

## CANDIDATE ANSWERS

### **KRIS DURBIN**

CANDIDATE FOR CITY COUNCIL – WARD 4

#### BASIC QUESTIONS

##### ***Q2 What should be the core functions of city government?***

When I talk to my neighbors around Shawnee, I often talk about the two most important services the city provides: public safety and public works. I talk about how these things need to come first, because a city government that is not meeting these most basic needs will not favor well with the citizens. These departments directly impact the quality of life for each citizen every day.

Other functions that are core, but less visible or impactful to everyday citizens include planning and zoning, licensing and permitting, engineering, codes enforcement, and the municipal courts.

##### ***Q3 What are the secondary functions that you support?***

I support parks & recreation, and believe that a well-balanced city includes green space, parks, and opportunities for families to experience outdoor recreation close to home.

##### ***Q4 Are there areas you feel the city government should not be involved with?***

Any function, service, or initiative that competes with the free market should be eliminated. Anything that prevents the city from providing its core services should be de-prioritized or avoided.

#### COMMUNITY CENTER

##### **Q5 Did you endorse the proposed property tax increase to fund a Community Center? If you're on the council, did you champion it? Please be specific and cite examples of either your support or opposition to the project.**

I did not endorse the planned community center or its funding strategy. I believe that the plan was poorly formed and was in direct contrast to the desires of the community. I was actively involved with the Vote No committee, and I helped to educate the community about all the facts within the city's plan.

Like many in our community, I do not oppose a community center if it does not compete with local business, raise taxes, or operate at a loss; however, certain neglected core services need to be our focus right now.

##### **Q6 What can be done in the future to more accurately gauge the appetite of voters when it comes to the potential of a tax increase?**

I found it ironic that the city engaged in extremely active grassroots outreach when they were attempting to advocate for the conceptual center's Yes vote. Had the city staff approached the community earlier and with a questioning frame of thought and were truly interested in the demands of the citizens, we would not have seen the proposal that was presented to us.

Even more ironically, the city was told with an overwhelming response to its own surveys that there was NOT an appetite for a tax increase for this community center. In the future, the city should focus less on their desired outcome of a survey and more on the message the response is delivering. They should also use their grassroots outreach earlier in the thought development process to understand the real desires and limitations within the city.

**Q7 Regarding the failing pipes that need to be addressed within the next several years, how would you tackle that and pay for it?**

I liked many of the ideas presented in the last council committee meeting by council members Kemmling and Jenkins. There is a distinct difference between slashing budgets and identifying cost savings. These council members sought to identify a targeted, net 3% cost savings in existing expenditures, contracts, and spending, to temporarily reallocate to this critical need (while not considering public safety for this strategy). Their idea was voted in dissent by the other council members and was branded as an attempt to “slash” budgets.

I like the idea of funding these storm water needs with our existing budgets, and without impacting other services; but if we do not act soon, we will not have many options but to cut services or raise taxes, which are worst case outcomes.

Another strategy I would favor is a master services contracting arrangement to perform the repairs at a lower than market rate cost (as compared to pursuing each individual project as a separate contract which is the current approach). This would influence a competitive bid on the estimated \$100-140M in future repairs, while securing rates that are predictable and favorable to the city for many years to come.

**Q8 What is the proper use of these incentives? When is it improper? Is there a form of incentive you favor over another? Is there any type you find more troublesome? Be as specific as you can.**

Economic incentives influence competition between cities for commercial development without the viability or market demand being the driving factor. Because of this nature, we have to use them on occasion as they are now considered an expected partnership by developers. By not considering them, we will miss out on opportunities that are beneficial to the community.

I believe that an objective risk and opportunity measurement system should be instituted to determine the time-scaled value and risk profile of an economic incentive partnership. Partnerships with well-developed plans that will increase the local skilled workforce or measurably improve curb appeal and reduce crime are examples that the city should consider within the described R&O system.

TIFs and Tax Abatements are especially troubling due to their immediate impact on the community (added tax burden and lost tax revenue). That does not preclude them from consideration when the unique situation could warrant them.

With the correct set of circumstances, community support, and planning, CIDs can be beneficial to the communities that use them. CIDs offer very specific improvements to a locale that has agreed to and voted for the assessments and improvements. CIDs should not be used as a substitute for other incentives or TIFs, and each CID opportunity should be examined, planned, and limited enough in scope to be able to provide objective, necessary, and substantial improvements to a limited subdivision of the city.

**Q9 Much has been made about new apartments and the proper balance between multi-family housing and single-family homes. What is your position?**

If private developers recognize a specific demand, then the city should consider the opportunity as a part of their local planning strategies.

I do not believe that the city should be pursuing developers to build more affordable housing as a policy approach for the entire city. Different parts of our community have different needs. Those needs create market demand, and the city should be interested in accommodating developers who want to cater to those demands.

The city should also listen to the neighbors to these developments, so that developers understand and hold to a standard that is acceptable for that area.

**Q10 If elected, how would you keep yourself informed and up to date of the issues and concerns residents of Shawnee and/or your ward believe are important and should be addressed?**

By listening and responding with action. It's a simple thing, but something that a lot of Shawnee residents feel is missing in our city government right now. Mayor Distler does a great job in representing the governing body in her frequent public outreach forums, but our city feels like their issues are falling on deaf ears. The governing body needs to hold city staff accountable and prioritize the needs of the community by materially representing them in the budgets.

Additional outreach is always an option, but action must come, or the extra listening and communication are worthless.

**Q12 Any Other Comments? Please provide any other comments you think are relevant.**

Our city does a lot of great things, but just a few bad decisions can outweigh all of the good ones. I don't think it's too late to fix these few mistakes. I want to represent Ward 4 as a mind for fiscal responsibility. My top priority as your council member will be to keep taxes low.

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### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

**Q2 "Dark Store Theory" Have you been aware of the current Walmart lawsuit here in Johnson County over the tax structure for businesses (Yes or No)? How do you see this affecting the City of Shawnee and what should the City communicate to the residents?**

Yes, I am familiar with the dark store theory. I also fear that avenues for the County's successful appeal are narrow, which could result in a victory for Walmart, and a loss for the county appraiser's office, along with every city, school district, and taxing entity in the county.

What follows is a series of lawsuits by similar big box retailers, which would likely yield similar results.

The actual monetary outcome of these lawsuits may not be known for many months or even years, but the threat is that a portion of our future tax base will be reduced and the city will be required to effectively refund historic tax revenues to these businesses as well. Because of the commercial and residential mix of the Shawnee tax base, any burden imposed by a series of successful commercial lawsuits will be largely assumed by the residential taxpayers.

The city should be communicating the following to the residents of Shawnee:

1. What is at risk? What percentage (approximately 0.34%) of the city's tax revenues originate from Walmart property taxes? What percentage of the city's tax revenues originate from big-box retailer property taxes?
2. What are the best case, worst case, and most-probable-case scenarios, both in a short-term outlook and a long-term outlook?
3. What is the mitigation or minimization strategy? How does the city plan to reduce or eliminate the impacts on residential tax-payers across the risk-profile and outcome scenarios presented?

***Q3 Any Other Comments? Please let us know about any additional points you think are relevant for our consideration. Thank you!***

Another concern for Shawnee residents should be the mix of tax revenue sources. According to the city's 2019 budget, 39% of the city's projected revenues are from sales taxes. With shifting buying habits and changing spending priorities of families within Johnson County, the city should be concerned about a possible future decline in this source.

According to a July 28, 2019, article in the Kansas City Star by Edward McKinley titled, "Johnson County faces 'puzzling,' 'catastrophic' threats of plunging revenue," Overland Park has recognized a 6% decrease in sales tax revenues in 2019. While the article provides no explanation to the change, one can assume that families are paying more attention to the sales tax percentages that add up on their purchases, such as those from Community Improvement Districts.

A hypothetical 6% decrease in sales tax revenues in Shawnee could be a budgetary impact of \$1.9M. This, combined with the threat of the dark store theory lawsuits and unfunded capital improvement projects, should have every Shawnee resident very concerned about the future. There are only two solutions if we don't act now – a cut to services or an increase in taxes.