

PROGRESSIVE PEORIA POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE
CANDIDATE SURVEY

Peoria City Council At-Large Survey

Name: CHARLES SCHIERER
Occupation: Attorney
Address: 6422 N Greenmont, Peoria, IL 61602
Phone: 309-494-9900 or 309-648-7269
Website: www.abetterpeoria.com
Email: cgschier@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin my survey by giving a brief introduction of myself and why I will effectively represent Peoria's business community if I am elected to the City Council. I am each of the following: (1) an Attorney with a degree from Washington University School of Law, (2) a Peoria Business Owner, (3) an Accountant with a degree from the University of Illinois, (3) a former city councilman while living in the St. Louis area, (4) an Executive Board member of the Better Business Bureau of Central Illinois, (5) a member of the Peoria Chamber of Commerce, (6) a licensed mediator, (7) an experienced negotiator, and (8) a proactive and positive thinker who embraces change.

I am running for city council because I feel that I have a duty to give back to my community, and I think the following skills make a position as a city councilman the appropriate vehicle for me to do so. First and foremost, I am a down-to-earth, compassionate and caring individual. With my accounting background, I have the ability to help make the city's budget work. As an attorney, I have the advocacy skills needed to voice the strengths of the community's suggestions. As a councilman who previously served a full term in the St. Louis area, I have the experience and the tools necessary to get results. My journey to becoming a licensed mediator has given me the listening skills necessary to truly understand the voices of our citizens. As an experienced negotiator, I know how to bring sides together to reach effective compromise. Having been regularly employed since the age of twelve, I have the discipline and the work ethic to make a difference. Finally, as a Peoria business owner, I have insight into the business needs of the Peoria area and I have ideas on how to attract more businesses to our City.

ANSWERS

1. What are your top three priorities, if elected?

As an at-large council person, I would have a duty to look out for the needs of the City of Peoria as a whole. I believe the following three issues are the most pressing for Peoria to face head-on and to conquer in order to ensure future prosperity:

More Jobs: I believe that Peoria has more to offer than any city of comparable size in this country. Peoria has a Fortune 100 company. Peoria has a successful college basketball team, a hockey team, a minor league baseball team, and a minor league basketball team. Peoria has an opera house, a symphony and a Broadway series. Peoria has the most active and thriving medical community in downstate Illinois. There is no reason Peoria should not be able to recruit more quality jobs to the area. I plan to aggressively pursue business to the area and to work with community organizations like Peoria Next, the Turner Center for Entrepreneurship, and the Economic Development Council to ensure that successful business ventures have incentives to stay and grow. More businesses mean more jobs; more jobs mean more money; more money means better city services. I will work hard to achieve these ends.

Safer Communities: Peoria residents have the right to feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods. They have the right to demand assistance from the City to achieve safety. Peoria faces some serious obstacles: a rampant drug culture, criminal immigrants from Chicago, struggling and straggling youth, and bad people in powerful places. These obstacles can be overcome. I have a three-tiered plan. Deterrence is component #1. Punishment must be directly proportional to the crime, and offenders must feel the consequences of their choice to commit crime. Rehabilitation is component #2. The City has a responsibility to its citizens to attempt to rehabilitate criminals. If it does not do so, the City will suffer the consequences for years to come. Self-empowerment is component #3. Peoria needs to infiltrate the communities filled with individuals at high risk for criminal activity and engage these individuals in programs to instill a sense of self-empowerment. We need these citizens to know they have the abilities to become productive members of society, and we need to offer them opportunities to do so. I plan to make this happen.

Better Education: The ability of a city to prosper is inextricably intertwined with its ability to provide its citizens' children with a strong and safe education. Although public education is not under the direct control of the Peoria city council, it is too important an issue for the city council not to work closely and diligently with District 150 to fight the problems we face. We must find ways to keep children in school, to keep children excited about school, to educate children who do not fit into the typical student mold, and to ensure that children from all levels of background and economic prosperity will earn a top rate education within the borders of our city. I will work with the other members of city council and with other local officials to ensure that community-wide steps are taken to achieve these ends.

2. What are the key business issues in the city and what will you do to address these issues?

I believe the key business issues are (1) recruiting new businesses and jobs, (2) supporting start-up ventures in our area and (3) providing retail businesses in the core of our city with a consumer base.

To attract and retain new businesses to the area, Peoria must create an aggressive outreach committee. If a talented and determined individual really wants something for themselves,

they do not wait around for it to come and land in their lap. Rather, they go out and aggressively pursue it. Peoria needs to take the same approach. First, we need to identify exactly what types of business would be beneficial to our area. Once this decision is made, we need to research what businesses of this type are interested (or could be interested) in relocation. Then, we need to form an advertising committee and an ambassador to approach these businesses. We need to get out there and start telling these businesses why Peoria will be a great venue for their work and a fabulous place for their employees to live, work and play. Finally, once we have identified prospective businesses, we must court them. We must be ready to be flexible on small principles and issues, recognizing that the evil which may come from certain compromise will be outweighed by the good these businesses can bring.

To attract and retain entrepreneurs and start-ups, the City must support these ventures. It is somewhat amazing the number of businesses Peoria has lost throughout its history simply by not providing enough support for the business owners. The City must work with programs like Peoria Next and the Turner Center for Entrepreneurship to ensure these types of businesses are getting what they need to succeed in Peoria and stay in Peoria.

To attract retail businesses to the core of the City, the City must be able to convince these businesses that there is a consumer base in the core that will support them. This issue is inextricably intertwined with the issue of paid parking in the downtown area: we must provide incentives to bring consumers to the downtown area rather than providing deterrents to scare people away. In addition, we need to keep a balance between locally owned businesses and large, national chains. While locally owned businesses are extremely important to our community, they are generally not the businesses that bring volumes of people to a particular area. We need to figure ways to get people to the downtown area. Once there, they will find and patronize the local businesses. City Council must develop a detailed plan of action for attracting consumers to the downtown area and must implement this plan. This is somewhat of a “which came first, the chicken or the egg” situation. The question becomes how do we get consumers downtown without businesses to attract them and how do we get businesses downtown without ensuring that consumers will patronize their business? However, we cannot let the daunting façade of the issue deter us. We must face the challenge head-on and develop a strong and executable plan.

3. What will you do to make Peoria city government more effective?

I have many ideas on how to make Peoria city government more effective. The following are some examples:

1. Inspire open-mindedness and embrace suggestions for change;
2. Work hard to increase open lines of communication between City Council and community organizations;
3. Develop a website specifically geared toward the sharing of ideas in a positive, communal environment;

4. Set clear goals, set clear steps to achieve these goals, set timeframes within which they must be achieved, and make the public aware of our progress;

5. Galvanize the other members and the community at large towards progression and positive change;

6. Create a public awareness campaign to make each individual citizen quickly aware of the most pressing issues and what they can do to assist in change;

7. Work hard to form symbiotic relationships with organizations throughout the city.

4. What do you believe needs to be done to make Peoria City Hall more business friendly and how will you accomplish it?

First, I believe a change of mind-set needs to take place. Everyone needs to recognize and publicly acknowledge that businesses in our area MUST be supported and encouraged to grow and succeed if we are serious about ensuring Peoria's prosperity in the coming years. If we are serious about changing the trend of stagnancy in economic growth, we need to make this known.

Next, once we have group acknowledgement of this principle, City Hall must work hard to develop a plan of revitalizing and growing the business community. To develop this plan, City Council must hold meetings, much like the charettes held to discuss the Heart of Peoria Plan and the crime forums held to discuss crime in the city, with business owners in the City and interested organizations like the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, City Council should form a committee to review other cities of similar size throughout the country that have succeeded in economic revitalization of their own communities. We should learn from these cities and include the best parts of their plans into ours.

Through these meetings and studies, City Council must decide, specifically, where it wants to take Peoria's business community in the next year, the next 5 years, and the next 10 years. We must decide what our goals are at each of these stages, and then decide how we can reach these goals. We must plan specific things that should be done to advance these goals. Once short and long term goals are formulated and specific steps to their achievement are identified, City Council's role in Peoria's business community will be clearer: City Council is to work to achieve the goals set. City Council is not to make decisions contrary to the planned goals, and City Council is to work intimately with area businesses and business organizations to achieve these goals.

Revitalization of our business community and recruitment of new jobs to the area are too important of issues for City Council not to extend area businesses a warm embrace.

5. What do you see as key budget issues facing the City of Peoria? Would you consider alternate sources of revenue other than a real estate tax increase? If so, what alternative source do you prefer?

In order to effectively provide basic city services and to address crime, the City of Peoria needs to maintain its stream of revenue. However, it needs to do this *while at the same time encouraging new businesses to join our community.*

For example, one of the city's big sources of revenue is its parking fees from the downtown area. At the same time, one of the city's biggest concerns is recruiting retail business, residents, and commercial business to the downtown area. People are discouraged from visiting the downtown area when they have to pay to park to do so. The recent move by the City to allow for 2 free hours of parking is a good one. However, we must do more. We cannot allow a self-defeating policy like this one to continue.

In addition, one of the city's biggest responsibilities is to provide for public safety. Despite this, the closure of fire stations is supported as a way to conserve money for the city. This goal and this solution do not go hand-in-hand. We need to keep the fire stations open to avoid disaster in our communities. Knowing this, we must find sources of income to support the fire stations. I believe programs like PAWS should be reevaluated to determine if returning this responsibility to the County could allow for us to keep the fire stations open and our citizens safe.

Finally, rather than an increase on real estate tax, I think the City should evaluate an increase in the Amusement Tax Rate and the Hotel Tax.

6. How will you work to develop and maintain a cooperative intergovernmental relationship with other local units of government, particularly that of Peoria County and Peoria Public Schools?

The main keys to a cooperative intergovernmental relationship between City Council and any other local unity of government are (1) open mindedness, (2) an absolute willingness to analyze a situation from different perspectives, (3) aggressive and positive attempts to inspire communication and (4) the creativity to form symbiotic alliances with mutually beneficial outcomes.

I am more concerned with the distance between the City Council and District 150, than I am concerned with the problems District 150 has. There are real problems, but if we can bridge the gap between these entities, real progress can be made. I will work on forming close relationships with members of the Peoria County Board and the District 150 board. I will work to ensure we are all aware of one another's current goals and needs. Finally, I will work to ensure we have a specific developed plan on how we may work together to achieve our goals.

7. What is your opinion of the Heart of Peoria Commissions proposed form based code for targeted areas of the City?

I am an absolute fan of form based code. Having lived in the City of St. Louis during a time when they realized the power of this tool and increased implementation of it throughout the city, I have seen first-hand the positive effects it can have on a city's revitalization.

Within the past year, I attended the seminar in Peoria on Form Based Code and listened to the experts discuss their plan for the area. I am impressed by their ideas. I believe this type of structural redesign should be implemented wherever economically feasible throughout the City. This type of structuring, where residential, retail, and business all play an integral role, makes people feel as if they are part of a true city neighborhood that is lively and entertaining. I will support this redevelopment process and will work to make sure it is a success.

8. What do you believe the City should do to attract and retain business in the City?

See answer to #2 above. Peoria has all of the resources it needs in order to attract and retain business to our City. We must simply put our tools to use, aggressively pursue our goals, and remain committed until our goals are achieved.

9. What is your position on the use of cumulative voting for the at-large council positions?

I do not believe in cumulative voting. In my understanding, the idea of cumulative voting was created as a response to minority complaints about the lack of appropriate representation on city council. If you do a study of the polls, the overwhelming majority of voters who appear for City council elections come from North Peoria. Minorities are severely under-represented in these communities. Accordingly, I fail to see how giving the majority of non-minority voters more votes is in any way assisting minority representation. If a person wants to support a particular candidate, I believe she should use one vote to do so and then choose to suspend her four final votes. I do not believe an individual should be able to give one person more than one vote.

10. What is your position on City funding for the Economic Development Council of Central Illinois?

I absolutely believe the City should provide city funding for the Economic Development Council of Central Illinois. As a City, we cannot recognize the importance of strengthening local business structure and assisting companies in relocating or expanding to the area and then fail to act to aggressively support attainment of these ends.

When organizations like the EDC are created, the city owes a duty to the community to support them. Although the City can enact its own efforts to pursue the same ends (as

discussed above), because everyone is working towards the same goal, and because this goal is so important to our city's long-term prosperity, the City should provide funds to support the EDC.

Further, the City should maintain regular communication with the EDC to share ideas, set goals, and plan for our future.