



Grand Haven City Mayoral and Council Candidate Questionnaire

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Employer: Retired Economic and Community Development Professional

Office Being Sought: City Council

**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?

Liz and I have been visiting Grand Haven, for 8 years, on vacation. When I retired, we decided to move here as we so love the community. Prior to moving here from Binghamton, New York I spent over 40 years as an administrator in community development, economic development and in the private sector. I have sensitive experience in city planning and development, comprehensive proficiency in real estate financing and development, commercial/industrial retention and attraction, financial credit analysis, budgeting and policy development.

During my career I routinely dealt with local, state and federal agencies, political officials, community leaders, neighborhood-based organizations, lending institutions, investment bankers, and private developers.

My background has allowed me to garner a broad range of ideas in the dealings of budgeting and administration on the local level. My background uniquely qualifies me to bring a fresh perspective to Grand Haven government.

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

NO. This is my first run at elected office

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

My first priority is to control the mismanagement of the Grand Haven city budget. The city is facing \$26.5 million in unfunded pension costs that has been ignored for years. I am recommending that the city bring in pension experts to study a change from the current defined benefit system to a more defined contribution system for new employees. Ottawa County did this years ago. Why can't Grand Haven do the same? Within the 2021-22 budget \$1.5 million, or 20% of the total, is a to begin to reduce this \$26.5 million debt.

Over the last three years City Council has allowed expenditures greater than revenue. For instance, in the most recent budget, revenue is projected at \$12,600,000 with expenses of \$13,500,000. Deficit spending has been occurring for the last three years. The fund balance (our "rainy day fund") has decreased from \$5.1 million in 2018, to a projected \$1.9 million in the 2021-22 budget. This substantial decrease has led to the City's investment income to drop from \$190,000 to a projected \$5,000 in 2022. This out-of-control spending cannot continue. If elected my first priority will be to tackle this huge problem facing our city.

The Board of Light and Power has recommended to City Council the adoption of a \$50 million bond for the construction of a new power plant and office building on Harbor Island. The BLP moved ahead with this recommendation even after being made aware that there are PFAS compounds, toxic " forever chemicals' on the site. In addition to PFOA and PFOS, cyanide, ammonia and inorganic nitrogen was also found in the groundwater. The clean-up costs for the city alone could be in the tens of millions of dollars. My position is that the Council must pass a resolution to STOP all development on Harbor Island and take a pause until the environmental and financial issues facing our city are identified.

Economic Development, General Policy and Transportation

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

Frankly as a candidate for City Council I am focused primarily on Grand Haven. The re-purpose of our handsome old BLP Diesel Plant on Harbor Ave. and the Chinook Pier site are two significant projects that must be carefully analyzed and effectively discussed with the public before any further action is taken.

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?

This ultimately depends on the project that is presented. It is unfair to ask a question of this type until you truly know all the facts associated with a particular project. I have participated in hundreds of projects and have learned that until you know the intricacies of each project this question is impossible to answer.

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

We all support attainable housing. The problem in Grand Haven is that there are very few sites where this type of housing can be constructed. The City Council recently approved a project off Robbins Road for roughly 32 units. Initially it was presented as an affordable housing project but in the end only one-half of the houses will be affordable. Grand Haven is in a unique position with housing prices rising dramatically. We have nearly 1,800 short- and long-term rentals within the city of which over 360 are short term. Unless we control the further development of these mostly absentee owner properties affordable housing will be impossible to achieve. The City continues to approve short term rentals which frankly takes these units out of the long term, affordable market. I support a fresh review of the current zoning ordinance so that any further development will be appropriate for the neighborhoods.

From experience, I have learned that there are two types of attainable, “work-force” housing: Cheaply built properties that will degrade quickly, and properties that are well built, with an aesthetic that people who live in them will value. There are developers with attitudes of designing and constructing project which reflect the communities in which they are being located, not some “template.” We must find these developers.

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)?

We currently have multi-community cooperation with our water and sewer systems, our Harbor Transit system, the Recreational Authority, economic development, and others. There are incentives from Michigan State government to find more ways to cooperate in greater consolidation of services. I think a regional task force, holding many local, open meetings to look at greater ways to cooperate is a great idea.

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.

There should be one economic development organization that oversees all economic development. In my decades of community and economic development experience, I have found that multiple agencies tripping over each other serve no purpose other than keeping bureaucrats employed. Let's develop a cohesive plan that consolidates all community and economic development functions into one entity.

Regarding the downtown, I share the concern with many in our retail community that are embarrassed by the number of tee shirt shops in our downtown. We are continually being compared to Holland. Holland has had private benefactors that has enhanced their downtown over three decades. Unfortunately, Grand Haven does not have that luxury. Let's develop a funding mechanism through local, state and federal programs that will allow us to offer incentives for new businesses to relocate to Grand Haven. This is my background. Let's work together to incentivize new businesses, including from our neighboring communities, to locate in Grand Haven. Yes, the Downtown and Centertown can use some help, but let's not forget the rapidly improving Washington Square, Beech Tree and Robbins Road business districts.

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

I have somewhat addressed this in previous questions. The major "legacy cost" that the city is facing is the \$26 million in unfunded employee pension cost. There are only two ways to control these costs. Completely dissolve the antiquated defined contribution system that currently exists or develop a hybrid program for new employees. Clearly, the city cannot jeopardize the pension system for existing employees. They have been loyal to us. We need to be loyal to them. Let's consult with experts in employee pensions to develop a system that allows Grand Haven to control future pension costs while developing a program that attracts new employees. Ottawa County switched their plan years ago. Why hasn't the city followed in their footsteps?

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?

There is a \$46 million identified water, sewer and street reconstruction deficit in the city. Council has already voted to raise water and sewer rates 6% over the next 3 years. In addition, the "ready to serve charge" has also been increased. Until we can determine if this increase in income will solve the \$46 million deficit, it is difficult to determine if and when additional funds will be needed.

I will work as part of the Infrastructure Committee to continue discussions and develop the necessary plans to address our infrastructure over the next few years.

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

I do not like the term, "Mass transit." That implies a system with empty busses travelling on routes at inappropriate times of the day. I like the term "targeted public transportation."

As mentioned previously, in this questionnaire, I am very supportive of attainable housing. Frankly, the locations for it are beyond the city borders. But they cannot be developed until we have a more effective transit system.

Perhaps it would be appropriate for leaders in Ottawa, Muskegon and Kent Counties to work on this challenge.

Clearly, the hours of operation, provision for flexibility in equipment, and funding need careful planning.

Please attach additional information regarding your community and business affiliations.

I am currently Chairman of the Planning Commission.
Recently served on the Zoning Board of Appeals
Member of Chinook Pier Study
Member of Grand Haven Infrastructure Committee