

Questions for Portland City Council Candidates

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In your opinion, what are the top three issues facing Portland and its residents?

1. Ensuring fiscal accountability during a time of diminishing resources.
2. Creating an education system that works for ALL.
3. Developing and realizing a sustainable vision for Portland with broad community input and support.

In which ways can the city improve transportation? What are your short, medium and long-term goals for Portland's transportation?

The most important challenge for the city to tackle when it comes to transportation is to integrate transportation planning with all of the other planning activities. Economic development, housing, land use, education, capital budgets, parks and open space, energy and environmental sustainability all both impact and are impacted by transportation policies and choices.

Short term – I would continue to deemphasize minimum parking requirements and focus more on transit options including bike/ped investments.

Medium term – I would continue the work I led as Vice-President of the Greater Portland METRO Transit District in attracting municipalities to join such as Falmouth's becoming a full member. I would look to Gorham and USM as logical next targets in developing joint student-commuter service to Portland's western suburbs.

Long term – I would continue my efforts as Vice-President of the Greater Portland Council of Governments in moving towards one comprehensive land use and transportation plan for ALL of Greater Portland. Transportation problems are inherently regional in nature and therefore require regional solutions.

What are Portland's strengths and weaknesses regarding affordable housing? How can we improve the weaknesses and expand on the strengths?

It is time to review the successes and failures of the city's affordable housing plan which I helped write almost 10 years ago. Some successes include the development of mixed income housing across the peninsula and the push for owner occupied multi-unit housing through the New Neighbors program. Challenges that remain include a lack of affordable housing off-peninsula as well as artists being priced out of the Arts District. Another opportunity for improvement is inducing the market to produce mixed use – commercial and residential together – projects such as the shopping center with housing that was proposed for Morrills Corner. Although not perfect, some of us advocated effectively for such higher density, transit friendly development along potential transit corridors such as Forest Avenue.

When, and in what ways, are TIFs (tax increment financing) appropriate and where are opportunities to utilize this tool in your view?

I began developing a scoring matrix for TIF applications when I served on the city council's finance committee that I would like to bring forward if elected. This matrix would identify sustainable goals for the city such as affordable housing, transit friendly development, green building design, job creation, etc., prioritize those goals, assign bonuses for geographic preference such as Bayside and other targeted areas, and then result in an objective score for a TIF application. This approach would remove much of the opportunity for back room deals and force councilors to be more accountable to the public when it comes to using this potentially powerful economic development tool.

Given the city's financial constraints, where do you believe the city should trim and/or raise revenues?

The city should continue to pursue the right to levy a local option sales, room, and/or meal tax to reduce our dependence on the somewhat regressive property tax as well as our reliance on state and federal funding sources that often dry up during economic hard times such as the current situation. In the meantime we must both streamline service delivery systems such as the merger of Parks with Public Works and lower our energy costs through innovative means such as the Energy Services Contract, both of which I championed as mayor.

How would you prioritize Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) monies in Portland?

In my three years on the council I led the top to bottom review and subsequent restructuring of how priorities are set and funding recommendations made to the City Council for the CDBG program. I insisted on broad citizen involvement and supported the work of the task forces when it came to the challenge of securing passage of the sweeping recommendations by the council. Although not perfect, the clear definition of priority areas and a much more objective scoring system are significant improvements over the previous methodology which was ill-defined and much more reliant on private versus public deliberations. More work remains to be done and I look forward to picking up where I left off.

What is your impression of the Old Port and Arts Districts?

They are two of the signature neighborhoods that make Portland such a great place to live and work. As such, they should not be taken for granted and require careful management of issues such as affordable housing and studio space, public safety, historic preservation, and business vitality and diversity. Portland's Downtown District (PDD) is an important voice in representing many of the stakeholders in these critical locations.

What changes, if any, would you like to see regarding liquor/entertainment licensing and regulations?

From my experience working with the Old Port bar owners, the Portland Downtown District, and the Portland Police Department I see the need to focus more on behavioral issues – both of bar patrons AND bar owners/managers - than arbitrarily limiting entertainment licenses. There are enough bars with entertainment licenses that never cause public safety problems that prove it can be done. Bars that cause problems simply should not be tolerated since they threaten the viability of both the Old Port and the Arts District. Efforts to solve problems in a more collaborative manner should be encouraged such as the recent work to deal with the noise issue and facilitating team approaches such as the use of texting to identify unruly bar patrons.

Do you support the Charter Commission's recommendation for a popularly elected mayor elected through Ranked Choice Voting? (yes/no). Why or why not?

YES. As mayor, I led the effort to ask Portland voters to create a charter commission to take up the question of having an elected mayor. I also worked with the legislature to allow us to separate the question of creating a charter commission from the actual election of those members. I am pleased that the voters will finally have their say on November 2.

Do you support giving the right to vote to all legal residents of Portland?

I strongly support having the citizens of Portland vote on this issue. I supported the citizen initiative to place this question on the ballot and will support the position taken by Portland's voters on November 2.