



2025 JANESVILLE CITY
COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Q&A

JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN



1853

Thank you to all the candidates who provided responses
to our 2025 City Council Candidate Q&A.
We appreciate your time and thoughtfulness.

The Janesville City Council is an important governing body that impacts daily life in Janesville and guides the City's trajectory for future growth and development. Councilmembers serve 2-year terms. **In the 2025 Spring Election, there are 6 candidates vying for 4 seats.**

Forward Janesville is the Janesville-area chamber of commerce and leading private economic development organization. Forward Janesville (FJ) does not endorse candidates or host candidate forums. Instead, FJ provides a venue for candidates to connect to voters via our Candidate Q&A.

The Q&A provides an opportunity to hear from candidates on issues that are important to the business community and residents at large. Questions were developed with input from the leadership of the Forward Janesville Board of Directors and our Government Relations Council.

The 2025 Spring Election is on Tuesday, April 1. Visit Forward Janesville's 2025 Elections webpage (<https://www.forwardjanesville.com/government-relations/2025-elections>) for information on the local races, candidates and essential voting details.

We hope you find our **2025 City Council Candidate Q&A** useful and encourage you to share it widely with your personal and professional network.

Meet the Candidates



Michael Cass



Joshua Erdman



Jack Herndon



**Michael Jackson
(Incumbent)**



**Heather Miller
(Incumbent)**



**Richard Neeno
(Incumbent)**



1. What motivated you to run for city council?

MICHAEL CASS:

I was motivated to run for Janesville City Council for several reasons. First, as a lifelong resident of Janesville, I am passionate about our community and deeply care about its success. Serving on the council allows me to contribute directly to Janesville's growth and success, as well as to the success of our neighbors.

Another key motivation is the continued growth of Janesville. It has been exciting to witness the progress we've made, particularly with the revitalization of our downtown. There are even more great opportunities ahead. With the Woodman's Center nearing completion, there is potential for further economic development along the Milton Avenue corridor.

Additionally, the downtown area continues to evolve, and the Children's Museum of Rock County is making significant strides, now seeking its first Executive Director. The city's efforts to acquire the GM/JATCO property also present a tremendous opportunity to diversify the types of industries and jobs available in Janesville.

My experience serving on Janesville's Community Development Authority (CDA) and Janesville Mobilizing for Change (JM4C) further motivates me to run. I've been serving on the CDA since 2021 and currently serve as Chair. This role has given me the privilege of directly influencing housing and community programs that make Janesville safer, healthier, and stronger. Additionally, my work with JM4C, where I've been serving since 2021 (including one year as Deputy Chair), has shown me the need for expanded youth programming in our community.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

I'm a long-time Janesville resident with a passion for community service. I want to use my experiences to improve the Janesville community.

My desire to serve happens to coincide with a growing interest in the functioning of local government over the last 5 years. I have attended or watched many council meetings, committee meetings and public participation forums, including serving on the Sustainable Janesville Committee, and have found the process somewhat lacking in transparency and engagement. In many cases, I have felt that there could have been better questions posed to the administration regarding the materials provided or anticipated project outcomes. As a citizen, I would have preferred to see the council ask for clear answers and not rubber stamp the recommendations.

I feel that I have the time and energy to put forward to reading the materials, doing my own work to listen to the citizens and explore options, ask tough questions and expect answers, and make balanced decisions that protect the interests of the citizens of Janesville. This is my second time running for city council.

JACK HERNDON:

My love for the city I call home, where I grew up and went to school. My children and grandchildren are also growing up here and I want Janesville to be the best place for them and generations to come.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

First, I don't mean to sound clique; however, I love this city. Serving on the council provides me the opportunity to give something back as well as make a difference in my community. Then too, I believe that experience matters. I am now seeking my third term on the council.

Next, I realize that the council needs experienced members who understand the many important issues that are before this, the ninth largest city in the state.

Finally, I have the time to serve this city. While this is a volunteer position, there are times when it feels like a full-time job. There are many meetings, dealing with constituent concerns, answering phone calls and emails, researching the issues, reading the staff memos, etc.. In my years on the council, I only remember missing one meeting, and that was due to having COVID. Serving requires a serious time commitment. I know that not everyone has the necessary time to devote to this. I do.

HEATHER MILLER:

Originally, back in 2020, the city was considering a transportation utility to help pay for local road construction. A review of the plan would effectively place us at the center of potential lawsuits from business owners, as it unfairly treated businesses and would inhibit overall economic growth. These discussions on how and when to proceed forward made me angry, to the extent that I felt it necessary to be more vocal about opening up the city's liability when nobody was speaking out about the repercussions.

Since then, I have found myself often at the forefront of speaking out on behalf of our south side residents. The neglect that this area of Janesville has seen over the past twenty years is unmatched and is long overdue for attention, rebranding and improvement.

RICHARD NEENO:

I ran originally out of a concern over the transportation utility tax that the administration suggested as a means of paying for road improvements. I am now running for reelection in order to continue to foster growth and development in Janesville, which is necessary to limit taxes and improve the quality of life for Janesville residents.



2. What is your vision for Janesville?

MICHAEL CASS:

My vision for Janesville is to cultivate a welcoming community where people can afford to live, work, and enjoy diverse entertainment and recreational opportunities. I envision a city that attracts new, diverse industries and businesses while also supporting the growth and success of existing businesses.

There are significant opportunities for development, particularly on the south and west sides, including the MacFarlane Pheasant Farm land. Additionally, many shopping centers and strip malls have low occupancy rates and large, underutilized parking lots. These sites present a major opportunity to incentivize redevelopment for mixed-use housing and planned neighborhoods, creating more vibrant and walkable communities.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

My vision for Janesville is a unified community built like a wagon wheel. Downtown serves as a central hub with equally successful commercial corridors extending out to each of the sides of Janesville.

I envision a community that appears connected and not just restricted to a northeast interstate business route. Each area of the city would have multi-use opportunities for commercial and residential, so citizens in all parts have a choice to stay local in their own area to shop or dine or travel to other sides of town for variety.

I want to see the continuation of a safe community, and ample opportunities for employment, housing, and entertainment. I also envision a local government that is responsive to citizen input and actively engages people to take part in the planning of their local areas of the city.

JACK HERNDON:

Communication with the residents of the city. Accountability for all contracts and contractors that do work in the city. Uplifting the community to be proud of our amazing city.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I know this sounds utopian, nonetheless, I envision a city with top notch schools, adequate and fair housing, ample retail options, vibrant churches, employment opportunities, excellent health care facilities, numerous recreational and cultural sites, complete with the infrastructure to support these entities. Something for children, teens, adults as well as seniors. I am working hard to make that dream a reality.

HEATHER MILLER:

Janesville is a safe and educationally vibrant community. We support children who have special needs all the way through AP and gifted programs. We have an advantage of having two post-secondary education choices within our community. We have some great 'quality of life' projects that are rapidly approaching the finish line.

I see several upcoming ideas that will both reinvent and challenge the status quo, both in housing and economic development. Having a vested interest in this city for more than 27 years, I'm in for the long haul of continuing to support an economically diverse city by maintaining fiscal responsibility and giving people a voice.

RICHARD NEENO:

I view the "Janesville of the future" as a hub for industrial development in the I-90 corridor along the state line. Home to an assortment of businesses, benefitting from land available for development at Centennial Park and a variety of industrial parks near the interstate.



3. The main functions of city council members are policymaking, budget development, and oversight of the City Manager. As a councilmember, what background and experience do you bring to the table in those areas?

MICHAEL CASS:

Regarding policy making, I bring a strong background working in the public sector, particularly in the criminal justice field and in consumer protection. This experience has allowed me to work with state statutes and administrative codes, as well as engage in program and policy development, implementation, and analysis. Additionally, I have hands-on policy experience through my service on the Community Development Authority (CDA) and as a board member of Janesville Mobilizing for Change (JM4C).

While I do not have direct experience with budget development, I am eager to learn and gain more experience in this area. I do have experience in overseeing budgets; through my work with CDA and JM4C. I have reviewed budgets and made allocations from funds received through grants.

In my time in public service, I have also gained leadership experience overseeing the training and development of new employees. This involved reviewing their work, addressing performance issues, taking corrective action when necessary, and ensuring compliance with policies, procedures, administrative codes, and state statutes.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

As President of the Green-Rock Audubon Society, I am responsible for creating and executing a budget of revenue sources from grants, donors, and business relationships, and responsible expenditures that keep our various Rock County preserves environmentally sound and financially sustainable.

Additionally, I bring specific policy expertise in Emergency Management and Public Safety arenas. I have over 20 years of experience as a municipal firefighter/paramedic and a graduate degree in Emergency Management. I've spent my entire professional career identifying life-threatening problems and life-sustaining solutions. I also have experience with operational planning, risks vs. benefit analysis, community response and event recovery in the short, medium and long term.

My supervisory experience includes 12 years of classroom supervision as a University of Wisconsin Emergency Education Center instructor and 4 years of experience as a Madison Fire Department Training officer. In both circumstances, I was responsible for providing coaching, feedback, direction, and mentorship to others, along with communicating concerns, goals, and expectations.

JACK HERNDON:

My responsibilities at my job include all of those things. I enforce district policies. I manage several budgets (taxpayer funded). I manage all of the facilities staff, all contractors and vendors. I am also on both safety committees for our district.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I believe that experience matters. I am now seeking my third term on the council. I was a member of the Council that hired our present city manager. I currently serve on the city's Plan Commission. I have been involved in job creation as a member of the Board of the Janesville Innovation Center. I have been involved with the affordable housing issue as a member of the Community Development Authority. I assisted in putting together the updated Comprehensive Plan which helped set the vision for the future of our city. I also helped frame our new Strategic Plan. I have supported the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center, the Boys and Girls Club, and the soon to be built Children's Museum of Rock County. As a member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, I served on the design committee for the new Palmer Park Aquatics Center.

Aside from the Council: I am a co-founder of the Janesville's Community Health Center as well as a member of the HealthNet Board of Directors. I have served on two local boards that have mental health as their focus. I was the pastor of New Life Church for more than 16 years. I founded Freedom Fest as well as the New Life Food Pantry. I have been a Chief Election Inspector. In the past, I was an EMT Special Skills in the state of Texas. I was also the President of the Mont Belieu, Texas Volunteer Emergency Medical Service.

HEATHER MILLER:

As an incumbent, I've had the privilege to serve under three city managers. My experience as a parent of six children and running a household has taught me more than just accounting skills; I've learned that oversight takes research and tenacity.

Law enforcement has maintained my objectivity and has helped me achieve a way to detach from just a "city government perspective." Consider that sometimes people just want to be acknowledged. While the best ideas are not without flaw, knowing how to collaborate and adjust to an ever-changing plan is necessary.

As a caretaker and advocate for the elderly and disabled, I know the frustration people often feel regarding finances & technology. I've learned to approach conflict with both patience and grace.

RICHARD NEENO:

I have served on the council for two years during which time I have learned the policy and budgeting procedures of the city. I have a variety of other experiences that benefit me as a councilmember: small business owner, national retail store management, budgeting, negotiation and an attention to detail. Above all, I have learned to anticipate and appreciate the needs of others.



4. The Strategic Plan is a key document that provides direction for the City of Janesville. What role does the Strategic Plan play in aligning city council with the City Manager and leadership team?

MICHAEL CASS:

The Strategic Plan plays a crucial role in ensuring that the city council, city manager, and leadership team are aligned on the direction and priorities for Janesville. It serves as a guiding document that establishes key priorities, objectives, and outcome measures, helping to create a shared vision for the city's current needs and future growth.

While the current Strategic Plan effectively identifies these priorities and goals, it lacks clearly defined steps to achieve the desired outcomes. Implementing more detailed action plans, timelines, and accountability measures would strengthen the plan and improve its effectiveness in driving measurable progress for the city.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

The Strategic Plan is a unifying document that allows the city council and city manager to share similar goals and visions for the direction of the city over the next 5-year period. The previous plan, however, did not align as well as desired with the most recent rendition of the Comprehensive Plan, and was revised last year. While the new plan has a useful list of overarching concepts and a few benchmark items to reflect on, it does not have much in the way of specific actionable items. As a result, it seems that any particular project can be manipulated into matching one of those items, even if the relationship is shaky.

The most important part of the current Strategic Plan is the requirement for frequent periodic updating and internal analysis of progress on each of the overarching concepts. As the city council maintains its oversight of the city manager and policy direction for the city, it is very important for them to critically evaluate those updates and to continually question whether the appearance of alignment with one of the broad concepts is a real circumstance or somewhat contrived.

JACK HERNDON:

In my opinion the strategic plan guidelines should be followed and supported by the council. Conversations should be had to keep building a strong strategic plan for the long-term future. There will always be changes and different opinions but as a group we need to come together in the best interests of the community!!

MICHAEL JACKSON:

"The City's Strategic Plan serves as the road map over the next five years to guide our community's vision." It is the city's roadmap, north star, directing us toward our desired future. The plan's seven priorities are points of agreement between the city manager and staff as well as the common council. All of the major decisions that take place should align with the Strategic Plan.

HEATHER MILLER:

All of the city plans have their own purpose, but it wasn't until now that they ultimately have worked together. All have traditionally been standalone plans that were better suited to sitting on a shelf, as none actually contained actionability.

In 2024, the council created an updated version of the Strategic Plan which contains an all-inclusive blueprint of where we (and city staff) think the efforts need to be placed. It is a guide and a reference for the City of Janesville that we have adopted as our road map of initiatives.

RICHARD NEENO:

The strategic plan is the organizing basis for the direction of the city and its administration. It makes clear the priorities of the council for the city and is a reference for the public, city administration and the council to judge if the direction of the city is consistent with its priorities.



5. Housing is a key challenge in the community, as it is everywhere in Wisconsin and the United States. Housing for All is a strategic priority in the city's 2025 – 2029 Strategic Plan. What, if anything, should the city do to increase new residential construction at all levels?

MICHAEL CASS:

I believe the city can take more proactive steps to increase new residential construction. One way to do this is by creating shovel-ready sites or subdivisions for new housing, whether single-family homes, townhouses/condos, or multi-family developments. By identifying specific areas of the city for these developments and determining which steps outlined in the city's Development Guide can be completed by the city, we can streamline the process.

The city's Comprehensive Plan (Vol. 2, Ch. 8) provides a strong framework for addressing our housing needs. The plan suggests ideas like accessory dwelling units and planned neighborhoods. Currently, the city is working on updating the zoning codes, which could lead to changes in the types and density of housing allowed in certain zoning districts. These updates could include increasing maximum height limits, decreasing the minimum width requirements, and decreasing parking minimums for multi-family developments.

Additionally, I would like to see the city explore the creation of a tiny house village, similar to the one in Oshkosh. Using funding from extended Tax Increment Districts or TIDs for housing projects is a practical solution that has received support from the current council, and I would continue to support this approach.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

Economic development and availability of affordable housing work hand in hand. The city needs to work to revamp the zoning system to better align with the comprehensive plan and encourage mixed use property that combines commercial and housing availability.

The City of Janesville is not alone in its housing struggles. I believe that the city should be evaluating some of the options being pioneered by other communities for use in Janesville. For example: Kalamazoo, Michigan is using pre-permitted housing plans to reduce lead time on home construction, developer costs, and city bureaucracy: "Pre-Permitted Plans Help Kalamazoo Bring Housing Back" (strongtowns.org).

Beloit, Wisconsin is offering downtown businesses Tax Increment District (TID) Housing Fund money to convert units above commercial stores into additional housing: "Beloit offering downtown businesses \$36K to convert upper floors into apartments" ([MyStateline | WTVO News](http://MyStateline.com)). Large cities, like New York and Washington DC, are working to convert vacant commercial properties into residential units, using federal incentives and grant dollars to assist with funding the transition: "Commercial-to-residential Conversion: Addressing Office Vacancies" (CEA | The White House).

These solutions are not all-inclusive or one-size-fits-all. They require analysis for use in our community and cooperation at all levels of local, state and federal government. But they are a great place to start looking for creative long-term solutions to our housing challenges.

JACK HERNDON:

There are many rules, regulations, and ordinances that make it difficult for some people to build and develop housing. I think sharing information through meetings and seminars would be a good way to educate people about the things they need to do in order to build. If procedures are streamlined, it makes things easier for everyone involved. That also helps build a strong tax base.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

My four years on the Council as well as my having served on the Community Development Authority has put me on the front lines of addressing the affordable housing needs in Janesville. Since I have been on the Council, a total of 944 housing units have been approved for construction. We added 314 residential units in 2024 alone. It is not as if we are sitting on our hands.

In addition, I think it is important to point out that we currently assist 440 families with monthly rental assistance. I think the rewrite of the Zoning & Subdivision Codes will help facilitate housing starts. I have also strongly advocated for lessening of the fees and regulations that can hinder or prevent development.

The city's 2025 Legislative Agenda stresses the need for "community development programs, like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnership (HOME) programs." These programs are currently at risk, and yet are critically important to our city in that they help increase housing supply, improve housing quality, revitalize neighborhoods, encourage homeownership, and more. Janesville recommends increasing funding for the CDBG and HOME programs. For several years, the city has called for the repealing the Davis-Bacon Act. Davis-Bacon is a deterrent for qualified contractors.

HEATHER MILLER:

We are already looking at our current zoning and the possibility of changing the codes to suit an aging population and young professionals who want/need different housing than has traditionally been available. We are reaching out to our past partners in the housing industry in efforts to create variations in new construction. Offering tax incentives (in the way of Tax Increment Districts or TIDs) and assistance with available federal and state grant funding methods can help put housing projects over the finish line.

RICHARD NEENO:

The city is already examining all zoning codes in order to make sure that the codes are sensible, up to date and helpful in the creation of safe housing. Beyond this, the city continuously markets available properties to developers, while offering Tax Increment Financing or TIF monies where appropriate. If possible, I would like to see increased funding to the Community Development Authority so that a department within the city is dedicated and has the resources to spearhead housing development in Janesville.



6. Safety is a top priority for Janesville residents and it's a priority that requires constant and sustained attention. Crime rates remain at all-time lows in Janesville. What is your perspective on safety in Janesville and how will you ensure Janesville remains a safe community as a councilmember?

MICHAEL CASS:

A safe community is essential for the stability and growth of our city. People want a safe place to live, and businesses want a safe community in which to invest. Our police department has done an excellent job keeping our city safe, despite historically having fewer officers per capita than our peer cities and the state average. Ensuring that our officers have the proper training, skills, and tools to maintain safety will always be a priority.

I support the community policing strategies our police department currently engages in and the efforts our officers are making in building connections with diverse people groups. I would like, if funding such as federal or state grants are available, to increase our police staffing levels. This would provide more officers on the street and alleviate some of the stress that is currently placed on our officers.

Having a background working in the criminal justice field (law enforcement, juvenile and adult corrections), I know another important aspect of ensuring a safe community is looking at the factors that can lead to criminal behaviors. Often, community safety is seen as the number of arrests made or a low number of reported crimes; however, true community safety also involves identifying and mitigating the things that can lead to crime. Ensuring stable employment with family-supporting wages, safe and adequate housing, access to food, a quality education, and strong community programs are great things to invest in now to have the return of a safer community in the future.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

Janesville is already a reasonably safe community but is currently doing so with lower than average staffing for fire and police. We need to make sure that the level of safety remains the same or better (response times, level of service, crime rate, etc). Among other things, these four areas are worthy of focus:

- Maintain and improve police and fire department funding and staffing levels to meet community needs (both planned and unplanned response needs). In addition to normal community needs, we have a Baby Boomer generation aging at home that will test our capacity. Many of the needs of our most vulnerable citizens fall to these city agencies.
- Ensure the city's operations, water and wastewater divisions are properly funded and staffed. While people think of the police and fire departments as the main players in community safety, these folks also play key supporting roles in community safety. As we noted in the July 2024 tornado, and in the leadup to every snowstorm and cold snap we have over the winter, we rely on our utilities and operations divisions for prevention (plowing/salting, street maintenance, clean water, waste removal, etc.) services and mitigation (debris removal, etc.) and their level of service also needs to be preserved.
- Look for alternative ways for the city as a whole, (and police and fire as individual departments) to provide prevention services (crime, fire response, community medical, fall prevention) because prevention is ALWAYS cheaper than mitigation and recovery – this includes programs like community paramedicine and mental health resources.
- Ensure development meets emergency management standards to address climate resiliency issues. Changing climate has the potential to cause additional stress on our municipal system and provision of service, as well as damage within our community.

JACK HERNDON:

As I stated earlier, I am on both safety committees at the school district I work for. One of the most important things I can do is meet with our first responders and gather information about their budgets and procedures for getting them the training and equipment they need to do their jobs safely. Everyone counts on them at some of the worst times of their lives. We need to always support first responders not just when we need them!!

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I am a strong proponent of public safety. Indeed, it is one of the key planks of my reelection platform. It is of prime importance that the people of Janesville feel safe in their homes as well as when they are at school, on the streets, as well as when they on one of our trails. As such, the police and fire departments must have the necessary tools to do their jobs safely and efficiently.

Presently, public safety services (police and fire) represent the majority of proposed expenditures of our General Fund at 49.0%. I am pleased that the Janesville Police Department (JPD) hired 13 sworn officers in 2024. The Fire Department enrolled three members in the paramedic program. I supported each of these measures.

On a different note, close to three years ago, I had a meeting with Interim City Manager Chief Dave Moore as well as a number of additional city staff. I had asked for the meeting in order to explore the city's options regarding the issue of people driving under the influence. Nothing of substance came out of the meeting. I understand that Madison sets the laws governing this problem. However, I do feel that the city can and should be more aggressive in dealing with the matter.

HEATHER MILLER:

We are a very safe community and that speaks volumes about our police staff and the training they receive. When you look at crime statistics, you see only what the violent offenses are. That being said, we have several cooperative partnerships within our community which allow for tips or information to be shared about crimes anonymously and without fear of retaliation.

The police department doesn't ask for much; they make up a large portion of our annual budget and they run on a skeleton crew sometimes. When the Chief brings a concern or a need to the city council, we listen, ask questions, evaluate, and act in the best interests of community safety.

RICHARD NEENO:

By agreeing to the hiring of Chad Pearson as the new chief of police, the council made the most significant step to ensure the continued safety of Janesville and its citizens. Chief Pearson is the best means of maintaining the safety that citizens currently enjoy. To the extent possible, the council needs to support and fund the police department as requested. Beyond that, there is no means of actually ensuring the safety of the community.



7. While downtown growth remains a community objective, there are other areas of Janesville that require attention, namely the Center Ave. corridor on the south side and the Court St. corridor on the west side. As a councilmember, how would you impact economic and neighborhood development along those corridors?

MICHAEL CASS:

Impacting economic and neighborhood development starts with gathering input from residents in these areas. Listening to their ideas and concerns would help the council and city find common ground as plans take shape. Currently, the city is utilizing just under 8% of the maximum 12% TIF valuation limit. I would support a slight increase to create new Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts in commercially zoned areas to incentivize redevelopment, especially in locations such as the Sunnyside Shopping Center (W. Court St.) and the Blackhawk Shopping Center (Center Ave.). These redevelopments, coupled with zoning changes, could create opportunities for mixed-use housing and make better use of underutilized parking lot space.

Additionally, I would advocate for advancing the Three Leaf Partner/Local Roots project, an indoor strawberry greenhouse. Supporting these investments has the potential to bring new businesses, housing, and community spaces to the area. Encouraging mixed-use developments and infrastructure improvements in these corridors can attract investment, enhance walkability, and improve the overall quality of life for our neighbors in this area.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

Downtown's success has been impressive and incredibly necessary to the vitality of the Janesville community. It was, at the time it started, long overdue. Unfortunately, Janesville's characteristic approach to revitalization focuses on expending resources in one area of the city, at the expense of other areas. It has resulted in a few thriving places, while other sections of the city continue to decline.

You've mentioned multiple commercial corridors in the city that are in need of focused revitalization efforts and referenced council's functions as a policymaking, budget development, and oversight entity. It will take initial investments by the City of Janesville, focused development planning for these specific corridors (including substantive neighborhood engagement), accompanied by rebranding efforts, development incentives, the reduction of various zoning-related barriers to development, enforcement of existing ordinances and infrastructure improvements before we can expect private businesses to support growth and develop partnerships like those in the downtown area.

As a councilmember, I will develop policy suggestions, budgetary recommendations, and provide direction to the city manager that focuses on expanding strategies from downtown into other areas of the city. I will be actively looking for other strategies that can be added or included.

JACK HERNDON:

I would work to make it attractive for businesses to open and create jobs in these areas. Doing research of these areas and getting information about zoning and regulations to get the areas booming. Support local businesses and they will thrive.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

The city's Comprehensive Plan, which was approved in December 2023, addresses both corridors, Court St. and Center Ave. A wide variety of issues were looked at in the plan including housing, transportation, parks and recreation, public safety and crime. Some of the proposals in the plan go all the way back to 2002. Many are outdated and in need of a current review. I favor such a thorough review. We may need to reinvent the wheel here. Next, I believe that the upcoming zoning evaluation will address some of the issues that have held economic and neighborhood development back along both of the corridors in question. Finally, it all boils down to money. The ARISE project showed us that a private/public relationship can be fostered in order to achieve a greater good.

HEATHER MILLER:

I always have been a cheerleader for the underdog and will continue to support economic development, change, and improvements within our south and west commercial corridors. Once we acquire the condemned area of Centennial Park, there will be a third corridor which will require a great amount of reinvention, as well.

While neighborhoods have grown in both west and south locations, we have yet to see a plan involving commercial corridors and specifically address the needs of each. Creating an ad hoc committee of residents who have stake in their own neighborhoods (for each area) to be revitalized would be my goal.

RICHARD NEENO:

The belief that the city council, much less an individual councilmember, can determine economic development is a fiction. The city council must ensure that Janesville is an attractive place in which to invest. The council should offer the economic incentives available when new development possibilities arise. But the city council cannot direct development to areas other than where a business feels it is in their best interest (see: grocery store, south side). Neighborhood development has traditionally been left to residents and resident-lead associations e.g. BID, DJI, SNOW. Such organizations represent stakeholders with a specific interest in beautification and development of a given area of the city.



8. The City of Janesville is in the process of rewriting its Zoning & Subdivision Codes. The expected completion date is September 2025. In your opinion, what should the main outcomes of the code rewrite be?

MICHAEL CASS:

The main outcomes of the zoning and subdivision code rewrite should be to establish clear, concise, and modernized regulations that align with current zoning standards while addressing the community's evolving needs. The updated code should prioritize housing development to accommodate future growth (such as in-law suites or backyard cottages), encourage continued economic development, and maintain the quality of life in residential areas adjacent to business and industrial districts.

Additionally, I hope the rewrite includes a strong emphasis on mixed-use zoning, which promotes walkable neighborhoods and vibrant commercial districts, as well as planned neighborhoods that integrate housing, green spaces, and essential services. Ensuring the new code fosters smart growth and sustainable development will help Janesville become a thriving and well-balanced community.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

Janesville's current zoning ordinance was adopted in 1981, with various amendments added as needed in the years since. Updating and revising our zoning statutes to meet the community needs of today and tomorrow is a critical step in addressing some of our most pressing challenges. The main outcomes of our current code rewrite should be:

- Improvement in ease of use. The code should be easy for city staff to execute and enforce, easy for community members to navigate and understand, and easy for builders and developers to work with.
- Modern and flexible. The code should assist with mixed use commercial/residential housing creation, improve urban planning efforts, reduce barriers to new construction safely, and address current and future needs (housing development, avoidance of urban sprawl and unnecessary destruction of farmland and habitat).

JACK HERNDON:

Common sense not special interest. These zoning codes and regulations need to make sense for the community and the long-term future of the city. They can't be based on one person's opinion.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

As a member of both the Plan Commission as well as the common council, I have been on the ground floor of drafting this vitally important document. The current zoning ordinance was adopted in 1981. However, parts of the subdivision ordinance were written in the 1970s. The current zoning ordinance needs to be updated to expediate community growth and expansion. The city also wants to improve the simplicity and ease of use of the current code. As the city's website notes, "An updated Janesville land development code will be simplified, responsive to market conditions, and facilitate high-quality development."

As Forward Janesville puts it, "When it comes to development, zoning is where the rubber meets the road." The final draft is set to come before the council for consideration of final adoption this summer. I am strongly in favor of the rewrite.

HEATHER MILLER:

We need to focus on the goal of making our zoning codes user-friendly. We hear often from contractors that Janesville is "difficult" to work with. From a council perspective, it's unsettling and makes me ask "Why?"

Creating a linear process that is laid out consistently for contractors to follow would be a good start. Redundancy regarding inspections needs tweaking and the fee schedule should be easy to follow and up front, so there are no surprises. Sometimes I think a single contact within the department as a lead would be beneficial, as one would only need to contact the same person to get the appropriate answers.

RICHARD NEENO:

The new zoning codes should be modern, fair, and receptive to current and future trends in housing and commercial development. They should be written in a way that allows for flexibility and new developments in the construction and planning of homes and commercial spaces.



9. Unlike many communities in Wisconsin that expect to lose population in the next ten years, Janesville's population is expected to remain fairly stable. What are the most important things for Janesville to do to retain and attract population? How will you impact those as a councilmember?

MICHAEL CASS:

To retain and attract residents, Janesville must focus on several key priorities:

- Maintaining stable industries that provide family-supporting wages.
- Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing.
- Equipping schools to deliver a strong quality education.
- Expanding access to diverse entertainment and recreational opportunities.
- Fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment is essential for both population retention and economic growth.

As a councilmember, I would advocate for policies that make Janesville an attractive place for businesses to invest and expand, while also promoting housing development to strengthen our tax base. I support continued investments in public facilities such as parks, pools, the Woodman's Center, and the outdoor sports complex to enhance community engagement and quality of life. By prioritizing these initiatives, we can ensure Janesville remains a vibrant and desirable place to live, work, and raise a family.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

It is important for us to focus on providing quality basic services that are accessible to all citizens. Fire and police protection, streets and sanitation and other basic municipal services make our community safe and attractive to both businesses and citizens. These services cannot be overlooked in their importance to our continued development success. The viability of our community depends on them. The cost of providing these services is going to continue to rise, and we need to plan for these "needs" to continue to maintain and grow Janesville. Otherwise, those individuals or businesses will look to go elsewhere.

We also need to focus on how we attract businesses, both small and large. They serve an important function as both employers and as amenities. In speaking with small business owners around Janesville, many have voiced concerns about the city's permitting and business development processes. Local small businesses don't have an army of lawyers at their disposal. The additional resources in time, money or staff to navigate local bureaucracy can be the difference between a business's success or failure. I would like to focus on finding ways to streamline the city's internal processes to make applying for licenses, permits, construction, etc. easier. Businesses of all sizes will benefit from improvements in this area.

As a councilmember, I will work to build consensus on policies and budgetary decisions that reflect these focus areas and to encourage the city manager to consolidate the efforts of his staff in these areas.

JACK HERNDON:

Again, it goes back to communication and information. Making things attractive for businesses to operate will create jobs. Jobs are a great way to attract residents to any community. Share information about the opportunities that are available.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

To grow, the city must be intentional. I am pro-growth. I feel that our city is currently on a roll. It is important that we keep the positive momentum going. "How will you impact those as a councilmember?" One, I again, support updating the Zoning and Subdivision Codes. It is time that we bring these ordinances into the 21st century.

Next, I have been a supportive voice in regards to the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center, the Boys and Girls Club, the Children's Museum of Rock County as well as the Palmer Park Aquatics Center. The city recently completed the bike park at Palmer Park as well as completed construction of six lighted pickleball courts at Riverside Park. It has been my vision to make Janesville the go-to place for families in south central Wisconsin.

Then, I have discussed the feasibility of bringing in an NBA G-League basketball team to the Woodman's Center to complement our Janesville Jets hockey team. I also would like to see a major remake of Uptown Janesville (the mall). This would include hotels, restaurants, office space, housing as well as limited retail. Again, I see these proposals as helping us retain and attract population.

HEATHER MILLER:

Affordable housing is what will keep people here and bring new people to our community. The last couple of years has put Janesville behind the eight-ball, so to speak, and the housing crisis is happening nationwide. Were you aware that entry-level firefighters qualify under poverty guidelines and would be approved for affordable housing? That should speak volumes. Great economic development and prevailing wage jobs are significant, but if you cannot house people within our city limits, spending and support of local businesses will also not be within our community.

RICHARD NEENO:

Population growth is tied to myriad things: economic opportunity, housing, good schools, infrastructure, city finances, safety, and recreational opportunities. The city council must continue to keep a "big picture" view of the city, taking all of these points—and more—into consideration in order to make Janesville the "city of choice".



10. The city has limited tools in its economic development toolbox. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is one of them. What is your perspective on TIF? How will you approach TIF as a councilmember?

MICHAEL CASS:

I believe the city is on the right path in its use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF). We utilize a pay-as-you-go approach, which minimizes financial risk for the city and taxpayers since incentives are paid annually based on the development meeting the terms of the agreement. This method ensures that public funds are used effectively and that developers remain accountable for their commitments.

As a councilmember, I will support the continued strategic use of TIF to encourage private investment in areas that need development or redevelopment. By leveraging TIF incentives wisely, the city can attract new businesses, revitalize underutilized properties, and enhance infrastructure without placing excessive tax burdens on residents. Maintaining transparency and evaluating the long-term impacts of TIF agreements will be key to ensuring they provide lasting benefits to the community. We've seen great results from our use of TIF, such as SHINE Technologies and the United Alloy expansion, and the incremental value adds to our taxbase.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

TIF can be a useful tool for the city to seek economic development, especially in those areas that require extra assistance to see development and in a state that allows very few ways for a municipality to generate revenue. To grossly simplify what TIF does, it can help generate funds for economic development and related infrastructure by setting aside the increase in property tax value on a developed property to be used for specific development needs and projects. Per state law, TIF money must be used for projects that would not be possible "but for" the financial support that a TIF can provide.

The State of Wisconsin has some strict rules on the extent that municipalities can rely on them and Janesville has done well to not push those boundaries and should continue to do so. I can acknowledge the effectiveness of infrastructure development, job creation and attracting more businesses in parts of the city through the use of TIFs.

Unfortunately, by doing so we lock away some property valuation that creates immediate revenue to support current community needs for a long time period. It has the potential to place undue burden on current taxpayers. I think we should be very careful not to mix TIFs with stand-alone development projects that are expected to produce localized development on their own. It penalizes local taxpayers in the immediate term. I understand that this is a delicate balancing act that requires careful consideration, and I intend to provide that consideration as a councilmember.

JACK HERNDON:

I really don't know a lot about TIF. I would like to learn more about it and if it makes sense to me again share the information. I am a grant writer for our school district as well. I do research and find different programs and resources that help in many different areas. I'm sure I can do the same thing for the community.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool used to stimulate economic development. In Wisconsin, TIF Districts are established by local units of government, think Janesville. A TIF offers a strategy for cities to "self-finance" a development or redevelopment project without having to raise or impose new taxes. It allows municipalities to capture incremental property tax revenue from growth in a defined area and use it to benefit that area. It works to generate tax dollars as well as increased employment opportunities in Janesville. It promotes economic development and redevelopment. It also promotes cooperation between public and private sectors.

It has been said that TIF is our most important tool in our economic toolkit. All TIF incentive proposals are subject to final approval by the city council during an open session public meeting. Again, given the fact that I am pro-growth, I favor such agreements. Unlike any of our neighboring states, TIF is all we've got.

HEATHER MILLER:

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a great tool that the city can use in revitalization or new construction, especially when an entity's funding may be limited. Tax laws are strict and rather than requiring upfront costs, its use allows for tax monies to be offset and appropriated into the area designated within the TIF District. In moderation, TIF is a great tool.

RICHARD NEENO:

Tax Increment Districts (TIDs) are a necessary tool in what is a national competition for industrial development. Janesville cannot compete with other communities around the country without having TIDs to attract new businesses. That said, TIF money is not to be used speculatively, guarantees and performance metrics must be put in place to safeguard the city's investment.



11. The city frequently collaborates to achieve goals while remaining fiscally responsible. In half of the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan's Strategic Priorities, partnerships are listed as key objectives. This applies to Economic Development, Fiscal Sustainability, Housing for All and Vibrant Community. What is your perspective on using partnerships to achieve the city's goals?

MICHAEL CASS:

Partnerships with external stakeholders are essential for achieving the city's goals. These collaborations can drive economic development while maintaining fiscal responsibility and should be actively pursued. ARISENow is a great example of the value of such partnerships, demonstrating how working together benefits both the involved parties and the broader community.

The city is not a developer and does not own or operate any public housing. Currently, we collaborate with a housing nonprofit for new construction, but additional housing nonprofits are needed to address the gaps that our current partner cannot fill.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

I think that partnerships are an acceptable way for the city to accomplish some of its goals but cannot be used to separate it from its responsibilities to its citizens. Partnerships have to have shared goals, shared priorities, be mutually beneficial, and have clear expectations in place. The city has to participate in providing some of the work and not depend on the partner for all of the work while the city takes credit.

While the city clearly wants to use these to achieve several of the strategic goal areas, it is important to not overcommit to an unmanageable number of collaborations, and to have some clear plans and policies on how partners are chosen and what type of collaborations are acceptable and what type of resources can be committed to the process.

It is also important that we recognize that CITIZENS (not just existing organizations) are partners, too. Citizens deserve seats at our "partnership" table, representing their neighborhoods, or their needs. It is a part of the process of involving citizens in governing and finding more effective ways to engage the community in building its new image and vision, prioritizing "wants" vs. "needs" and involving citizens in governing.

JACK HERNDON:

I think the city should be creating partnerships with lots of organizations in the community. Help support the local housing shortage and homeless issues we currently have. There are many ways to support the different categories of issues. It will take research and diligence to follow the guidelines and make a difference in all of these areas.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

The City of Janesville collaborates with a number of communities within its extraterritorial boundaries. We also have strong working relationships with Forward Janesville, the business community, the various neighborhoods within the city, the school district, etc. I think such partnerships are vital to all concerned. The city must not be an island unto itself.

Eventually, I see Janesville, Beloit and Milton as being one interconnected unit. Given that, collaboration is critical as we plan for future opportunities and needs. Janesville's zoning laws could ultimately impact the northern reaches of Beloit. The Beloit casino will have an impact on our housing needs. As southcentral Wisconsin grows, so will the need for additional medical care, housing and infrastructure. As we move forward, I would hope that communication between these various entities will only increase.

HEATHER MILLER:

We certainly have seen by the ARISE Plan, Woodman's Center, and soon-to-be Children's Museum just how important partnerships are. Continuing to partner with those having similar values and wishes is a win-win for the community both financially and as a vibrant community. We have city committees (like Sustainable Janesville) that I'd like to see be more involved in the planning and reinvention of real estate throughout the city that would have more long-term effects. Housing will remain on the radar as a priority, as we are lacking more than 200 units with our population needs today. As we continue to develop, we must keep pace with additional housing and remain mindful of our aging population.

RICHARD NEENO:

Mutually agreed upon partnerships and collaborations should be among the tools used by the city to achieve any goals. As long as the citizens of Janesville are protected, I don't see this as an issue.



12. The ~250-acre GM/JATCO site on the south side of Janesville is a huge opportunity. The city is in the process of acquiring those parcels and listed creating a “new redevelopment plan for the former GM/JATCO site” as an economic development objective in the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan. Do you think the city should have acquired those parcels? What do you think the redevelopment vision should be? What should the city's role be in the GM/JATCO site redevelopment?

MICHAEL CASS:

I do think it is appropriate for the city to have initiated the process for acquiring these parcels. As it stands now, Commercial Development Corporation (CDC) has not been paying the taxes they owe and has not been maintaining the property, which has resulted in them being fined by the city. I do have concerns about the costs to the city for any remediation that may need to take place in the future with new development.

In a perfect world, the GM portion and parts of the JATCO property would be great for commercial/industrial use. The remaining portions of the JATCO property could be used for more housing and/or a solar farm.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

The former General Motors (GM) site represents a free-market failure that is extremely common among similar brownfield sites (power plants, former industrial locations, mines, quarries and mills). Environmentally compromised properties are extremely difficult to redevelop privately because of the massive amount of investment required for cleanup, with very little access to independent funding sources. While the City of Janesville is not the preferred entity to take responsibility for site cleanup and redevelopment, it may be the only entity who will attempt it. Without intervention, this site will remain a community eyesore and a barrier to south side redevelopment.

While not desirable, the City of Janesville's involvement as a transitional owner may be necessary to move the city forward. Recent council decisions reflect this thought process. The redevelopment process is a long-term commitment and a long-term need for the health of the community. According to city manager Kevin Lahner, the former GM plant represents "the single largest investment in the city's history" (Janesville Gazette, Feb. 23, 2024). Federal assistance for cleanup, however, is not a reliable source of funding at this time. City staff and council need to be aware of the risk of overcommitting the city's operational budget or borrowing commitments to this project and neglecting the regular needs of the community.

In terms of redevelopment, if we are successful in mitigating the environmental challenges of this property, the previous plans should be revisited and revised to reflect new zoning regulations and renewed focus on engagement with residents. Mixed-use development with a combination of commercial and multiple economic levels of high-density residential development should be included in at least part of this plan to help correct the population density issues that have made the viability of a south side grocery and other economic developments difficult. The timeline of this plan development needs to match the actual project, because by the time we are ready to commit to actual redevelopment, the site's circumstances and our financial realities will have changed significantly.

JACK HERNDON:

I do think the city should be leading the way for the redevelopment of this area. I am not a believer in eminent domain unless it's the only way to achieve a goal that is in the best interests of everyone. I know there is some controversy with some of the properties adjacent to the GM property but I think there are better ways to resolve those issues. But for the economic development and tax base that area could provide it makes sense for the city to help developers get things in place to streamline the process for development..

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I am very much in favor of the City of Janesville acquiring the 250-acre GM/JATCO site. In fact, before any action was initiated, I was complaining to the city manager about the blight. I was concerned about the effect that the deterioration of the property might have on the property values on the houses and businesses in the area. I was also worried about rats and other vermin.

As far as my redevelopment vision goes, I think the parcel of land could be the golden ticket to the revitalization of the south side. After the city secures the land, I favor having a number of townhall-type meetings with the residents and business owners from that part of town. I would want to hear their input. I have my ideas as to what should go in there (various types of housing, light industrial, green space), but I live on the other side of town. The people that live there need to be able to express themselves, and their wishes need to be heard.

The city should do their due diligence on planning and zoning. We need to make sure that the necessary grants for site clean-up are garnered. We need to facilitate the townhall-type meetings. We must work hard at coming up with ideas as well as opportunities for economic development. At the end of the day though, this must be a collaborative effort between the private and the public sectors.

HEATHER MILLER:

This GM/JATCO site is a hidden gem and has seen no revitalization since GM closed in 2012. Current ownership has made no improvements to this parcel and instead, brought only warehousing/intermodal transport leasing to the table. The land is in need of eradication per the DNR, and it has unlimited potential to be a clear frontrunner as another south side commercial corridor.

Nearly surrounded by housing, the obvious push should be to increase multi-family and single-family housing to the west. Mixed-commercial development on the east side could bring in more upscale rental possibilities to the south side with much-needed necessities met with grocery, medical, educational, shopping and veterinary services nearby. With easy access to the nearby industrial park, river, and interstate - this area rework will change the south side for the better and satisfy the needs not currently being met for residents.

RICHARD NEENO:

First, the city has yet to acquire the GM/JATCO property. Second, why would the city not acquire the property? City ownership will allow for the creation of a unified development plan rather than a haphazard, jigsaw puzzle of private development if the property was sold in pieces. City ownership is the only way in which the public will be allowed to have input in redevelopment. The city will facilitate public input and will guide development that makes logical best use of the property.



13. 2025 marks the 10-year anniversary of the ARISE Plan, a focused effort on revitalizing downtown Janesville. The city has been very intentional in implementing the ARISE Plan and its development objectives remain relevant. What is your perspective on the ARISE Plan?

MICHAEL CASS:

I believe the ARISE Plan has been one of the most successful ongoing projects our city has undertaken in recent years, with the Town Square serving as a pivotal element in revitalizing downtown Janesville. I have personally enjoyed several events hosted at the Town Square and have spoken with individuals who traveled from larger cities to attend these events, highlighting its regional appeal.

With the Town Square portion of the plan now appearing to be complete, I am excited to see the next phases come to life. Continued investment in downtown development will help sustain the momentum, attract more businesses and visitors, and further enhance Janesville's appeal as a destination for residents and tourists, especially being just over 2.5 miles away from the Woodman's Center.

JOSHUA ERDMAN:

Downtown's success via the ARISE Plan has been impressive and incredibly necessary to the vitality of the Janesville community. It was, at the time it started, long overdue and has served its purpose well. It provided direction for initial downtown redevelopment, with historical preservation, promotion of mixed use and high-density development, and the development of community connection and walkability being very important.

Available funding, community needs, urban planning practices, and changes to zoning and ordinances all influence the execution of long-term plans like the ARISE Plan and require periodic updates. I am glad to see that updated versions of the ARISE Plan are being implemented every few years and hope that we can continue to see successes and tremendous growth potential from these new iterations. On the near horizon, I'm excited to see the construction of the Children's Museum of Rock County and the redevelopment of the historic Fredendall Building on S. Main St. into market-rate housing.

JACK HERNDON:

I am not familiar with this plan. As I would in any area of the city, I think supporting local businesses is key to keeping all of the downtown and surrounding areas looking good and welcoming.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I am very proud of the downtown area. I especially love the Janesville Farmers Market at Town Square. Then I also appreciate how the plan has embraced the river. The ARISE Plan has worked and worked well. Frankly, I would like to see a similar effort directed at the Center Ave. corridor, the Court St. corridor, as well as the Milton Ave. from the Interstate to Mount Zion St. corridor.

HEATHER MILLER:

The ARISE Plan was instrumental in revitalizing the downtown. I believe this is a good model to use in the revitalization of our commercial corridors.

RICHARD NEENO:

It is not clear to me what remaining objectives ARISE intends to achieve. In its current state, my perspective is that the ARISE Plan is incomplete and has fallen short of the development that it should have achieved. Public restrooms were omitted, structures have been built without a plan for how or who would bring about their activation. I believe that much remains to be done.