



Grand Haven City Mayoral and Council Candidate Questionnaire

Name: _____ KAREN LOWE _____

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Employer: _____ _(Retired) Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers and VP & Global General Manager, IBM _____

Office Being Sought: _____ Council Member _____

**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 volunteered to run for City Council because I was (and still am) deeply concerned about the major financial challenges Grand Haven faces and I have both the education and professional experience needed to help make difficult, balanced and forward-looking choices for our community as a valuable addition to the council.

By way of background, I hold a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Washington University in St. Louis. I retired about 5 years ago, after more than 25 years of business and management consulting as both a former Partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), a 'Big Four' accounting, consulting and professional services firm, and as a retired vice president and general manager with IBM. From a community standpoint, I am an amateur historian and published my first book on one of Grand Haven's historic districts in 2019. Additionally, I have served as Commissioner on the City of Grand Haven's *Historic Conservation District Commission*, which has provided me an opportunity to observe firsthand how City Hall works with its citizen boards and commission

I believe my education, background and professional experience will complement that of other council members' and provide both diversity of thought and a fresh perspective that can only strengthen our City Council decision-making and our local government overall.

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

No.

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

I volunteered to run for City Council because I am deeply concerned about the major financial challenges Grand Haven faces, among others, including the potential approval of \$50 million in revenue bonds (i.e., long-term debt) for the Board of Light and Power (BLP). With negative operating income planned for budget year 2021-2022 as well as \$26 million in unfunded employee pension costs (which city council has failed to act upon for 10-plus years), approving this long-term debt for our community is, quite frankly, irresponsible and indicative of poor fiscal management and decision making. The city's daunting financial challenges alone gravely concerned me and led to my decision to step forward.

Sadly, Grand Haven's problems do not end there. Along with our financial challenges, I have noticed extraordinary discord between the people of Grand Haven and the city administration. The last nine months have been like no other: numerous protest signs in yards, resident letters and emails to City Council, and, most of all, a general lack of openness and transparency in City Staff actions. Decisions with the potential to radically change the character and landscape of Grand Haven (e.g., "1st & Franklin infill parking; DPW monument on Harbor, etc.) are rushed to City Council for approval, often without sufficient vetting within our community. This is not the way our local government is supposed to work.

As a result, if elected, my priorities will be to:

- 1. Provide Strong Fiscal Management and Accountability.** The City of Grand Haven faces daunting financial decisions. Our City tax base has never been more robust, yet Grand Haven struggles with recapitalizing failing infrastructure, meeting underfunded pension obligations and rationalizing both a reduced workforce and shrinking services.
- 2. Preserve and Protect the Character and Charm of Grand Haven by Preventing Overdevelopment.** The very charm, character and landscape of our town -- what makes Grand Haven unique -- is in jeopardy due to aggressive redevelopment efforts. In the past year, City Council has approved redevelopment projects which will introduce over 170 new housing units in the northwest area of downtown. Along with the approval of these projects, City Council also granted major concessions, agreeing to ordinance exceptions on density, parking requirements, etc., as well as significant tax breaks for the redevelopment projects. We need to protect our neighborhoods from overdevelopment and listen carefully and often to what our citizens are telling us regarding their neighborhoods.
- 3. Rebuild Public Trust by Addressing Lack of Openness and Transparency in Decision Making.** I love Grand Haven and want to ensure our community prospers, on a sound financial foundation, while continuing to value and preserve what makes our town so very special.

For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

Economic Development, General Policy and Transportation

1. Please describe your general economic development philosophy for Northwest Ottawa County.
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

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?
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

3. What are your thoughts regarding the need for affordable workforce housing?
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

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)?
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

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.
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

6. Please describe how you plan, if elected, to work toward funding/controlling legacy costs.
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

7. How would you propose to fund key community infrastructure needs that have been identified by city staff over the next three to seven year's?
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

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
For more information on my priorities and position on the issues facing our city, please refer to my website at: www.karenloweforcitycouncil.com

Please attach additional information regarding your community and business affiliations.

From a community standpoint, I am an amateur historian and published my first book on one of Grand Haven's historic districts in 2019. Additionally, I have served as Commissioner on the City of Grand Haven's *Historic Conservation District Commission*, which has provided me an opportunity to observe firsthand how City Hall works with its citizen boards and commission.

Regarding other business affiliations, I have previously served on the Board of Directors for the National Retail Federation (NRF) as well as the Retail Industry Leadership Association (RILA) Board of Directors. As a result of this experience, if elected to city council, I would like to institute a way for me (and other council members) to dialog on regular basis directly with the Mainstreet merchants (rather than through the DDA and Chamber of Commerce) as well as with business owners throughout the city, to gain feedback and ideas regarding their needs for success and future growth.