

Robert McPherson, WCWT Village Board Candidates Questionnaire

Q. What motivated you to run and what issue do you feel uniquely suited to address? Where do you hope to make the biggest difference?

A. My motivation for running is that I want Waunakee to be more inclusive for residents, provide equitable solutions for residents, and to attract new, diverse businesses to our village. With a background in banking compliance and risk management I have a strong understanding of finances and oversight of multimillion-dollar budgets. I hope that I can bring more transparency and accountability to village hall.

Q. How do you feel you can make an impact on Waunakee getting a Community Pool?

A. By advocating for the formal beginning of the proposed ad hoc pool committee that was discussed prior to COVID. I do strongly believe that it needs to go to referendum with the public funds that would be used. Ideally this would be a public-private partnership to protect taxpayers.

Q. What is your stance on allowing more apartments and/or lower cost living in Waunakee? How do you feel this positively or negatively affects residents?

A. My stance is that achieving workforce/affordable housing within Waunakee does not always mean “more apartments” for the village. Incremental or small development, such as allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (or ADUs), or looking at our residential zoning restrictions on the types of houses that can be built in the village is more attainable. Relying on apartment complexes is tricky because those take much more time, have significant funding hurdles (as they need 3-8 sources of funding to be “affordable”), and meet significant resistance from residents and elected officials. Having a more balanced stock of housing greatly benefits residents- it increases the tax base organically, it attracts more businesses with greater access to local employees, and it diversifies the village by all walks of life.

Q. How do you communicate best, and in what ways or means do you use to communicate with residents currently? Any ideas or areas related to communication in our community that you think need improvement?

A. In person! Which has been rough in the time of COVID. So, I have largely communicated by e-mail, Facebook, and by phone or Zoom. I believe that the village and its elected officials do need to embrace digital technology better. Having individual trustee Facebook pages, or actively watching community spaces (and perhaps even talking every once in a while) would be valuable. The pandemic has shown the importance of digital reach out, and many other municipalities do a much better job at this than we do in Waunakee.

Q. What are your views about intergovernmental relationships, and using the "good neighbor" policy, for instance with the Town of Westport, and how do you see your role representing our Waunakee community when it comes to working with nearby communities?

A. I believe that intergovernmental relationships are crucial, especially when so much of our area overlaps through zoning rules and shared staffing. Being a good neighbor, in my opinion, means when you have controversial issues that directly impact each other that you take the extra step to reach out and work on solutions that benefit both sides. This also includes working with the Waunakee Community School District Board of Education as well. In the past there used to be a regular meeting of elected officials from area governmental groups (Waunakee, WCSD, Westport, Vienna, Springfield, etc.), and it is time we look at bringing that back.

Q. Are there any current laws or ordinances you'd like to add, amend or change?

A. Our zoning ordinances. Many of them are aged and do not fit the realities of our current needs, which is why many current projects within the village are zoned as a Planned Unit Development (or PUD), which allow for significant changes from our standard zoning. When you constantly make exceptions to your rules, your exceptions are your rules.

We have also learned that we should be looking at quarrying rules in place in other villages in Wisconsin as our current ones do not do enough to protect residents. We can learn from others in that regard.

Q. What steps will you take to make village government more transparent? Please be specific.

A. Three straightforward steps I would take: 1. Only use closed sessions when necessary and make sure they are restricted entirely for their noticed purpose if used. 2. Investigate having, at the 2nd village board meeting of each month, summary reports given of the meetings for each committee that met in the previous month for the benefit of the public and trustees not serving on those committees. 3. Introduce, for the village board, a statement of economic interest, similar to state-wide elected officials have to complete. There is nothing that should be disqualifying about being invested in Waunakee, but the public has a right to know considering the decisions trustees can make.

Q. What is your stance on TIFs in general?

A. Tax Incremental Financing should be used very carefully and only when absolute necessary. There are very specific uses, such as environmental cleanup, that they make sense for. Development of former agriculture or nature space (known as greenfield development) or those paid for through developer-led pay-as-you-go (or PAYGO) processes are the worst outcome for the village as explained by the UW's Center for Wisconsin Strategy (COWS). Those unfortunately comprise many of our recent TIF

approvals. There is a video on my campaign Facebook page where my 4-year-old daughter experiences that type of TIF as a taxpayer.

Q. What is your view on the use of closed meetings?

A. That they should only be used as strictly defined by state law. The law is written that a closed session “may” be used, but it does “require” they be used. Any use of closed session to avoid embarrassing or unfavorable conversations is inappropriate.

Q. What steps would you take to ensure Waunakee is a welcoming, diverse and inclusive community? Please be specific.

A. By first working with the Waunakee Community School District’s efforts on diversity, equity, and inclusion. This gets the conversation started. I would introduce resolutions recognizing various events (such as Black History Month, National Hispanic History Month, Women’s History Month, Pride, etc.) so that those communities are seen and supported. Working with Create Waunakee I would look for community events that are more inclusive of outside groups to promote diverse events – they do not need to be on the scale of WaunaFest, but even small one day events can make a difference in a community. Finally, as it is a major part of my platform, I would continue to work on housing choice availability and equity issues, recognizing that certain historically discriminated groups do not have the financial ability to afford Waunakee’s higher than average housing costs, to give them a path to live and remain in the village.

Q. How would you partner with the business community as well as with regular citizens?

A. By reaching out to them through both the Chamber and giving non-Chamber businesses an avenue to speak with me as well, just as I would engage with any resident in the village. Waunakee needs to continue to grow its business base, whether it be through improving transportation options to bring in employees or customers, having an increased housing stock for workforce/affordable options that provides employees, or continued investment in infrastructure to support quality growth. Contrary to what some believe, these changes support both the business community and regular citizens; residents want more restaurant choices, a second grocery store, and non-big box chain retail, but we can’t compete with other municipalities when the workers can’t afford to live here, and we lack public transportation in to the village.

Q. If you had to pick one candidate other than yourself to be elected, who would you pick and why? If you had to pick one who would NOT be elected, which one and why?

A. I’m going to go with what happens on my ballot stays on my ballot, and good luck to everyone running!