



Candidate Questionnaire for Whitewater Municipal Election

April 4, 2017

Councilmember at Large - Patrick Singer

Q1. What motivates you to want to become or seek another term as a Common Council member?

I have had the privilege of serving Whitewater citizens for the past ten (10) years on the Common Council. During that time there has been much change within our community – both opportunities and challenges.

I have always worked hard to advocate for the citizens I represent. Given the dynamic makeup of Whitewater, and our status as a predominately university driven community, the need to look at all sides of an issue is paramount.

There is still much work to be done on issues that will continue to improve the quality of life in our community – and I look forward to work the next two years in that capacity.

Q2. Which aspects of your background make you suitable for this position?

The past ten years have allowed me to continue to gain knowledge on our community and its needs. As was previously stated, I have always tried to advocate for the needs brought to me by constituents and other councilmembers.

For the past nine years I have been selected by my peers to chair the Common Council. I apply the same philosophy in that responsibility as I do as an individual councilmembers. The need to make sure all voices are heard (both citizens and councilmembers) is important to ensure that our municipal government is as responsive as it can be.

One of the consistent themes in the past several years has been the need for the City of Whitewater to communicate more effectively with our residents. In order to address this complaint I worked with our City Manager to convert our vacant Media Services Coordinator to a new Public Relations and Communication Manager. This position has already begun to improve the engagement avenues that the City uses with our citizens.

Q3. Whitewater is fortunate to have several independent organizations such as the Food Pantry, the Clothes Closet, and the Bethel House, to name a few, that provide needed social services for our community. Do you think they should be consolidated in one physical location, making them easier to access for those in need? If so, how might that be accomplished?

The fact that Whitewater is home to the above mentioned organizations is testament to the responsibility our citizens take to ensure that the most vulnerable among us our taken care of. That said, the decision on how these

organizations choose to physically locate is a decision for them. There could be a benefit to having all resources located in one location – but it would have to make sense for those organizations involved.

In addition to looking at the physical consolidation, the need to communicate the purpose and need for these organizations is equally important. Our citizens should know the great work that these organizations are doing. It would also help to generate more volunteers and donations from those that can give, and provide the knowledge to those in need that there is support out there.

The City can help partner on the communication front with our new Public Relations and Communications Manager to assist in dissemination of this information through municipal channels. Also, these groups could leverage resources on campus to assist in promoting these organizations.

Q4. There seems to be consensus that citizens of Whitewater would like a grocery store. Specifically how would you go about making that happen?

The lack of a full service grocery store in Whitewater is a priority issue for most of our community. The factors that led to the closure of Sentry and the inability thus far to attract a replacement are complicated.

As the City of Whitewater, the organization, the outreach to all channels within the grocery space has been ongoing since Sentry closed its doors. There have been a couple of interested parties but the lack of an appropriate sized space and market demand for financing approval have been barriers.

The Community Development Authority has been actively recruiting grocers and a committed group of residents are in the process of examining the feasibility of a local grocery co-op. Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet to this issue. The factors that led to Sentry closing, which were just not related to the expansion of Wal-Mart, are also providing challenges to the recruitment of a new store.

With a multi-pronged approach that is just not reliant on municipal government, it is hopeful that we will have movement on addressing this glaring need in the near future. The City will be working in 2017 to continue to educate residents on the status of all efforts, and to engage residents on what their ideas.

This truly does have an impact on the quality of life in our community for everyone. It impacts the growth of single family homes, attraction of employees and retirees alike and will also negatively affect the ability for UW-Whitewater to continue growing. Suffice to say, this issue touches all within our community and we need everyone together to address it.

Q5. Occasions like St. Patrick's Day and Spring Splash can negatively impact the community. Do you feel that it is appropriate for the city to be involved in regulating such events, and, if so, how?

Ensuring the peace and safety for all residents is one of the main functions that the City of Whitewater exists for. The reality of being a community with a large university in it provides additional demands on our public safety infrastructure when larger events as held within our community

There are only so many regulations that a municipality can impose on private property owners, especially when coupled with the resources required to enforce. As the Common Council has examined the issue of how to address large events with the community, it is apparent that there are numerous regulations already in law that allow for our law enforcement to proactively address issues that arise.

The main issue that has become apparent is ensuring that our public safety agencies are prepared and coordinating to address those aspects of these large events that can get our of control and impact other residents in a negative way.

We want to ensure that Whitewater is a safe place for all residents, no matter is there are large events held in our community. The fact that these large events are being held is not the issue, but the enforcement of our ordinances and laws for those that chose to not act in a responsible manner.

As was heard at a recent Common Council meeting, the public safety agencies in partnership with UW-W have developed an approach that will address future events in a proactive way. This includes communication of to all residents on the overall event, the expectations for residents participating in such an event and what residents who experience inappropriate behavior can do.

The most important thing we can do is to be prepared for large events and if there are modifications needed to our ordinances to assist public safety agencies in maintaining order – we need to engage everyone in the community in those discussions.

Q6. What are the top two or three economic development priorities that you will champion as a member of the Common Council?

The recruitment of a full service grocer or co-op to our community is one of the most important priorities we as a community are focusing on. Without this important provider in our city, the ability to grow in other ways will be compromised.

Additional priorities for me to continue working towards are the growth of our industrial and technology parks and being responsive to all business needs (small to large businesses) in a responsible way. These are two initiatives I have been working on for a large duration of my time on the Common Council there is always more work to be done as we try and compete with the ever changing region, state, country and world

Q7. As University students move into available housing rentals in Whitewater, there is a chilling effect on single-family housing. What can be done to encourage more development of single-family homes and therefore an increase in that population?

Market forces drive most of where the demand is for housing rentals in our community. During the early 2000s when the housing financing market was very permissive, the growth of rentals in to traditional single family neighborhoods saw an uptick. Since the recession in 2008 some of that growth has curtailed back – since it was not as easy for single individuals to buy a house in our community, rent it to their children and friends and then continue renting it once their children had graduated.

With the zoning re-write initiative a few years ago, the focus on providing natural growth areas for rental housing were incorporated in to that enacted proposal. The encouragement of higher density rental housing near campus was encouraged – and recent studies have shown that this is working.

In order to continue to grow our single family housing stock we need to continue to work to recruit employers and employees to our community to live in those homes. If the market for those homes is there – development will occur.

Q8. Whitewater used to have both regular bus service and train service. For some decades it has not had either and the most recent experiment with a bus did not last long. Do you think that it is important to look for alternatives to automobiles for transportation to any distance outside of town and back?

Public transportation is an important service that always should be considered for a community.

The bus service that was provided for several years between Janesville, Milton and Whitewater was a good test for what demand there was for such a service. At this time, the main ridership for that service was for one particular employer in the industrial park. Unfortunately, even when small adjustments were made to hours of service the amount of non-employee ridership did not increase. The service was ended due to the Council decided it could not subsidize a bus service for one employer within our community.

That is not to say that another service or similar solution could not be examined in the future. I am committed that if the demand from our citizens is there to help support a transportation service, whether it be transportation within the community (increased shared ride taxi) or bussing service to other cities, we as a Council need to seriously look at those proposals.

Q9. It has been difficult to get citizens to participate in local government by running for Common Council or joining City boards and commissions. Why do you think this is true and how would you encourage others to become actively involved?

This issue is not unique to Whitewater, as voter participation and general civic engagement nationwide has diminished over the years.

In Whitewater, there are a couple of approaches that are being looked at to engage our citizens in the decision making process, which hopefully will spark additional willingness to participate in other ways.

With our PR and Communications Manager on board, we are looking to leverage various communication channels to our residents, that may not have been used before. We understand that our community is diverse in terms of ages. All generations consume information through different media forms, and making sure that we are reaching all segments of our population is critical to an informed engaged electorate.

In the very near future we will be updating our current Cable TV Commission to be the Community Involvement and Cable TV Commission. This remodeled commission will work to develop a comprehensive communication plan for the City of Whitewater and also examine ways to better engage citizens in all aspects of municipal government.

Finally, I would like to work with the Whitewater Unified School District to reach in to the schools and educate on the functions of municipal government and give students the chance to shadow both city staff and councilmembers.

Q10. Is there something that the City of Whitewater is not presently doing that you believe will significantly improve the quality of life and strengthen the local economy? What is that and why do you believe it to be important?

As the previous answers I provided in this questionnaire show, there is plenty of work to be done as a community to continue to improve our community.

It is my hope that with a committed Common Council, city staff, partner organizations (UW-W, WUSD) and all residents in our community – that we can accomplish our shared community goals.