

Catherine M. McNally
Candidate
Mayor of Grand Haven

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

Professional Experience: 25 years as a Coast Guard officer, attorney, instructor and leader in positions of increasing responsibility in operational, personnel and industrial management, law, regulatory enforcement and compliance, strategic planning, logistics, land use, federal claims, professional development and military justice.

Significant Assignments:

- Coast Guard Representative, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island;
- Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Integrated Support Command, Ketchikan, Alaska;
- Legal Officer, Eighth Coast Guard District, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Educational Summary:

- Bachelor of Arts (*magna cum laude*) in History, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1978;
- *Juris Doctor*, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1981;
- Master of Arts (with Distinction) in National Security and Strategic Studies, Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, 1996.

Core Competencies:

- Sound judgment and principled leadership;
- Well-developed sense of fairness and of humor;
- Strong writing, speaking and interpersonal skills;
- Extensive government ethics expertise;
- Member, State Bar of Michigan.

2. Have you ever run for political office before? If yes, please explain. No. I have no direct experience in municipal government, though I've lived in many small towns and worked in an official capacity with their leaders. I have significant governmental experience at the federal level: developing policy, enforcing laws and regulations, managing public lands, and leadership experience in several command cadre assignments.

3. If elected, what would be your top priorities and why? This may be a hard sell to the Chamber of Commerce, but the foundation of my platform is the need to defend the character, charm and scale of our lovely small beach town against overdevelopment. Doing so will serve both Grand Haven residents and small businesses, especially shops and restaurants that rely on out-of-town customers, whether from the Township, Spring Lake, Grand Rapids or farther afield.

I live in a pretty little Victorian on the corner of First and Franklin. I was appalled in February when, based on carelessly vetted and since-debunked false information developed in an unrelated planning study, City Staff recommended converting *five* city-owned downtown parking lots to

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privately-operated, multi-story buildings through public-private partnerships and long-term leases. This recommendation occurred very shortly after the City granted major incentives (during a national building boom) in the form of brownfield relief funds, property tax abatement, parking standard concessions and even vacating a public street—all in the face of significant neighborhood opposition—to develop more than 170 new housing units in Old Town. The City Staff based its plan to convert our downtown lots on a survey done for the Beyond the Pier Waterfront Master Plan. The consultant who developed the survey inverted its results, so that the City Staff's claim that survey respondents overwhelmingly favored developing our parking lots was never critically examined and was patently untrue. Had City Staff's bad data not been debunked by a private citizen and had City Council voted to approve the Staff's recommendation as is its custom, these projects in aggregate would have spoiled our extraordinary town. Oversized, modern, colorless buildings, many built on City leaseholds with a planned thirty-year obsolescence, would dominate our downtown and displace the timeless, inviting, diverse architecture on Washington. The City's direct financial stake in these ill-conceived "partnerships" would expose us to substantial, unwarranted financial risk. (Have we learned nothing from Grand Landing?) It would also raise questions about City Staff motives when regulating developers and serving as arbiters between them and affected neighbors. Grand Haven would have more people, less open space, insufficient public parking and significantly less access to shops, restaurants and the riverfront.

There is a remarkable aesthetic balance in Grand Haven that locals cherish and outsiders envy. If elected, I would work to build consensus among City Council Members that Grand Haven is already largely developed and largely lovely, that it requires no major changes. If successful, we would set firm guidelines regarding future development. On private property, we should not offer incentives to build. Grand Haven is a premier location and we are in a period of national growth: developers who want to build in our City should pay a fair share of property taxes and comply with our zoning ordinances. We should manage our public property inventory for the benefit of the people. City government should not surrender its regulatory role to engage in private enterprise, and should not adopt policies that result in winners and losers among local businesses. We have considerably more control over what happens on city-owned property. There should be no sale or conversion from existing use unless it serves a greater civic need and, even then, only if the new use incorporates exceptional aesthetics. As a City, we should not seek to grow for growth's sake. Any growth should be gradual, incremental and thoughtful, always keeping in mind that what we have is extraordinary and we must work to protect and preserve it.

Economic Development, General Policy and Transportation

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

Every successful economy needs balance and diversification. Northwest Ottawa County is fortunate to have both. The manufacturing sector, agriculture and tourism give us a good and

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interesting balance. Our small businesses provide diversification. My philosophy would include ensuring manufacturing and agriculture have necessary transportation and utility infrastructure to succeed, and promoting tourism and small businesses as a key to growth. I would like to see a Visitors' Center incorporated into current planning efforts for Grand Haven's riverfront. Tourism brings in out-of-area dollars that pump life into local restaurants and shops that serve us throughout the year. I co-own a small business promote them personally: we shop and eat downtown and use local builders, suppliers and tradesmen for our work. There are legacy businesses in Grand Haven like Baker Lumber, Bekins Appliance, Olmsted Signs, Fricano's, Clover Bar and many others that have provided generations of local excellence. Dollars spent with them remain in the community. If I had a wish list for Grand Haven, it would focus on some kind of post-high school educational hub: a nursing school, technical program, art and design center or aquatics research lab, perhaps affiliated with one of our state universities, that would offer personal growth opportunities and job skills to local youth. It would also provide year-round balance to summer-based tourism which, honestly, is needed if we really want to grow as a community. To further diversify our economy, I would promote Grand Haven and its surrounding area as a desirable and welcoming community for people with portable jobs who are considering a lifestyle change based on recent urban and climate challenges.

5. Do you support the use of tax abatements and /or special tax incentives to create jobs and spur economic growth? Why or why not? No. The City of Grand Haven is struggling with major infrastructure recapitalization, a significant maintenance backlog, dwindling cash reserves and underfunded pension obligations. Property tax revenue is the City's only real funding source. We cannot afford to subsidize one business entity at the expense of another, or at the expense of property owners generally. To the extent possible, tax burdens should be equitably shared.

6. What are your thoughts regarding the need for affordable workforce housing? There is an undeniable shortage of affordable housing in the City and not just for our workforce, but it's unrealistic to think the City of Grand Haven can do a great deal to meet it. We are a community that's already largely developed, is tightly constrained geographically, and has a small population, a small tax base and little discretionary spending in our budget. Property values are at an all time high, as are construction costs, and Grand Haven is a premier location. I have watched several developers promise "affordable housing" in their projects to extract concessions from the City, and back out on their offer as their projects develop. For decades in West Michigan, housing was relatively inexpensive and labor costs reflected it. To the extent this is no longer true, rather than look to taxpayers to solve a wage gap, local employers who want Grand Haven housing for their employees are going to have to face up to higher labor costs.

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7. 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)?

These ideas are creative and worth exploring but the devil is in the details. I have seen much good come from mutual support agreements between governmental entities (many of which currently exist) and fully support their broad employment, but control and responsibility are difficult to share. I remain open to these types of arrangements if they make sense and cost-sharing is equitable.

8. 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. Provide stable, consistent, predictable government that focuses on excellent maintenance of our City and gradual renewal of our infrastructure. Resolve to live within our means. Preserve the character, charm and scale of our beautiful town. Enable manufacturing, promote tourism, and encourage everyone to support local small businesses.

9. Please describe how you plan, if elected, to work toward funding/controlling legacy costs. Our property tax base is gradually growing based on rising property values, and these increases will allow the City to meet its financial obligations including legacy costs like pensions and health care. Our workforce is not large, is necessary to maintain our City, and deserves a living wage. Though paid for by electric ratepayers rather than taxpayers, one way I support controlling/preventing legacy costs is turning down current BLP plans to issue bonds to fund major construction on Harbor Island. The largest unknown “legacy” cost that concerns me is clean-up of contaminants on Harbor Island. Given recent revelations about what’s out there and what we know about rising river levels, flooding and subsidence, it is imperative we clean up or encapsulate the waste. Given the scope of the problem, we will need federal and state help both with developing a plan and with funding.

10. 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 City has and is acting upon a plan for gradual infrastructure recapitalization. I agree with it. They have also shown good initiative in seeking state and federal grants that aid in these efforts, which I applaud and would hope to continue. I think it possible the proposed national infrastructure bill will have funding we can tap into, particularly in power generation and lead abatement.

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11. **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.** Frankly, I have not seen evidence of sufficient demand to justify investment in expanding regional transportation services.

Please attach additional information regarding your community and business affiliations.

Community Involvement:

- Community Advocate: organized neighborhood opposition to City Manager's 2018 plan to build a downtown parking structure; organized community opposition to City Manager's 2021 plan to convert five downtown City-owned parking lots to privately-operated multi-story buildings; organized community opposition to City Public Works Director's 2021 plan to replace scenic dune area along Harbor Drive with a concrete monument sponsored by a Kansas City-based professional organization.
- Member, St. Patrick - St. Anthony Catholic Church in Grand Haven and food pantry volunteer.
- Member, American Legion Post #28 in Grand Haven.
- Long time Grand Haven Salmon Festival volunteer.