

## **RESPONSES RECEIVED FROM NORTH LIBERTY CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES**

*Note: Questionnaire answers are written as received from each candidate.*

### **Matthew Eckhardt –**

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

Service is my passion. From an early age I have been drawn to helping others. True joy is found in the service of others. What better way to serve my community, my home, than city council. My primary focus will be our young community members, our youth. North Liberty's growth has been dramatic over the last decade. The city has done very well accommodating that growth especially in terms of infrastructure. Its time to focus on our youth, families and social programming. I would like to see us develop a comprehensive plan to address these needs. We need to develop sound, fiscally responsible projects that will serve us into the future.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

A strong local economy is driven by local business. Minor investments in municipal resources can help to increase the ability of local businesses to develop and grow. City sponsored seminars and education opportunities can help local owners increase efficiency and grow their bottom line. Land use and zoning adjustments can encourage locally owned over large chains. I will work to ensure North Liberty is attractive for small business.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

New construction and the renovations of existing structures play a crucial role in the vitality of our local economy. Developers and government alike are faced with increased mandates/requirements affecting time and expense. Three points are key to ensuring our city remains attractive for developers and manageable for local government; communication, collaboration and efficiency. City regulations and policies must be clear and easily accessible. The city currently does a good job providing easy access to its building codes and expectations. I will continue to seek ways to aide this process. To overcome the additional obstacles in the development process its important that local governments collaborate with developers when and where possible. Efficiency in permitting, zoning/ rezoning, and approval processes will decrease the cost for developers and help to create a fertile environment for growth.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be a useful in promoting economic development. TIF in the area is widely used but can be often misunderstood. Project funding must be appropriate and fit the desired outcome. Tax abatement, bonds and general fund spending should be considered along with TIF financing. TIF must have an obvious positive impact on residents; local examples of this include the I-380 Connection Project (the Forevergreen Road Interchange). This increases the city's development capacity for both commercial and residential zones. Past TIF approval for a family fun center, with the city's labor stipulations, would have provided a positive economic impact. Items that should be part of the general fund and scheduled capital improvement projects should be wisely budgeted and may not be TIF appropriate.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

Keeping an open dialogue with developers is important in addressing affordable housing in our community. It's important to create strategies in cooperation with builders to provide a balance of housing options. Strategies that encourage mutually beneficial development for prospective home owners and builders alike. I will strive to work with existing low-income property owners to maintain safe and desirable housing. In turn, in cooperation with local agencies, council can create spaces to educate residents on existing programs. The key to this will be communication and cooperation from all parties involved.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

Climate change has been at the forefront of national debate. As new housing is developed and existing structures renovated its important to encourage sustainable building practices. It's also important to be mindful that local policy does not inhibit growth. As with many issues that arise with further expansion, communication is vital. We must come up with practical solutions that provide the most benefit for everyone involved. Coming around a common table to develop these policies will ensure we can progress wisely.

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

I will seek to approach the Home Builders Association through communication, collaboration and cooperation. As will many of the issues that arise communication is key. We must be clear about the purpose of suggested policy but also mindful of its impact on local business and development. Collaboration will aide us in examining in questions, suggestions and/ or concerns. We must work together to overcome existing barriers and future obstacles.

## **RaQuishia Harrington –**

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

I am running for re-election for City Council because I want to continue to help in the growth and direction of the North Liberty Community. My background both personally and professionally has given me a unique perspective and outlook on ways that North Liberty can ensure that we are thoughtful and strategic in making decisions that will positively impact the lives of all residents. I believe that together we can make a difference in branding our community and ensuring that residents can live, play and thrive in our community by bringing new voices to the table.

My top priorities are to bring new direction and voices at the table, ensuring that North Liberty grows thoughtfully and deliberately into the community its citizens want and need. I will focus on opportunities to serve a quickly growing diverse population. I will work to address accessibility to services and amenities to all North Liberty residents. Prioritizing efforts toward affordable housing, access to social services and re-evaluating options for transportation. I will also work to brand North Liberty as a desirable location within the corridor for large

businesses, while promoting small businesses and grass-roots initiatives to help them thrive and expand from a solid base in North Liberty to help boost our local economy.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

Looking at long term plans and setting measurable goals to ensure our growth is sustainable. I will highlight the many ways that show we can live up to our ideals and ensure that we are re-evaluating our approaches as we continue to grow. We have the opportunity to learn from surrounding communities as to what may or may not work for us.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

Regulations are one of the ways a city council puts its ideals into practice and protects and promotes the general well-being of all members of our community. Regulations and enforcement need to promote and protect the valuable members of our business community and developers who see North Liberty as a place where we invest in each other's success and growth as well. The long-term health of our community depends on a council that ensures our businesses and citizens are treated fairly, neighborhoods and buildings are safe, infrastructure is solid and we have clean air and water.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

Bottom line is TIF needs to provide proportional added value back into the community. The direction of the current council can look at ways to creatively utilize TIF funding to build up our community. Understanding how best to use TIF funds for our community where revitalization of neighborhoods are at a minimum. Usage of TIF still can include infrastructure improvements (e.g. roads, utilities), job skills training for workers within the TIF, marketing the area to prospective new businesses, and building new public buildings. We are at a pivotal point where we can spark new private-public partnerships and new economic activity if strategically planned out.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

By working through mechanisms such as TIF and zoning, residents deserve the opportunity to have a variety of housing options that are indeed affordable. Housing is a human right. The use of fee-in-lieu on the affordable housing requirements for TIF projects and other forms of public-private arrangements shows real promise for future projects aimed at affordable housing. I also believe there are lots of opportunities for the city to support a holistic approach to affordable housing and continue to create opportunities for developers.

*[HBA Note: Home building generates substantial local economic activity, including new income and jobs for residents, and additional revenue for local governments. The estimated one-year impacts of building 100 single-family homes in a typical local area include: \$28.7 million in*

*local income, \$3.6 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 394 local jobs. The additional, annually recurring impacts of building 100 single-family homes in a typical local area include: \$4.1 million in local income, \$1.0 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 69 local jobs.]*

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

Building a certain number of homes spreads all kinds of opportunities out into the community. As a member of the city council I look forward to engaging your members to make sure we are getting the most benefit from those opportunities for the long term. Our success builds on a combination of living out our ideals for equity with a number of opportunities we have in our community with a growing population and numerous new places to work, learn, and thrive. Working with developers and other members of your organization to make sure that jobs created through home building will provide fair pay and benefits to those workers to continue to boost our economy and sustain development in the long run.

**Chris Hoffman –**

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

I am a 12-year member of the North Liberty City Council. I am running again because of the city staff and people of North Liberty. We continue to manage growth very well in our city, and the challenges/opportunities that come with that growth. I feel I have been a solid, consistent, and reliable member of council, and currently serve as the mayor pro tem.

If I am fortunate enough to be re-elected, my priorities will continue to be providing sound financial and growth advice for our city staff and residents/business owners. We've been fortunate to keep tax rates the same over the past 5 years but have had to make choices for expanding our Water and Sewer services that included modest rate increases. We are almost finished with those increases, and look forward to finding ways to stabilize the cost of living in North Liberty.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

From a council standpoint, the best thing we can do is help our city staff to meet the needs of developers and residents. Sometimes, that is simply updating building codes and other times it is helping to establish new ordinances to address our growth.

As I mentioned above, providing stability in the tax rate has helped property owners in North Liberty, also, as we continue to grow. Helping our staff provide for consistent and equitable building standards has been incredibly helpful to the building community as well.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

As a 12-year member of council, I know how difficult it has been over the years for builders and developers to have consistency among all of the municipalities in Johnson County. With the addition of our City Planner Dean Wheatley more than 10 years ago I think that consistency now

exists. Our Building Department has been able to take on more enforcement responsibilities provided for in code, as well as provide guidance in future planning for development. I am not aware of major issues within our Building or Planning Depts that we should be addressing? I think our city staff consistently addresses concerns to the satisfaction of builders/developers while maintaining standards required by code.

**What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?**

Within the city of North Liberty, I am very satisfied with the approach and use of TIF funding for projects. For the most part, we reserve that funding source for Road projects. Nearly every road project we've completed over the past 12 years utilized TIF funding in some way. In some instances, though, we have also used TIF funding to help major employers in the Corridor, or the nation, make North Liberty home. All of those funded programs required job growth and/or an economic return to the city. They have also been written as time-constrained agreements. For example, we have used TIF funding (either directly or through the developer) for Heartland Express, UICCU, GEICO and Spotix, to name a few. They were mostly written as 10-year tax abatements.

**How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?**

I have heard from other county groups, and believe so myself, that North Liberty has been the most successful community in Johnson County at addressing affordable housing. Let me say, before I go on though, that affordable housing means different things to different persons/organizations.

My definition of affordable housing is having an inventory of housing available within the city to meet the needs of residents. Our mixed use housing (with businesses) has been successful over the years, as well as developing neighborhoods with a mixture of housing types. For example, Cedar Springs, Harvest Estates and Broadmoor (to a degree) offer duplexes, townhomes, small home lots (we call them RS-6 or RS-8 zoning) as well as large lots (RS-4 zoning).

We also have a competitive amount of rental properties available throughout our city, and a healthy mobile home park (although more expensive recently due to rent increases).

That is not to say we don't have opportunities, though. An assessment of housing types is provided to council about twice a year, and we are able to make zoning/development decisions based upon that information. We also update our Land Use plan every 2 - 3 years, to provide for flexibility as trends change.

**How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?**

I am a member of the Home Builder Association through my employer, Moxie Solar. We are definitely actively engaged in construction in Johnson County. To that end, I understand some of the barriers to making doing business easier and what opportunities exist. I don't actively pursue problems that might exist in North Liberty...I feel like it is micro-managing. I do, though, think I have a good relationship with city staff to know if serious issues do arise. I feel our key city staff (Ryan Heiar, Tom Palmer and Dean Wheatley) treat developers and builders with professionalism and consistency.

I think I engage with/for the Association both from the inside (as a contractor) and outside (as a policy maker) fairly well right now. I am always available for an update or question, though.

What is your position on climate change and how would you address the impact to the home building industry?

I work for a renewable energy company, Moxie Solar. I am acutely aware of costs/requirements for installing a solar array on a home or business. I think North Liberty addresses our concerns as a Solar company rather well but opportunities still exist for them to know it better. I see greater opportunity to benefit residents of Coralville, though, as they have much higher fees for going solar.

To the extent North Liberty (and any city in Iowa) could address more climate change issues is more or less dictated by the State. I would like for there to be higher standards for insulation, for example, than what is in the Iowa code. We (cities and builders) will benefit our climate and environment if we were able to improve efficiencies in more cost effective ways.

## **Mike Nicholls –**

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

I am running for north liberty city council because I believe it is time for me to give back to my community. I have owned and operated several small and large business in my past and want to use that knowledge and experience I gained over the past 50 years. I want to be a voice for small business because I know how important they are to our community.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

I would create a city council forum and go out into the community and listen to business, churches, Optimist club, Seniors, residence and ask them what they need from North Liberty and what can North Liberty do for you. Then bring that information back to the city council and find out how we can make changes.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

I think there are far too many regulations that hinder growth, some are needed for safety. Some are mandated by the State and Federal governments. I am not aware what is in place at time but once I get into office, I plan on making it a item to discuss with the council.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

I am not familiar with TIF funding, only what I have read in the paper so I would need to get more information.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

I think affordable housing is always a good idea and will benefit our community it will have my full attention. I want to first find out who is in out area doing the building and make a point to meet with them and listen to what they need from North Liberty.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

Climate change is happening and has been happening for thousands of years. I do not believe that man is causing the planet to warm. The subject has become so political and when that happens truth no longer is of any value.

## **Brent Smith –**

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

Since joining council back in July in a 4 to zero vote in favor of my appointment, I have called for and already begun work on a 5 and 10-year developmental strategic plan. This plan incorporates both residential and business growth. I will use my experience in strategic planning to assist in creation of this plan. I have already begun this work by voting in favor of and participating in the North Liberty visioning project. My recent work with Council has led to the development of a new North Liberty logo and marketing tag line of “Connected to What Matters”. North Liberty has grown so fast that we have had to be reactive in building infrastructure and just try to keep up. Now as we begin to level off a bit, we need to diversify our tax base and be aggressive in business recruitment and retention. Our visioning project begins that journey.

I am also running because we need stability on council. We have seen our share of folks leaving in the middle of their terms. I commit to fulfilling the full 4 years of this term and beyond. When I make a decision, it comes from time spent understanding the issues, listening to constituents and understanding how my vote will affect things today and in the future.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

City Councilors can assist continued favorable economic times in our community by working with business owners in zoning and ordinance evolution. North Liberty has plenty of commercial space to develop and will assist in rezoning in a way that fits the needs of businesses, developers and our housing needs. We can assist with small business loan programs, partner with the University of Iowa Small Business Center to work with new businesses and create a welcoming and inviting place to open small business. We then promote our community businesses in our aggressive marketing campaign. I have called for the creation of a new position in the City, once we have completed the 10-year developmental strategic plan, to have someone dedicated to marketing North Liberty and its plan to attract and retain businesses in our community.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

I think that North Liberty currently has some work to do to reduce red tape and make it less burdensome for folks to do business here. The first face a new business owner should see when opening in North Liberty, should be one of a City Councilor or City Management that greets them with a handshake. The handshake should be followed by a welcome packet that is full of helpful resources we as a city have to help them start up and be successful. This initial investment in relationship development will yield great things for our city and make the new

business owner feel like they made the right investment coming to North Liberty. I have not just talked about this; I have been out and doing it. I have been the first City representative that businesses like Corridor Equipment Rental, AAA Mechanical, Diventures and many other new businesses in North Liberty have seen. I want to continue being the City Councilor for small businesses here in North Liberty.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

Tax Increment Financing is a great tool when used correctly. It is also one of the only tools a City has to incentivize developmental investment. TIF financing is part of a larger pie including looking at total city budgets, local school bonds and what the long-term investment will yield at the end of the financing. Since being appointed in July, I have voted in favor of infrastructure expansion west of I380. This has allowed us to open up an entire new area for development. I am in favor of expanding our TIF areas when the right fit comes along that will benefit our residence in job creation, expanding the tax base long term and bringing a needed service to our community. North Liberty has been wise in its use of TIF funds on many road projects like Forevergreen road, and 965, businesses like UICCU, Heartland Express and others. All these investments have occurred while maintaining fiscally responsible budgeting that has yielded outstanding bond ratings.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

Affordable housing can be addressed a couple of ways. First you use inclusionary zoning in your housing areas. Building a mix of duplex, zero lots and single-family homes within the same development creates housing at a variety of price points. Second, we have to work with and allow for rental units. We can have clean, safe rental properties that meet the needs of residents by requiring them to meet our standards. Council will need to continue to rezone areas allowing for types of housing that is showing the most need over time based on our housing surveys.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

We can all make more of a conscious effort to use less. Use less energy, use less water and respect the natural resources we all need for life. As a City we can make investments in renewable energies like solar, (which we have) wind and grant programs that reimburse residents for things like rain barrel installs and soil restoration projects. We must assure as a city that we do not burden our housing developers with required renewable systems. Instead we rely on their evolution in building better energy efficient homes, making available more options to those home owners that want to invest a bit more in renewables and work with the State of Iowa to keep tax incentives in place for these investments.

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

The Iowa City area Home Builders Association has been a large part of the growth of North Liberty. Many of your members have designed our beautiful developments, partnered with one another in creative ways to create new and innovative buildings and yielded the hammers and nails that have grown our city by the thousands. I have been out in our North Liberty business community. I have heard what is helping them be successful and also what is hampering their growth. I will continue this relationship development, pledge to hold business round tables and

focus groups in my push for our 10-year developmental strategic plan. I will be the voice of those who go “all in” when they chose to build their dream businesses here in North Liberty. I want to thank HBA for their past partnership with our city and look forward to building the future of North Liberty together.

## **Bryan Wayson –**

Why you running and what are your priorities if elected?

The main reason I am running for City Council because North Liberty is a great place to live and I would like to do my part to help keep it that way. My primary goals if elected is to work to keep property taxes low and budget increases within the growth of the tax base. I would also like to see continued improvement of recreation facilities within North Liberty including continued development of parks and recreation facilities. I would also like to see continued targeted funding of agencies/groups that can help meet the social needs of North Liberty residents such as a transit assistance program. I would also like to help promote commercial growth in the city which will help develop the tax base, increase available shopping opportunities for residents, and promote employment within the city limits.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

I believe that North Liberty should continue to work with businesses who want to start or locate in the city by using the Small Business loans and tax rebates. These funds need to be tied to clear expectations about job creation and building size since that relates to property tax generation. I believe the City has been receptive to qualified proposals and has partnered well with several businesses. North Liberty also needs to work to keep the cost of doing business down by keeping tax rates low and developing the infrastructure that lets development of new business continue in a steady fashion. The City also needs to be receptive to changes in building techniques that meet zoning criteria as well as being somewhat flexible in zoning as housing trends change. Affordable housing is needed to attract new employees that businesses need to expand.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

I feel that the current building code, storm water, top soil, and rental programs are adequate but not overly burdensome to businesses. The City zoning regulations provide a consistent guideline for development. I do not feel we have overly restrictive regulations in North Liberty. The Council and City staff need to be flexible and work with affected parties as new regulations are applied to the City as the population increases.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

TIF funding can be a very useful way to help a city develop. I believe it should be primarily used for infrastructure development. If TIF is to be used to help businesses locate to North Liberty or expand current operations then an agreement with the business laying out expectations of job creation, or building development is created. North Liberty has been successful with several businesses in the last few years to expand or relocate. I feel that there does need to be a sunset on the urban renewal area to avoid undue burden on other local taxing entities. I supported the use

of TIF on several projects during my previous time on the City Council.

**How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?**

Affordable housing is an issue in the County for several reasons including lack of units, high property values, and wage issues. One of the key things North Liberty can do is to work to allow a range of housing development and not place undue regulations on developers which increase costs that are passed on the renters or home buyers. Currently there is a good mix of housing in the City. Low property taxes also help lower housing costs. Attracting good wage jobs will also help increase worker wages and that will make housing more affordable. Policies to encourage businesses to locate in North Liberty and small business assistance programs are important.

**How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?**

I feel North Liberty is now in a position to help drive and shape the development of the Corridor. As the City works to lay out its vision for an area it will be important to seek input from the people that can make that vision come true. The City will need to let interested parties know when there will be discussion about planned development to provide input and to make sure any plans are realistic and make sense from a business standpoint.

**What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?**

North Liberty should continue to promote alternative and environmentally friendly energy options to promote energy conservation and decrease pollution. The building code should reflect the current industry best practices in energy efficient building construction. I feel that mandating expensive technology use in houses such as solar panels is not conducive to making housing more affordable. However, the City should be supportive when new techniques or building materials are developed and builders can show a benefit to the environment.