



Grand Haven City Mayoral and Council Candidate Questionnaire

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Employer: __Retired – formerly Howmet Corporation (Alcoa, Arconic)_____

Office Being Sought: __Mayor, City of Grand Haven_____

**Please feel free to attach a separate sheet if the space provided is not sufficient.*

General:

1. What qualifications/experience do you feel you possess that will enable you to fulfill the responsibilities of the elected office you are seeking?

I am a retired engineer with a career in private industry, including 31 years at Howmet Corporation, where I was responsible for capital improvement projects, facilities design, and leadership of UAW skilled tradesmen. I have used that background in my approach to service in the public realm. I use facts and rational thinking to understand problems and reach decisions. I served on the Planning Commission from 1999 to 2008, including five years as chairman. I learned to run those meetings fairly, thoroughly, within the law and good practice, and with respect for the public. I served as chairman of the City's Environment and Natural Resource Committee from its inception in 2002 to 2009, contributing to the City's efforts at conservation and environmental compliance. From 2009 through 2019, I served on City Council, and in 2019 I was elected Mayor. I have continued to work hard and fairly to advance the best interests of the city and its citizens to the best of my understanding. I currently serve on the Harbor Transit Board and represent Harbor Transit on the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), the region's MPO. In 2010 I was elected to the Tri-Cities Historical Museum Board, serving as board member, Treasurer, Secretary, and Facilities Committee Chair. I have been working with students in the Grand Haven Area Public Schools since 1998 as a coach for Odyssey of the Mind and Science Olympiad, at both middle school and high school levels, including several trips to National Tournaments; this experience has kept me in touch with the kids, what they need to be successful, both in their learning of skills and their developing maturity; these kids are our future. My contact with the kids allows me to pass along knowledge and share my experiences. This is the most rewarding thing I do: I have always understood that I learn as much from the kids as they learn from me.

2. Have you ever run for political office before? If yes, please explain.

I was elected to Grand Haven City Council in 2009, re-elected in 2013 and 2017. I was elected Mayor in 2019.

3. If elected, what would be your top priorities and why?

There are plenty of issues requiring our attention: housing shortage and lack of affordability; safety and stability of the various neighborhoods, both residential and commercial, through careful planning and regulation; a never-ending infrastructure project list; snowballing legacy costs; remediation and reuse of the Sims plant site and the future of power generation in GH; protection of natural and environmentally sensitive areas; utility capacity; development of a diverse, year-round economy with good jobs and opportunities for citizens' prosperity. All of these priorities are necessary to carry on the business of the city and insure its future.

Economic Development, General Policy and Transportation

1. Please describe your general economic development philosophy for Northwest Ottawa County.

The economy of Northwest Ottawa County has always been diverse and broadly based, and this must continue in order to be resilient in the face of constantly shifting national and global economic pressures. The communities of Northwest Ottawa are deeply interdependent, and collaboration is a necessity. We have been fortunate to have strong and complementary segments in manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. We have a well-educated workforce with good work ethic, although we struggle to provide the range of housing and transportation options to support them. Local intergovernmental cooperation has generally been good and supportive so that the region prospers together. Recreational opportunities and natural areas enhance the quality of life. We can build on our strengths while addressing our weaknesses in a deliberate, incremental manner.

2. Do you support the use of tax abatements and /or special tax incentives to create jobs and spur economic growth? Why or why not?

Tax abatements are a widely used tool to retain industry and to reclaim distressed, underutilized, or contaminated property. Without some incentives, it is often cheaper for a business to develop unencumbered and undeveloped land than to expand in place or locate in an older community, or to leave for a city that offers a better deal. Use of the tax abatements can make a community more attractive and can mitigate some of the initial costs of investment; the payback to a community is the long-term growth of jobs and tax base. I support them because they ease the cost of investment, promote jobs, help to foster cooperation between the city and the business, are time-bound and have no immediate negative effect on city revenue. I strongly believe, however, that the

recipients of tax abatements must be held accountable to their commitments to the economic health of the city and region.

3. What are your thoughts regarding the need for affordable workforce housing?

The greatest single challenge for our businesses, whether industrial, commercial, tourism, or other service occupations, appears to be recruiting and retaining qualified, trained, and committed employees. If they can't afford to live in the community where they work, and if they can't afford to raise families here, attend schools or churches, contribute to the social fabric of the city, then not only will our businesses be at a disadvantage, but the whole community will be poorer. Providing a range of housing options appropriate to the means of our workforce is an essential element to meet this challenge.

4. As we move to a more regional community and in the face of continued fiscal constraints, what are your thoughts on consolidation of services (police, fire, schools, transportation to name a few)?

Consolidation must be approached with caution. Much depends on how a consolidation is executed and what the goals were. Collaboration and cooperation between organizations or departments, pooling of resources among peer organizations, can deliver economies of scale without losing responsiveness and identity, whereas consolidation often simply makes organizations larger and more distant. To the extent that consolidation can eliminate duplication of administrative or fixed costs, it may be helpful. However, I would be very concerned that bigger is not necessarily better and keeping services, particularly municipal services, close to the people generally serves the people better.

5. Please provide your vision of what council can do to support Mainstreet DDA and all business districts that are spread throughout the city to ensure there is continuing business growth and new development that generates new tax base.

Fundamentally, the city needs to listen to the needs of businesses regularly, be flexible in our use of public resources, and pursue policies which set the stage for success. We can be a conduit for grant funding and a resource for collaboration. Council needs to provide, within our means, the infrastructure and public amenities which support business, industry, residents, and visitors as they make, move, and consume products, live high-quality lifestyles, and enjoy local experiences.

6. Please describe how you plan, if elected, to work toward funding/controlling legacy costs.

Legacy costs are growing in Grand Haven, and our situation is hardly unique among cities in Michigan. We are always looking for best practices and new ideas from other cities and municipal entities. City Council has made a priority of controlling the MERS unfunded accrued liabilities for at least the past four years. To date, defined benefit pension multipliers have been bridged to reduce costs, also reducing pension benefits, and the employees pay an unusually high share of the cost of their pension benefit, so our situation is slightly better than many cities. This has had an unintended negative effect on retention of younger workers. The suggestion to eliminate the

defined benefit plan entirely appears to drive up costs rather than reduce them. Still, with the most recent MERS actuarial studies, we find ourselves falling behind and devoting an ever-increasing share of our tax revenues to our required annual payment. This year, city administration has been tasked with identifying some actions that council may implement. Options suggested so far to deal with this are not attractive: reduce operating costs by reducing workforce (by attrition) and eliminating services or amenities where possible; selling of assets such as land or facilities to generate cash and create taxable property; raising taxes through dedicated, voter approved millages; or some such combination. We will continue to look for better options, and to lobby our legislators for options as well.

7. How would you propose to fund key community infrastructure needs that have been identified by city staff over the next three to seven years?

The larger infrastructure projects such as street and utility reconstruction will eventually be funded through the perpetual millage that the citizens approved in 2019, and funding generated through utility service fees, in addition to aggressively pursuing grants and other outside funding. The perpetual millage replaces bond millages as they expire over the next several years, without raising the overall tax burden. Until this millage becomes fully implemented, projects will need to be smaller scale and immediate in nature. Other infrastructure, such as city buildings, parks, and service facilities, etc., will rely on careful maintenance and opportunity funding such as grants plus local matching funds. The city must be smart and selective about the capital investments it makes, and the amenities it attempts to sustain.

8. Discuss how mass transit may assist with workforce development and what role local/state government may play in further expanding regional transportation services throughout West Michigan

Impediments to regional transportation are a combination of jurisdictional boundaries and infrastructure investment. Transportation authorities such as Harbor Transit, MATS, the GR Rapid, etc., have jurisdictional boundaries which are supported by local taxation and by payments of Federal and state funds; these are associated with specific regions and ridership counts. Transporting people across jurisdictional boundaries, such as transporting workers, customers, and residents across county lines or between different service areas will require agreements to account for overlapping costs and parity of service. Examples may be agreements for MATS to transport workers to and from jobs in North Ottawa County and Harbor Transit transporting people to and from Lakes Mall: such examples would be beneficial to the public but would involve transit authorities driving outside of their base areas. Agreements would need to be worked out and supported by state law to allow sharing of ridership and funding resources. Another approach would be establishment of a regional transportation system, including funding, such as light rail or bus between more widely separated communities, allowing passengers to ride between communities without intermediate stops and transfer to local transit, private transportation, or walkable destinations.

Please attach additional information regarding your community and business affiliations.