

Capital Area Association of REALTORS®

Candidate Questionnaire

2011 Municipal Election

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name of Candidate: Joe McMenamin
Office: Alderman- Ward 7

ISSUE QUESTIONS

1. In this current economic climate, it seems that the budget dominates most discussions. It would seem that we are going to be facing another challenging fiscal year. Are you aware of any budget or revenue problems or shortfalls in the City? If so, what are your plans/proposals to address this?

ANSWER: The SJR reports that Mayor Edwards sees a \$10 million Corporate Fund shortfall in the fiscal 2012 budget that begins March 1 this year. This is serious and represents a 10% budget hole. Part of this problem will be self-correcting over time as the economy improves and sales and income tax revenues return to pre Great Recession levels. Already local sales tax distributions from the State to Springfield increased by one half million dollars comparing Nov 2009 to Nov 2010 distributions. However, huge structural imbalances remain. All of the city's real estate taxes now go to service pensions of retired City workers and none to city operations.

I will focus efforts to review pension practices and stop abuses such as retirement year pay spikes that permanently inflate pensions for City workers. This amounts to a type of theft of taxpayer funds. Public sector pay and benefits now often exceed private sector pay and benefits. According to 2009 City payroll records, 78 CWLP employees earn over \$100K per year. Fourteen City firefighters earn over \$100K per year; 30 earn over \$90K per year. Adjustments are needed.

2. How would you characterize the City's economic development plan and incentive programs to attract businesses to Springfield? What are your plans, if any, for enhancing or changing those programs/incentives?

ANSWER: Springfield is the home to State and County government, is a regional retail center, possesses significant medical institutions, and several higher education campuses. With these assets, it is not surprising Springfield has the second lowest unemployment rate in the state. As difficult as our economic challenges are, they are worse elsewhere.

I will focus economic development and renewal at the neighborhood level. Whereas Downtown Springfield benefits from its own TIF producing \$5 million annually for exclusively downtown projects, many of our neighborhoods are suffering neglect and some abandonment.

I favor a city residency requirement for City employees, with a grandfather clause for those that have already left. Since its repeal in year 2000, over 600 of our 1600 City employees have moved out of town. One hundred of our police have left. We want our police living in our neighborhoods. Hardship waivers should be allowed. New hires would have a reasonable time to move into the city. When there are more sellers than buyers in a market, prices decline, property values fall, and real estate tax revenues suffer. There are 600 fewer families living in the City limits now as the result of the repeal of the city residency requirement. We need to put Springfield first and require City employees to commit to this community and if they do not wish to do so then they can let someone else have that job with its generous benefits and future pension.

The city should collaborate with Memorial and St Johns' to offer financial incentives to Hospital employees to purchase homes near the hospitals. This approach to renewal worked when Notre Dame University partnered with the city of South Bend, IN.

We need to strengthen and enforce "boarded building" ordinances to create incentives to develop and disincentives to leave "as is" properties such as "old Kmart" on MacArthur Boulevard. We should: increase the registration fees for "boarded buildings" by scaling them to building square footage, and compound fees for "boarded" duration; require City Building and Zoning Department to publish fines and boarded building registration documents on-line—by Ward—to increase accountability; refill the second Code Enforcement attorney position that is now vacant in the Corporation Counsel's office.

We need a long-term plan and funding source for sewer work in the older neighborhoods. For example there are some beautiful and expensive older homes surrounding Washington Park that now face frequent raw sewage problems in their basement.

3. The Union Pacific Railroad has announced that freight traffic will be increasing through Springfield. This, coupled with the potential impact of the proposed high-speed rail project, has many residents and business people concerned. What is your position on the Rail Corridor Study? Do you support one (or more) of the consolidation options that have been proposed?

ANSWER: I favor 10th Street corridor. However, having taken the Eurostar train through the Chunnel from London to Paris last year, I am aware how that train did not pass through town centers, but instead weaved around them. Ultimately, we need the same approach for US high-speed rail service if it is to succeed. Such decisions and funding will be made at the State and Federal levels.

4. Recently, the school board has presented an ambitious plan for school improvements including construction of a west side high school, renovation of Lanphier and Southeast High Schools, state mandated upgrades to several elementary schools, and the conversion of Springfield High School to a magnet

school. What are your thoughts on this plan? Also, what do you think an appropriate funding source would be should this plan go forward?

ANSWER: I favor incremental and less expensive plans to upgrade Dist 186 facilities. I oppose the new west side high school campus because the current SHS campus is an anchor for its neighborhood and a new campus is prohibitively expensive. I favor an urban renewal approach where the School District purchases boarded up and neglected properties surrounding the current SHS campus to add green space, practice fields, and facilities. I favor the middle school gym improvements. Future funding sources for Dist 186 will include 2 ½ million dollars of additional revenue per year when the Downtown TIF expires in 2016.

DEVELOPMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

5. Originally, the recent .25% increase in the sales tax was established as a dedicated funding source for infrastructure improvements. Would you support maintaining this original intent, or would you allow it to be used as general revenue?

ANSWER: I favor the original intent to use those funds exclusively for infrastructure.

6. The controversial “Developer’s Agreement” is key to any discussion of new roads and infrastructure. It allows for the imposition of fees in a manner seemingly inconsistent with state statute (state law provides for very specific and narrow guidelines for impact fees). What is your position on impact fees? What guidelines and procedures would you put in place to assure adherence to state law?

ANSWER: I am receptive to any information from Capital Area Association of Realtors on these subjects. I generally favor reasonable impact fees. I also would support financial incentives to developers to renew and redevelopment older neighborhoods and vacant lots.

7. The permitting process for a development can add significant time to the completion of a project. Development fees can also add significant cost. How does the city balance the need to thoroughly review plans and recoup its costs, with the disincentive these costs and delays the process can create?

ANSWER: This is an area where the Capital Area Association of Realtors can inform the candidates and current council member of problems and make recommendations.

8. Would you support new development, or encourage redevelopment, or both? Please explain.

ANSWER: There are “for sale” and “for lease” signs all over town, in all areas, indicating an over inventory of retail and housing units. This oversupply combined with reduced purchasing power of consumers and an aging population within the City means that redevelopment should take priority. It can be more cost effective and financially viable when resources are limited because infrastructure is already there.

REALTOR® INVOLVEMENT

9. Do you have personal or professional relationships with local REALTORS®? Are any REALTORS® involved in your campaign? What role do you think REALTORS® can play in improving your community?

ANSWER: As a general practice attorney for many years, I appreciate the knowledge and expertise of the many fine realtors in the Springfield area who are the de facto ambassadors for our community to new residents.

10. Please feel free to add any additional information you feel would be relevant as to why CAAR should support your candidacy.

ANSWER: I am preparing to be a full time council member. I have cut back my law practice, my wife and I now have no children at home, and I will retire from the IL Army National Guard after 30 years of service. I look forward to working with groups like CAAR to make Springfield the best community it can be.