

**Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce
Owensboro City Commission Special Election 2023
Candidate Questionnaire**



Name: Sharon Gray NeSmith
Date of Birth: June 12, 1951
Occupation: Commissioner City of Owensboro May 2023/Present
General Manager, Hampton Inn & Suites Downtown
Director Multi States, Area Manager Bellsouth/ATT 1972/2015
Education: Master of Science Business Management, Brescia University
Bachelor of Science, Business Administration, McKendree University
Associates of Science, Business, Brescia College
Family: Gene NeSmith (deceased) Married 42 Years
Children: Michael Stewart (Teresa); Sherri NeSmith (Tim); Syrina Kay Thompson (David); Sandy NeSmith (Clayton)
A wonderful, smart, beautiful blended family of “Grands”



Name: Jerry Ray Davis
Date of Birth: February 10th, 1969
Occupation: President of Jerry Ray Davis Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram
Education: Clearwater High School – NADA – NCM Grad
Family: Braxton Davis and Joseph T. Davis



Candidate Name: Titus Willis
Date of Birth: November 30, 2000
Occupation: City Commissioner Candidate
Education: Science
Family: I have a beautiful fiancée and three children.

QUESTION 1: In the 1950's, Owensboro citizens voted to change from the strong mayor form of government to the City Manager form of government. Would you please define your understanding of the role of the City Manager and define how you believe the city commissioner role should work with the offices of City Manager and Mayor?

NESMITH

Coming from a corporate world, I see the City Manager position as a Staff Position that assists the leaders and managers by providing information, guidance, and oversight to ensure objectives and goals set by the City are met, including meeting both citizen and financial goals of the Commission. This position allows Commissioners to better serve the public by researching questions and providing assistance from the various departments to deliver on changes and requests submitted.

Commissioners are considered part-time with our current form of government. Having a city manager allows Commissioners to focus their attention on their constituents versus everyday management tasks. This position allows continuity of operation during election cycles.

DAVIS

The city manager is essentially the chief executive officer of the city, responsible for the day-to-day operations. They are appointed by the city commission and are responsible for implementing the policies set by the commission. The city manager oversees all city departments, prepares the city budget, and advises the commission on policy matters. They are also responsible for hiring and firing department heads and other city employees.

The city manager's role is to ensure that the city runs efficiently and effectively, providing services to

residents and maintaining the city's infrastructure. They are also responsible for long-term planning and development, ensuring that the city grows in a sustainable and beneficial way.

The city commissioner, on the other hand, is an elected official who serves on the city's governing body, the city commission. The city commission is responsible for setting policy, passing ordinances, voting appropriations, and developing an overall vision for the city.

The city commissioner should work closely with the city manager to ensure that the policies set by the commission are effectively implemented. This involves regular communication and collaboration, with the city manager providing regular updates to the commission on the status of various projects and initiatives.

The mayor, who is also a part of the city commission, often serves as the public face of the city government. The mayor's role is to preside over city commission meetings and represent the city at official functions.

The mayor should also work closely with the city manager, providing leadership and direction for the city's vision and goals. The city manager, in turn, implements this vision through the day-to-day operations of the city.

In summary, the city manager, city commissioner, and mayor should all work together in a collaborative and communicative manner. The city commission and mayor set the policy and vision for the city, and the city manager implements this vision, ensuring that the city runs smoothly and effectively. The mayor along with the 4 commissioners each have 1/5 voting power which makes the 5 equals in power on the decisions made on behalf of its community.

WILLIS

The role of the city manager is to oversee the everyday operations of the city government, including our infrastructure, budget, sanitation, public safety, and approve programs alongside our commissioners and mayor. They ensure that everything is running smoothly between city officials and city staff, while contributing to our long-term goals for the city. As a city commissioner, I would oversee the city manager and work closely with the manager to give input on behalf of our residents. I would also ensure our policies are aligned with our mayor and commissioner decisions. Together, this is an important part of running a city.

QUESTION 2: A safe city is one of Owensboro's most treasured quality of life benefits. The Owensboro Police Department has been a national leader creating an educated community-oriented police force. Many seasoned and award-winning officers have left the job to go to the private sector and to other agencies. Our fire department is also facing a workforce shortage. What would you do as an elected official to reverse this trend?

NESMITH

Owensboro has recently reviewed salary levels and increased pay scales to retain and recruit needed personnel; however, we, like many businesses, are still facing a shortage in critical areas. Our police department is an example of this shortage.

Concerns the city residents have of every day parking and street issues along with more serious events are sometimes answered with “we just do not have enough personnel to handle the situation.” Other cities are facing the same issues. These cities, like Owensboro, can offer a great place to live and raise a family, an opportunity to work and serve in the community, and competitive salaries. We have to find the differentiator that will bring personnel to Owensboro and be willing to support the changes needed to provide first class public safety. Benefits and salary levels coupled with a great place to live could bring the people we need to keep us a great place to live and raise our families.

DAVIS

As an elected official, addressing the workforce shortage in critical departments like the police and fire departments would be a top priority. Here are some strategies I would consider:

- a. Competitive Compensation: Ensure that salaries and benefits are competitive with similar roles in the private sector and other agencies. This could help attract and retain qualified personnel.
- b. Recruitment Initiatives: Launch targeted recruitment campaigns to attract new talent. This could include partnerships with local schools and universities, job fairs, and social media campaigns.
- c. Training and Development: Invest in training and development programs to equip employees with the skills they need to succeed and advance in their careers. This could also include leadership development programs to prepare employees for management roles.
- d. Work-Life Balance: Implement policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting options, and generous leave policies. This could help make these roles more attractive, particularly to younger workers.
- e. Community Engagement: Engage the community in understanding the importance of these roles and the impact they have on the quality of life in the city. This could help generate support for initiatives aimed at addressing the workforce shortage.
- f. Partnerships: Collaborate with other agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector companies to develop innovative solutions to the workforce shortage. This could include apprenticeship programs, job-sharing arrangements, and other creative staffing solutions.
- g. Recognition and Rewards: Implement a system to recognize and reward employees for their hard work and dedication. This could help boost morale and job satisfaction, leading to higher retention rates.

h. Addressing Underlying Issues: If the workforce shortage is due to specific issues such as unsafe working conditions or lack of equipment, these issues would need to be addressed directly.

By implementing these strategies, I believe we can create a more robust, resilient, and effective workforce in our police and fire departments, ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

WILLIS

To reverse the trend of the hardships our fire department and police department are facing, we need to assure we are properly allocating resources to our police department and fire department in the most vital areas they need more staff to keep up with our growing population and higher wages to assure they want to stay on the job while doing great things in our community, as our police and firefighters contribute to our communities in a vital sense.

QUESTION 3. If you had to name one issue that motivated you to run for office, what is it, why is it important to you and what ideas do you have to address it?

NESMITH

Decisions are made by city leaders that address an issue or a problem. We look for resources and alternatives to address issues and can substantiate our rationale why the decisions are made. The decisions make the morning news and print and appear on social media those next few days. Often times the discussion and options discussed do not.

The rumors start and unfortunately, the initial information provided gets lost in translation. Repetition of more controversial decisions, including the conversations that led to those decisions, at later dates may help. Obviously, the more available we make our discussions, especially when spending dollars or making changes, the more likely we can present all the aspects of a decision we made.

DAVIS

The reason I decided to run for commissioner was, to my understanding, the current commission deciding to table certain issues that are so important to this city. The idea the commissioner's deciding not to vote on something that deserved a vote made me decide to run for this seat. Sometimes during the right thing may not be the right thing for me but it's still the right thing and voting would have been the right thing. Doesn't matter how they voted; I believe all items up for a vote is intitled to one.

WILLIS

I don't have one issue that made me want to run for city commissioner. I had a list, and this list includes the lack of getting the best prices we can in terms of new development in our communities, the lack of police and firefighters wanting to stay on the job, our budget being based on speculation of return, our youth having a lack of things to do and being looked at like a menace to society, our seniors not having the best quality of life they can get, our veterans having to close their post due to property tax planning and zoning driving new businesses and local businesses out of our city, our infrastructure development

not being a number one priority being met with quickly and responsively with the highest quality and best prices, our debt being at 171 million dollars today and growing, a lack of communication, collaboration, and transparency with our residents, and the growing number of cybercrime. I will work with those in our city to fix these problems, and if I have to, I will go to the state level to resolve these problems with those in Frankfort.

QUESTION 4. What is the personality trait you possess that makes you the best candidate for commission.

NESMITH

I am irrationally optimistic, and any individual can spark change. I care about our community and the many people who live here. This is an awesome place to call home and I want to contribute what I can to help all who live here. Inclusiveness is not just a word, it is an action, and we are very fortunate to have a diverse population in our small area.

DAVIS

Compassionate

a. Understanding Constituents: Compassion allows me to empathize with the struggles and challenges my constituents face. This understanding can guide my decision-making process, ensuring that policies and initiatives are designed with the best interests of all my constituents in mind.

b. Building Trust: When constituents feel that their elected officials genuinely care about their well-being, it builds trust. This trust can foster a more collaborative relationship between me and my constituents, leading to more effective governance.

c. Promoting Inclusivity: Compassion encourages me to consider the needs of all constituents, not just those who are most vocal or influential. This can lead to more inclusive policies that address the needs of diverse groups within my constituency.

d. Conflict Resolution: In the face of disagreements or conflicts, compassion can help facilitate constructive dialogue and compromise. By understanding and acknowledging the perspectives of all parties involved, I can help find solutions that are acceptable to everyone.

e. Inspiring Action: As an elected official, my actions will inspire others. By demonstrating compassion in my role, I can encourage others in your community to act with compassion as well, fostering a more caring and supportive community.

f. Policy Making: Compassionate leadership can lead to policies that prioritize social services, education, healthcare, and other initiatives that directly impact the quality of life for my constituents.

In essence, compassion can make me a more effective and respected leader. It can guide my actions and decisions, ensuring they are grounded in empathy and understanding, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for all my constituents.

WILLIS

I am determined to get things done quickly. This will impact the way I serve by me getting things done with a deep determined factor. I also study theoretical physics, the study of everything in the universe. I have the ability to use mathematical equations to predict occurrences at a great scale of understanding

QUESTION 5. Give us one creative project you think the city should undertake to make our community a more exciting place.

NESMITH

Transportation 24x7 with shorter access routes is a topic I addressed when initially appointed to fill the Commissioner position in May 2023. This one is going to take a lot of study, fact-finding, conversation and proof of value; however, it is definitely on my list as a high priority to assist individuals and businesses. It is also a project that will have us all “thinking outside the box” to find creative ways to make this happen.

DAVIS

Monthly or quarterly forums that will be open to the public with the head of every Neighborhood Associations in attendance along with the leaders of all other groups. This forum will be a discussion session to discuss on going and current events. This would be the ideal way to allow our constituent's voices to be heard.

WILLIS

A creative project I believe the city should undertake is bringing back the youth council, and the rest of the projects I believe should be made with collaboration and transparency of everyone in our communities because everyone will enjoy what we bring, so they should be a part of this question.

QUESTION 6. What citizens are we not effectively serving in our community and how we can be more effective?

NESMITH

The Owensboro and Daviess County communities are doing so much to help others regardless of their status or circumstances. Sometimes it feels like we can never do enough. While we cannot save the world and make everyone happy, each of us can do one thing to help someone else. So if ten of us do one thing and ask those ten we helped to do one thing, the multiplication impact can grow each day.

The important step to start is to realize that inclusiveness is not just a word, it is an action one step at a time.

DAVIS

Foster Children. Youth with Medicaid which includes all, if not most, foster care, have no dental or orthodontist in Owensboro. You must travel to other cities. Community Dental may take some, but no way meets the need for our size city and it's tough to get through to their phones to arrange an appointment. This leads to another concern, Foster Care. We do not have enough families to take foster kids, especially in a crisis. So social workers are at crisis level having to stay overnight with these children because there is nowhere to take them. We need to step up as a community and serve the youth which is the future for us all.

Senior Citizens and Veterans. We need to not only listen, but we need to comprehend what's being said. Once we comprehend what they are saying we must put their words into action, as a city and a commission. Our Veterans and Seniors built this city, fought for this city and is an asset that needs to be appreciated.

WILLIS

This question is more individualized as I believe there are a lot of people within groups I could name, but those within these groups would have different opinions, but our youth, veterans, and seniors deserve more of a voice. There are always those who feel they are being oppressed by the oppressors.

QUESTION 7. Part of community leadership is participating in service roles in many aspects of life. Could you tell us about one specific area of service that defines who you are?

NESMITH

I am experiencing the opportunity to learn and share in a service role as a current commissioner. I enjoy finding solutions and answering questions that help others in their search for information or assistance. In this short time, I have found it could be easy to say "that is not a city item." What is not easy is finding and sharing, not only where, but whom to contact about the issue if I can, regardless of the authority level who handles it.

DAVIS

I have been pleased to be able to give back to my community by supporting multiple organizations. Philanthropic support, especially where children are concerned is close to my heart. Providing the opportunity for children to have the feeling of family, being heard, feeling safe, empowered along with protecting the innocence of the youth is something I have become very passionate about.

WILLIS

I truly don't like to put out there all I have done for people, but I will say I have helped families over the years with Christmas, furniture, bills, and food. I have helped them resolve problems relating to city government anonymously. I have donated anonymously. I won't give names, but I have given people a place to lay their heads, helped them get a job, and provided financial education that changed their lives and their families' lives for generations to come. I've volunteered with multiple organizations and helped many people, always asking for nothing in return and wanting no notice of my good deeds. God is always with me.