



2023 JANESVILLE CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Q&A



We are pleased to present the 2023 Forward Janesville City Council Candidate Questionnaire.

After careful consideration and consultation with the Forward Janesville Board and Government Relations Council leadership, we determined that a candidate questionnaire was the most efficient way to present the candidates and their viewpoints to our Membership. Forward Janesville does not endorse candidates, but instead provides this kind of comprehensive information to our members.

Wisconsin's Spring Election is on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. Visit My Vote Wisconsin (myvote.wi.gov) for comprehensive, non-partisan information on what's on your ballot, absentee voting and polling place information, and much more.

There is much at stake on April 4. The Janesville City Council and the Janesville School Board regularly make important decisions that affect our community and your organization's performance. It is extremely important for all of us to vote on April 4.

We hope that you find this document to be useful, and we encourage you to share this information with your employees, your network, and your neighbors.

Council Candidate Spencer Zimmerman declined to submit answers to this questionnaire.

Meet the Candidates



Michael Jackson



Heather Miller



Richard Neeno



Dave Marshick



**Spencer
Zimmerman**



1. What experience do you have that will make you a good council member? What qualities and leadership skills will you bring to the council?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I have served one term on the Council. I am a co-founder of the Janesville's Community Health Center as well as a member of the HealthNet Board. I have served on two boards that have mental health as their focus. I have been involved in job creation as a member of the Board of the Janesville Innovation Center. I have been involved with affordable housing as a member of the Community Development Authority. Experience counts. I feel that my experience on the Council, my education, as well as my life skills have equipped me for the office.

DAVE MARSHICK:

I have a very broad base of experience that makes me a good council member. In my job I work with businesses every day, both large and small. I think my experience working with businesses gives me a different perspective on many issues that come before the council, that others may not think about. I also have good experience through several boards and committees I have served on over the years. Additionally I think I bring a strong collaborative style of leadership. I take pride in my ability to work with both sides of issues and find compromises.

HEATHER MILLER:

Objectivity is the key to being a good council member, and having the ability to bridge the gap between citizens and local government - both strengths which I possess. We are in a digital age and sometimes our elderly or disabled folks feel left-out or fall through informational cracks. For the past two years, I've reached out to many through various volunteer positions and radio - trying to not let this happen. There's a difference between listening to understand and listening to respond.

RICHARD NEENO:

I have been a citizen of Janesville for 25 years after growing up here, I am familiar with Janesville's history, success and failure. I am currently a member of the BID. My wife and I own three businesses and properties in downtown Janesville, which means that we pay considerable taxes each year. I am able to represent the average citizens of Janesville as well as the business community.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



2. What is motivating you to run for office, and why are you the best candidate to serve?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I love Janesville. I do not mean to be cliché, but I really do care for my city. As a former pastor here for better than 16 years, I think I can back up that statement. I have ministered to people from all four points of this city. I have been in a nonpartisan ministerial relationship with democrats, republicans, conservative and liberals, gay and straight, as well as the various ethnic groups that reside in this city. Serving on the Council provides me with an opportunity to give something back to the city.

DAVE MARSHICK:

I have enjoyed the last two years serving on the council and feel I do make a difference. Janesville has given so much to me and my family and I enjoy giving back. I think the momentum Janesville has is very exciting and being a part of keeping the momentum moving forward is a one driving force of my running for a second term. Additionally, there are two specific things that I feel I want to see through. First, we have been working on the Woodman's Center project for nearly 5 years now, and the finish line is starting to come into view. I really want to see this project through and be a part of a council that brings this transformational project to fruition. The other thing that excites me is our newly hired city manager. I feel like we have a tremendous opportunity to take Janesville to the next level under the leadership of Mr. Lahner. I want to be a part of helping Mr. Lahner get acclimated to our great city and work with him to really bring forward new and exciting things for Janesville.

HEATHER MILLER:

It takes a Council member a year to understand what the position requires and how procedures are handled with city government. The second elected year is actively pursuing growth, change, or being responsive to the needs of both the citizens and City. I'm not finished with what I've set out to change for our community.

RICHARD NEENO:

I have a desire to maintain a direction toward development and progress in the city. I believe that this is a critical juncture for the city as it chooses between development and retrenchment. My experience as a business owner and a long-term citizen gives me insight to what has worked in the city and what needs to be done.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



3. As a new (or returning) council member, what are your top priorities for the City of Janesville?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

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DAVE MARSHICK:

The number one priority short term is to find a way to bring the Woodmans Center to fruition. Big picture I think we need to find a vision for Janesville. Our former city manager implemented a 5 year "strategic plan", this is a good document and something that was sorely needed. That being said I feel the document is more of a work plan than a strategic plan. I hope to work with our new city manager to revamp our strategic plan to be more strategic and less of a checklist. Our current comprehensive plan checks the required boxes that we have to do, but it would be great to take it to the next level and develop more of a master plan that looks not only on zoning but is more intentional about our economic growth. Our economic development group has had some great success recently bringing a number of warehousing and distribution centers. This has been good for our "net new construction" number, but we need to start looking at other types of industries, particularly industries that pay wages that can help bring up the median income in our community.

HEATHER MILLER:

Janesville needs a little bit of a "reset" in terms of revitalization; Center Avenue and Milton Avenue corridors, for starters. I have ideas for this. Establish the community kids (youth and county-wide high schools) as THE priority in the WSCC arena portion of the Uptown Janesville project; affording them priority use, advertising, locker room space, and lower fee schedules.

RICHARD NEENO:

1) Build the WSCC 2) Guide the new city manager to create an open and transparent style of management.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



4. What are your thoughts on the roles of the council and the City Manager? What should the new City Manager try to accomplish in his first six months on the job, and how would you support your new employee?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I am excited to welcome the new city manager to Janesville. I would hope that he would initially spend some time getting to know the city. I trust his first steps will be slow and measured. Next, I believe that he will review the strategic plan. What can he offer in terms of a fresh vision for Janesville? Not just downtown, but all four points of our community. I am anxious to hear his thoughts on the WC. I will be happy to offer him my hand and my insights. I will be a voice of encouragement and support.

DAVE MARSHICK:

As a city council member I rely on the city manager to dig into topics, issues and "do the research". I feel their job is to inform the council present all the information in an objective manner but also look for recommendations. I think it's important for the council to not get too much "in the weeds" and let the city manager and his staff run the day to day operations of the city. The council is her to make the big and hard decisions and provide direction for the staff. The new city manager is coming into a number of things that he's going to need to get up to speed on quickly. The Woodman's Center, Centennial Park and possible new TID, and Project Ripe, the large development on the south side. All three of these things will be coming together very quickly after the city manager starts.

HEATHER MILLER:

Kevin Lahner will take some time to get acclimated to his new position. By the end of summer, we should begin the budget process and allow him to utilize his 15 years of expertise (as a self-proclaimed math nerd) to see if there are unnecessary costs and how to alter this. I'm hopeful that before the end of 2023, he will have started another mission for an affordable housing multi-unit on the south, west, or near west side. Having a new perspective helps one to see things differently than "the way we've always done it."

RICHARD NEENO:

As just stated, I believe that the new city manager must create a positive, open environment within his administration as well as be as transparent and receptive to the public as possible. The city manager must be a leader.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



5. How can the City Council better support current businesses and help Janesville entrepreneurs grow?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

While I do not expect him to reinvent the wheel, I do trust that he will be able to show us some new and better ways to use the wheel. To gain that insight, he will need to visit Uptown Janesville, downtown, as well as the other business hubs in our city. I hope he listens to the business owners. I hope he offers some fresh ideas. I hope he mends fences and develops a new sense of trust within the business community. I hope that he is able to move our businesses from good to great.

DAVE MARSHICK:

One thing I very excited about with our new city manager is his thoughts on community engagement. He talked about how important it is for him personally to get out and talk with all the stakeholders of Janesville including large businesses, small businesses. I think having our leader out talking with businesses large and small with give us a better understanding of what we can do as a council to support our great business community.

HEATHER MILLER:

I'd like to see a Business Spotlight as a weekly feature on the city website, social media, and outreach to the Gazette. One local business weekly that is highlighted and actively promoted could bring new life to any business. How well are specialty shops even known across town? You never know who might be looking for a particular service. At council meetings, the ones highlighted throughout the previous weeks could be shared in the minutes.

RICHARD NEENO:

The council can implore the city manager to make city inspectors more receptive to development and inclined to find ways to help new projects rather than stand in their way. The city already has a number of TID districts and an aggressive Economic Development department, the city council needs to support their efforts.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



6. What are the opportunities that Janesville should explore to be a 'Community of Choice to realize life's opportunities' such as the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center (WSCC), city parks or downtown development? What is your approach in funding those priorities?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I support the WC. I enjoy our park system and use its various amenities. I am proud of our downtown development. I am hopeful that the proposed children's museum comes to fruition. I use my voice whenever possible to tout Janesville's many quality-of-life offerings. I consider myself a lobbyist for our community. I personally spent an hour and a half talking with State Senator Nass about our need of a larger slice of the state's shared revenue pie. I have also twice spoken to Assemblyperson Sue Conley along the same line. I do not favor unbridled taxation.

DAVE MARSHICK:

I think the redevelopment of our Downtown has given us the template for funding amenities to make Janesville a "Community of Choice." It was such a great example of public private partnership. It really showed great things can be accomplished when everyone works together with a common goal. It is critical that we look for opportunities to make Janesville an attractive city with plenty to do for all of our residents, young, old and in between. Also when businesses look to relocate, they look for the quality of life amenities that are needed to attract and retain people to fill the jobs new businesses will bring.

HEATHER MILLER:

Much of the funding of the WSCC, I believe, will come from the convention center. The city will supplement the remainder, as we do with all other recreation. We shouldn't be afraid to ask for donated services to help offset costs of cleanup or beautification. There are plenty of opportunities to expand our downtown and grant money is often available through creative writing.

RICHARD NEENO:

The key is to listen to the community as to their interests and needs, and to be receptive to new ideas. Funding should come from every possible source, though if a facility is to remain a city property, the city must be the majority contributor unless a private entity wishes to provide Janesville with a gift.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



7. The City of Janesville has a strategic planning process that maps out key priorities on a rolling five-year basis. What are your thoughts about the City's strategic plan and this process?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I support the city's strategic plan. However, I have advocated for the Council to have more input into the planning process. Up to this point, I have felt as if the plan was really the city manager and his staff's plan. His vision. I have called for an open meeting where the Council reassesses the strategic plan. Do we want sprawl? Housing growth or industrial growth, or both? What about the stewardship of our farmland? The impact of Beloit's casino? We have an excellent opportunity to cast new eyes on the plan with the new city manager coming on board.

DAVE MARSHICK:

As mentioned earlier our current strategic plan is a good and important document but is more of a work plan. It tells us what we want to accomplish over the next 5 years and helps give us a roadmap for funding. What's lacking I feel in our current plan is a more longer-term vision and strategy to achieve that vision.

HEATHER MILLER:

The plan is good, in thought, but could use fresh eyes and a new look... this is why it's a plan, and plans often change.

RICHARD NEENO:

The strategic plan was a great addition to the city, however, it lacks a broader scope or vision. Much like what took place with downtown, the city needs to develop a plan for areas of the city so that development isn't haphazard or disjointed.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



8. Forward Janesville believes the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center will be a transformative project that will both support the redevelopment of the Milton Avenue corridor and improve the community's ability to attract and retain the workers and families that will help our economy grow. With that in mind, please share your thoughts on the potential development of the WSCC project at Uptown Janesville.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I have put up to 150 hours on the project, including studying Wisconsin's rich history of private and public funding partnerships. The WC will be more than just two sheets of ice. It will be a community center for the young, the old, the rich as well as the poor. By adding the Woodman's Center to Uptown Janesville, we will add hundreds of new jobs to our city. New taxpayers. New businesses. Regardless of what the Council decides to do, there will be a cost associated with that decision. I just think the cost of saying "no" is much higher than the cost of saying "yes".

DAVE MARSHICK:

It is no secret I am a strong supporter of this project. There are so many ways this can help our community. Directly it will provide a place for our residents to have place to go and keep active especially during the winter months when options right now are fairly limited. The amount of business we are losing out on conventions because we don't have a large enough space is staggering. The Woodman's Center will be a great catalyst not only for Uptown Janesville but the entire Milton Ave corridor. As a parent of a former traveling basketball player, I know firsthand how much money I've spent in other communities while following around my daughter as she played in tournaments throughout the Midwest. We can become one of those communities with this project. Lastly as talked about previously, this is a great asset and "quality of life" amenity that both businesses and people look for when looking to relocate.

HEATHER MILLER:

Milton Avenue needs some help, no question. If there is a shift - both in planning and publicity - to where our community kids are the driving force to make this project successful, I would be a solid supporter. I have no concerns about the event space being utilized to the fullest and becoming a great asset. Unfortunately, as long as the ice arena portion places our community kids behind the needs of the Jets Organization, both financially and in the eyes of the public, there will be resistance. Our youth and city/county high school players shouldn't take a back seat to the needs of the Jets. Esser funds were put into building upgrades, maintenance and security. Parker High School booster club raises money for sporting equipment and uniforms that the School District can't fund. Not once did I see a mascot for any user team in the plans, other than the Jets, and actions speak louder than words. Including the high school locker room buildouts in a separate bid is telling of the steering committee; that this is a Jets project that the community can use and fund.

RICHARD NEENO:

I believe that the WSCC is a critical development for the benefit of Janesville, I agree with the positives outlined in your question. The WSCC provides the possibility of substantially increasing the tax base in the neighborhood, which will benefit all citizens of Janesville.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



9. Two years ago, the city proposed creation of a transportation utility to fund the city's annual street repair program. While the city council ultimately chose to fund the street repair program in other ways, funding for transportation improvements remains a perennial challenge. What ideas do you have for funding infrastructure improvements going forward?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

Janesville's 330 miles of roads must be maintained. Letting them go is not an option. The Council looked at reducing the number of miles that are resurfaced each year. That won't work. We could reconsider the transportation utility fee. However, I would oppose that. Lobby for an increase in the gas tax? At nearly 31 cents per gallon, we have one of the highest gas taxes in the nation. Toll roads? Divert some of the sales tax to road maintenance from the purchase of a new vehicle? None of these are feasible options. Until Madison offers the cities more funding choices, I don't see anything changing.

DAVE MARSHICK:

Infrastructure improvements and repairs continues to be a challenge, especially given the continuing rise in costs. While the changes made two years ago greatly reduced the borrowing needed to keep up with our street repair program, we still should continue to look to new ways to reduce reliance on debt even more. There is some hope that while the state shared revenue formula will not be changing anytime soon, there may be some additional funding coming back to local municipalities. If that indeed happens directing much of that to our street program could be a good use of those funds. The other thing we maybe need to take a hard look at is how many miles of roads we repair a year. Over time we've gone from 6-12 miles, 6 was certainly not enough, but maybe 12 is too much. Maybe 12 is the right number, but it's worth taking a hard look at again.

HEATHER MILLER:

I'm still holding on to the hope of getting a half-percent sales tax that could directly go toward road improvements. Everyone who shops here, stays here, eats here, visits here, and drives on our roads would help fund this and the general public could absorb it fairly easily. It's not a big hit to anyone's taxes. I'm an optimist.

RICHARD NEENO:

The best way of funding infrastructure will be if the state assembly rebates a percentage of state sales taxes to cities. Otherwise, it appears that Janesville will ultimately end up developing a mutated form of transportation utility. Given that the prospect of a transportation utility is what drove my original interest in city government, I am horrified at the prospect of a TU, but alternatives are limited and infrastructure costs continue to increase. It will be a huge fight.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



10. The City of Janesville has long been disadvantaged by the state's shared revenue formula. Given that fact, what ideas do you have for creation of sustainable revenue streams to fund city priorities?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

The annual operations of the Woodman's Center would result in almost \$1.5 million in tax receipts. Rock County would receive \$48,000 in sales tax receipts. Janesville is asking Madison to pay for the municipal services it uses here. Were this to happen, the City would receive an additional \$206,230 in revenue for 2023. The Governor is proposing that 0.5% of the 5% sales tax be returned to the municipality where the sale occurs. In 2021 this would have generated an estimated \$11.8 million in revenue for Janesville. Have Madison either remove levy limits or allow municipalities to increase their levies by a maximum of inflation plus net new construction.

DAVE MARSHICK:

Unfortunately there are very few options for revenues sources for municipalities; shared revenue, taxes and user fees. Shared revenue is a battle we continue to fight but is somewhat out of our control. There are levy limits that control how much we can increase revenue from that source, and user fees are such a small amount it's hard to move the needle through fees. Our best opportunity to continue to increase revenue is focusing on economic development and working to increase our net new construction number. Growth is our greatest way to continue to increase our revenues so we are able to fund not only our necessities but also other programs and project to live up to our "Community of Choice" moniker.

HEATHER MILLER:

Plant more money trees in Riverside Park. I'm hopeful on a change in the shared revenue formula, but it's hard to be optimistic. Nobody has the desire to finger-point who the winners and losers would be in congress or the Governor's office so they just don't. I'm holding on to the sales tax possibility, for now.

RICHARD NEENO:

None. The state assembly holds the keys to revenue for cities and the current assembly has shown little interest in helping the cities. I do believe, however, that continuous development would provide an ever-increasing tax base and attract a larger population base. This is our best hope to limit tax increases in the future.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



11. The City of Janesville and other partnering organizations have made significant investments in Downtown Janesville. What role do you think the city should play in downtown development?

MICHAEL JACKSON:

I see city government as being a key player in the development of our historic downtown. The city helps by providing vision. The Town Square project is an example of a vision becoming reality. A vision that was in part inspired by the city's leadership. Next, I am thinking of the Janesville Business Improvement District. The BID is a public-private partnership that supports downtown economic vitality. The BID is funded through an assessment system that levies a special assessment against property owners within the Business Improvement District. I am in support of the three BID districts downtown.

DAVE MARSHICK:

The downtown redevelopment has been a great illustration of; persistence, working together toward a common goal and public private partnership, and what can be accomplished when all of three of those things are present. The city needs to continue to support our downtown through the created TID. Because of the amount of money invested in downtown vs the increased increment the TID needs additional support. To that end as new TID are created we are looking to include provisions that allow excess funds from the newly created TIDs to be transferred to the downtown TID. The city also needs to continue the strong collaborative relationship with both DJI and the Downtown BID. In addition to supporting development the city must also support in the activation of the downtown.

HEATHER MILLER:

The city should invest in our downtown's amenities and we have. To what extent the city is involved would be on a case-by-case basis.

RICHARD NEENO:

Given that most of the downtown property is privately owned, and the infrastructure is largely complete, the city should play a supporting role, encouraging new development and removing road blocks.

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.



12. Given the City's fiscal restraints, please rank the following spending priorities in order of importance to you, with 1 being most important, 8 being least important, and so on.

MICHAEL JACKSON:

1. Maintaining high levels of Police and fire protection
2. Maintaining a high level of City services - snowplowing, public transit
3. City support for affordable and diverse housing options
4. Economic development - bringing jobs and investment to the City
5. Maintaining an active street repair program of 12+ miles per year
6. Supporting downtown development
7. City support for families - supporting affordable child care, etc.
8. Supporting and maintaining City recreational facilities - parks, pools, golf courses, etc.

DAVE MARSHICK:

1. Economic development - bringing jobs and investment to the City
2. Maintaining high levels of Police and fire protection
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HEATHER MILLER:

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RICHARD NEENO:

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8. Supporting downtown development

SPENCER ZIMMERMAN:

Did not respond.