Over the course of my lifetime, I have had the privilege and opportunity to experience many types of jobs and careers. After graduating from college, I had several jobs working as a social worker with developmentally disabled children and adults. Having volunteered in high school with disabled adults after school as part of my service club requirement, taught me that I had the skills and patience to deal with those who needed social interaction and assistance with everyday skills. Eventually, I decided to obtain a teacher certificate to teach Special Education students and did that for 26 years in the public school system in Springfield, Illinois. Needless to say, teaching in a classroom everyday with students who have special needs of various types was a huge challenge but one that helped me to grow personally and professionally. Personally, I became a more disciplined, tolerant and

compassionate teacher. Professionally, I acquired the skills of collaboration in reaching out to my fellow teaching professionals who sometimes did not appreciate how much more effort there was involved with creating an 'appropriate' teaching curriculum for special education students. I sometimes had to "sell" or convince my fellow regular education teachers that my students were just as hard-working as regular students and were deserving of a fair but appropriate curriculum for their needs.

After retiring from teaching in Springfield, I met and married a Peoria dentist and moved to the City of Peoria in 2009. In 2010, I fulfilled one of my "retirement dreams", which was to become a Master Gardener with the U. of I. Extension and became involved with gardening projects in the City.

Hard work, usually physical, commitment, leadership, collaboration, dedication, social interaction plus education about the plant world are only some of the skills that have enhanced my experiences over the past few years. In 2012, I helped to organize the training for the U. of I. Master Naturalist Program and was in the first class for Peoria County. That training has increased my love and knowledge of the natural world and has inspired me to develop skills in herb and butterfly gardening, raising butterflies in the summer and teaching others about what I have learned. I am still an active Master Gardener and Master Naturalist and have served the Master Gardener organization in my roles as president, secretary and publicity chair.

In 2018, because of some "concerning events" that occurred in my neighborhood, I decided to start a neighborhood association – the MetroWest Neighborhood Association. We have been certified by the City of Peoria and were actively meeting up until the Covid Pandemic. Obviously starting a neighborhood association with no budget and knowing few neighbors was quite a challenge but I was determined and after making and placing over 400 flyers at neighbors' homes with several volunteers, we have an engaged group of neighbors numbering about 70 families. I am very proud of what we have accomplished and look forward to the future!!

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 believe strongly that 'communication' is key to all our efforts in life, no matter what we are involved with. Residents want to know what is going on in their community even though sometimes they do not take the time to find out. As a District Council person, I will work hard and go the extra mile to communicate decisions made by the Council by way of press releases, emails, setting up monthly or bi-monthly open meetings setting both morning and after work hours for residents to meet, bring their concerns and discuss solutions. As President of my neighborhood association I have already been involved with several issues of concern in our neighborhood and have worked with City officials to resolve them.

Therefore, I feel I have the skills, the commitment, the compassion and the ability to “make a difference” on the City Council for the City of Peoria.

Patricia Melaik

January 9, 2021