



2026 JANESVILLE CITY
COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Q&A



Thank you to all the candidates who provided responses
to our 2026 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 2026 Spring Election, there are 6 candidates vying for 3 seats*.**

Forward Janesville is the Janesville-area chamber of commerce and leading private economic development organization. Forward Janesville (FJ) does not host candidate forums but 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. Candidate responses are listed in alphabetical order by the candidate's last name. Candidates answered 13 questions, some with multi-part answers.

The 2026 Spring Election is on Tuesday, April 7. Visit Forward Janesville's 2026 Local Elections webpage (www.forwardjanesville.com/government-relations/2026-local-elections) for essential voting details, information on the candidates, upcoming candidate forums and the latest headlines.

We hope you find our **2026 City Council Candidate Q&A** useful and encourage you to share it widely with your personal and professional network.

**Robert Hanson is no longer running for elected office in 2026 but his name will remain on the ballot.*

Meet the Candidates



Ben Dobson



Cassandra Pope



Shane Seeman



**Larry Squire
(Incumbent)**



**Paul Williams
(Incumbent)**



Reese Wood



1. What motivated you to run for city council?

BEN DOBSON

What motivated me to run for city council is simple, I believe there is no city council without the voice of the people. It's the voice of the people that would get me elected to city council. For over 20 years working in Rock County Human Services, I have seen great examples and poor examples of when systems forgot who they are supposed to serve. I've had the pleasure of working alongside families, frontline staff, and community partners, and the common thread is this; people want to be heard, respected, and taken seriously.

I started paying closer attention to how our city government interacts with residents. Too often I saw dismissiveness, non-answers, and a tone that felt more like "we know best" instead of "let's work together." That doesn't build trust. And without trust, local government doesn't function well. We don't have to agree on everything, however I can promise you I will listen to what you have to say.

I'm not running for a title. I'm running because transparency matters. Open communication matters. Smart growth matters. Supporting the workforce matters. Supporting local businesses matters. Accountability matters. Respect matters.

My background in community engagement and city advisory boards has shown me that when residents are informed and empowered, solutions get better, and so does confidence in government.

I'm strongly independent in my thinking. However, I know when to reach out to the experts to help me make the best decisions for the city. I'm not an expert in local governance, however my promise will always be to include the whole community in important decisions. I'm motivated by two things, making sure the people of this city feel heard and represented, and we are making the best decisions to move the City of Janesville forward and support smart growth when available.

CASSANDRA POPE

After living in Janesville for going on 17 years, and raising my children here, I have grown to love and appreciate the community in Janesville. Though this is a great place to live, I feel like there are some areas that need restoration in order for Janesville to thrive - trust, accountability, and unity.

I want to be a part of the restoration efforts helping to restore the community's trust, government accountability, and unity across the city. After getting involved with local civics, I noticed a lot of processes and policies in our city government were being overlooked, ignored, or twisted. I started showing up to and speaking at city council meetings to advocate for the community and the environment. I joined the Sustainable Janesville Committee and learned more about how our government works and I started volunteering with different groups in the community.

At some point, I realized that I had the ability, and with that the civic duty, to represent the citizens of our city and to fight for them on a bigger platform and in ways that could make a larger positive impact on their safety, quality of life, and future.

SHANE SEEMAN

I've been thinking of running for council for a long time. My first exposure to local government was when Sneakers Sports Bar was coming into my childhood neighborhood around 2010. There were a number of neighborhood meetings to discuss the project and hear from nearby residents. My mom took me to at least two of these meetings and the city council meeting that gave it final approval. I started to see how the system worked, how passionately people care about their neighborhoods, and how to make change happen.

Since then, I'd been watching how Janesville kept moving forward after the financial crisis, and I had applied for an appointment for an open seat in 2015. Around 2021, a former coworker was frustrated with the license fees associated with bringing her food truck to Janesville. I had spoken at a few meetings here and there, and she asked me what to do, so I suggested she come to a council meeting and make the case. Within a few meetings, city staff had come back with recommendations to change the fee schedule, which was then adopted. That experience helped me prove to myself that I can be an effective advocate.

In recent years, I've been reading about urban design, learning a lot more about development patterns, traffic safety, debt structures, and housing development. These are areas where I see a lot of potential in Janesville. I have definitely seen improvement in the years since the ARISE Plan was adopted, but we've also taken some half-measures in certain areas, leaving progress on the table.

In my current work as a legislative assistant in the State Capitol, I've learned so much about how city budgets and policies are impacted by state law, and where we can petition or lobby for more freedom from state restrictions. With my background in community organizing, I've been hearing the concerns of Janesville residents for nearly ten years. I hope to bring some of these concerns directly to the council and build a coalition to work on things like housing, accountability, economic frustration, and more.

LARRY SQUIRE

I originally chose to run for city council because Janesville has been such a terrific place to live and raise our family. I also saw the positive momentum other leaders in Janesville had created. I wanted to help keep that momentum going and help discover what is next for Janesville.

I am choosing to run for re-election because this is still a great community, and I want to continue to give back and make it better. We have some very real challenges along with many opportunities to continue our positive momentum. I want to work with our city leaders and staff to represent our citizens to shape the future of Janesville.

PAUL WILLIAMS

Being a lifelong resident of Janesville, I wished to give back to my community. I decided being on the city council was a good way to do that.

REESE WOOD

I've lived in Janesville most of my life and raise my family here. I'm running because I believe our city is at an important crossroads. Major redevelopment decisions, housing challenges, and budget pressures will shape Janesville for decades.

I want to ensure that growth is responsible, transparent, and sustainable — and that residents and businesses alike have confidence in the process. I'm motivated by the belief that local government works best when it is accessible, accountable, and focused on long-term community stability rather than short-term wins.



2. How do you view the role of city council members?

BEN DOBSON

I view the role of a city council member as a steward to the community, not a ruler, not an expert on everything, and not a rubber stamp.

Council members are elected to represent the people, not manage them. Our job is to listen first, ask thoughtful questions, and make decisions that impact the long-term health of the city. Long-term health including financially, socially, and structurally.

A good council member understands they don't have all the answers. When I don't know something, I'll say that, and I'll go get the information. We have a robust business community that could be a great source of information and support when help is needed. Asking for help builds credibility, pretending to know everything erodes it.

The role also requires balance, supporting city staff while holding systems accountable, being fiscally responsible while investing wisely, and making decisions that are transparent and clearly explained to residents.

Most importantly, council members set the tone. The way we treat residents, business partners, and especially those we disagree with matters. Respect, clarity, and accessibility aren't optional. They are part of the job. At the end of the day, the council exists because the community exists. Our responsibility is to serve it well.

CASSANDRA POPE

City council members are public servants. Their role is to serve the community. Council members shouldn't just work for the community, they should work WITH them. A partnership. It is a City council member's job to come alongside the community, find out their collective needs and desires, and partner with them to make our city the best place it can be.

Council members are the carriage drivers steering our city in the right direction, but citizens are the ones telling them the destination. Yes, city council members set policies, approve budgets, and have oversight of the City Manager, but they also have the ability to bridge the gap between the citizens and their local government. They have the opportunity to hear from citizens and actually address their needs and concerns.

SHANE SEEMAN

The role of the council members is to decide the future of Janesville. That may sound a little heavy, but in making decisions that impact city health, safety, and finances for decades, I feel like that's a fair characterization.

Council members are also there to lead by example. The people of Janesville work hard and they deserve representatives that do the same. We should have council members that put in the time to understand the policies and proposals, seek education and insight when learning new issues, ask tough questions, and hold the administration accountable.

LARRY SQUIRE

Questions 3 and 4 get into the functionality of the role of a council member. I believe the overarching role is to provide guidance and direction to do what is best for our community.

At the center of accomplishing that goal, is being a strong communicator. To me, that starts with being an active listener. Next is to be patient in order to have all the relevant facts on a particular topic before reaching a conclusion or decision. Then, being able to explain the why behind my position.

In a world where we want immediate information and answers, this can be difficult. However, these steps in our communication are essential, especially when there are controversial or difficult decisions to be made.

PAUL WILLIAMS

The roles of a council member are many. A council member must review and do their own research on issues and agenda items. They must listen to the citizens' concerns and complaints. Council members are responsible for setting the parameters for balancing the city budget. The only city employee of the council is the city manager. The council evaluates the performance of the city manager and has the final decision on hiring or firing the city manager. Council members also serve on different city committees, commissions or boards, which requires additional time commitments.

REESE WOOD

City council members set policy direction, ensure responsible budgeting, and provide oversight of city administration. The role is not to micromanage, but to:

- Establish clear priorities
- Protect taxpayers
- Ensure transparency
- Balance economic growth with long-term community health

Council members must also act as steady communicators — listening carefully, engaging respectfully, and making decisions grounded in facts and fiscal responsibility.



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

BEN DOBSON

City council service requires judgment, discipline, and the ability to balance long-term vision with practical constraints. In policy making, I bring experience evaluating competing priorities, asking tough questions, and weighing tradeoffs before making decisions. I understand that good policy isn't about what one person thinks, it's about clarity, consequences, and measurable outcomes. I have spent time on two Janesville Advisory Committees, The Community Development Authority and the Leisure Services Advisory Committee. This experience has contributed to this area of need for a city council candidate. I am comfortable doing the homework, studying data, and engaging respectfully with differing viewpoints before casting a vote.

In budget development, I bring a mindset of fiscal responsibility and stewardship. Whether in professional, nonprofit, or volunteer settings, I have had experience managing resources, prioritizing limited dollars, and ensuring that spending aligns with clear goals. I spent time on the Janesville School Board that gave me direct experience with managing a large budget. I understand that a city budget is not just numbers, it reflects our values and long-term commitments.

Regarding oversight of the city manager, I understand the importance of governance versus management. The council sets direction and expectations, the manager executes this. Effective oversight requires clear performance standards, regular communication, and accountability, without micromanaging day-to-day operations. I value professionalism and would focus on measurable outcomes, transparency, and collaboration. Above all, I bring a steady temperament and willingness to listen, learn, and lead thoughtfully.

CASSANDRA POPE

I owned and operated a retail storefront here in Janesville. I was in charge of every aspect of my business including policy decisions, budgets, and so much more. It gave me confidence as a leader and has shaped who I am, my values, and my desire to serve my community.

In the past, I have worked in positions as an office manager and a preschool teacher and director. These positions gave me experience leading students and staff. I was involved with staff performance evaluations and handled all of the preschool's financials. I also created and wrote multiple employee and parent policy handbooks. In my time working in the loan department at a community bank, I also spent a lot of time reading through and understanding in-depth loan paperwork and contracts.

I currently serve as Vice Chair on the Sustainable Janesville Committee and am a board member and the Secretary of Green-Rock Audubon Society. Both positions have given me more experience learning about policy making and budget approvals.

SHANE SEEMAN

On policy, my job in the State Capitol has given me a chance to learn more about all kinds of topics and issues; particularly, the interactions between local and state government. What the city would like to do can be a very different thing than what we are allowed to do. I've been following the group called Strong Towns for a number of years, which has helped me develop a deeper understanding about road design, safe streets, infrastructure costs, and much more.

Oversight was a big part of my previous work in the restaurant industry. I was a shift lead, hourly manager, and salary manager at different times at drafthouse, Famous Dave's, and Prime Quarter Steakhouse. In those positions, I was charged with various degrees of sales analytics, customer feedback systems, waste controls, staff discipline, hiring and performance reviews, and so on. It's definitely a different thing in public service, but it all comes down to finding the right metrics to follow and asking questions that aren't always asked.

The budget is something that I will need help understanding. When the numbers get that large, especially with interest rates, debt service, and segregated funds, I will definitely have to lean on other members of the council and city staff to help me read and fully grasp the budget. I'm always willing to admit when I need guidance.

LARRY SQUIRE

My background fits very well with each of these key functions and responsibilities of our council. I have 40 years in the banking industry, including my last 20 years as the Regional President of a local bank team in Janesville. In that role, I performed these functions personally.

In banking, we are held accountable to policies and procedures to ensure we treat all clients fairly and earn their trust. We are held to a high standard. I developed and implemented a large budget for our bank team and achieved success with that process. With the bank, we interacted with all aspects of Janesville. From individuals and their home mortgages, to small and large businesses getting started and growing, to partnering with non-profits have positive impact in our community. I know what it takes to lead a large community organization/business. I can use that experience to provide positive oversight and assistance to help the City Manager and the staff do their best for Janesville.

Over the years, I have had the privilege to be involved in many community organizations and established great working relationships. These relationships keep me connected to all aspects of our community. That is a great benefit to be able to have quality conversations with so many different sectors.

PAUL WILLIAMS

As you may know, I am currently on my 20th year as a council member. I first ran in 2000 and served until 2008. Deciding to return to the council, I ran again in 2014 and was elected and have been reelected ever since.

My prior work experience includes working as a paralegal in my wife's law office. The paralegal work helped me to improve doing research and have a better ability to understand the law.

REESE WOOD

I bring experience in public policy, constituent communication, and regulatory interpretation through my work as an unemployment claims specialist. That role requires careful analysis of statutes, budget awareness, and consistent communication with the public.

I've also been deeply involved in civic and political engagement for years, which has strengthened my ability to:

- Analyze proposals critically
- Ask direct questions
- Communicate complex issues clearly
- Engage people across viewpoints

I understand how decisions impact working families because I speak with them every day.



4. Seats on the city council are at-large positions, meaning that they do not represent one neighborhood or area of the city. Rather, they represent all residents. How will you approach representing a breadth and depth of residents?

BEN DOBSON

As an at-large council member, I take seriously my responsibility to represent the entire community, not just one neighborhood or the loudest voices in the room. Representing the breadth of the city means intentionally showing up everywhere, attending neighborhood meetings across the city, visiting local businesses, engaging with community groups, and making myself accessible to community members whether they agree with me or not. Every part of the city deserves to be heard and valued.

Representing the depth of the city means listening carefully and understanding the lived experiences behind the issues. Again, this is directly related to my 20-plus years of experience with Rock County Human Services. A homeowner concerned with property taxes, a renter worried about housing stability, a small business owner navigating regulations, and a parent focused on safe parks may all see the same issue differently. My role is to understand those perspectives before making decisions, and to weigh how policies affect people differently across our community.

At-large representation requires independence, thoughtful listening, and a commitment to fairness. My goal is not to advocate for one segment over another, but to make decisions that strengthen the entire city for the long term.

CASSANDRA POPE

I would love to see Janesville implement neighborhood/ward representatives who can bring their area's needs and desires to the council. This would give the council a deeper understanding of how to best represent a wider range of citizens.

In the meantime, I plan to spend as much time as possible with people from the community, learning as much as I can about the different opinions, values, and needs that they have. I will work hard to foster an environment of communication and engagement with the community so we all can be as informed as possible.

I also think it's important to have an open mind and be willing to change it when presented with new information. As citizens contact us, whether through public comments, emails, phone calls, forums, in-person meetings, etc., they bring forward their own experiences and knowledge. We, as council members, need to be able to analyze and apply their experiences and knowledge, as well as our own, as we make city decisions.

SHANE SEEMAN

My approach in representing all of the residents is to be available and earnest when hearing their concerns or issues. During the campaign, I plan to get to all corners of the city to talk to residents and hear their thoughts on what we need. I want to continue this during my term as well, actively considering input and seeking opinions on policy.

At the same time, some issues will impact certain areas of the city harder, and in that situation, the residents most impacted should get a certain level of deference. For example, a change in policy involving annexation of township lands might impact the people living on the outer edges of Janesville more than those living downtown. In sum, most decisions will have ramifications on the entire city, but we should be a bit more sensitive to those who will see the immediate outcomes first.

LARRY SQUIRE

This is one of the great facts of our city council in Janesville. All council members represent all citizens of Janesville and all organizations of Janesville. Everyone is our constituent.

In my role as Regional President of the bank team, I was fortunate to be able to get connected to all segments and geographic areas of Janesville. I have relationships and connections all across the community. That lets me have insight into what are the questions, concerns, challenges and opportunities facing Janesville. I am always open to listening and learning what matters to people.

PAUL WILLIAMS

In my twenty years on the council I have never let where a person lives have any bearing on my ability to address a citizen's concerns or complaints. I feel the at-large positions take the politics out of the equation. Being at-large you don't have favoritism for one side of the city over another. The at-large system also allows residents to contact any and all of the council members with their concerns, complaints or questions.

REESE WOOD

As an at-large council member, I would make accessibility a priority. That includes:

- Regular public updates
- Open office hours
- Direct communication channels
- Meeting with neighborhood groups and businesses

Representation means listening to both supporters and critics. My goal is to ensure no group feels ignored — whether they're homeowners, renters, small business owners, or employees.



5. In your opinion, what are the top three challenges facing Janesville? What is your plan to address them?

BEN DOBSON

Number 1: Housing Availability and Affordability – Janesville needs more housing at multiple price points. Starter homes, workforce housing, and quality rentals. When housing supply is tight, it drives up costs and limits who can live and work here.

My Plan: Support smart, responsible development that increases housing supply without sacrificing neighborhood integrity. Review zoning and regulatory barriers that unnecessarily slow down projects. Ensure incentives like tax increment financing (TIF)/TIF districts (TIDs) are used strategically and transparently, with clear return on investment (ROI) expectations. Growth should be intentional.

Number 2: Long-Term Financial Sustainability – Residents want lower taxes. They deserve fiscal discipline. At the same time, the city must maintain infrastructure, public safety, and essential services. This will continue to be a delicate balance for any council.

My Plan: Prioritize needs over wants in budgeting. Push for measurable outcomes tied to spending decisions. Increase transparency so residents understand where their tax dollars go. Encourage economic development that broadens the tax base rather than shifting that burden onto homeowners.

Number 3: Rebuilding Public Trust and Engagement – Local government works best when people believe they are heard and respected. Right now, many residents feel talked at instead of talked with.

My Plan: Commit to clear, direct communication. Hold accessible listening opportunities and respond thoughtfully, even when the answer is no. Foster a culture on council that values respectful dialogue, especially during disagreement.

CASSANDRA POPE

I feel that Janesville's number one challenge is its lack of public trust. When the community doesn't trust their elected officials and city government, it makes every project, every decision, and every idea extra challenging. It will take time and effort to regain that trust, but it's possible through consistent transparency and communication, real engagement, and a visible effort to invest in people, not just development.

The second top challenge I see is a lack of community engagement. In order to fix this, we first have to improve public trust. People who trust they are being heard and valued will be more likely to engage. Next, we need to find more creative and innovative ways to keep citizens informed and involved. Citizens need access to information along with simple and quick ways to engage. Time is precious and limited, so we need to respect our community's time while also facilitating as many opportunities as possible for them to be involved.

I see the third biggest challenge as insufficient long-term planning. I want to see long-term implementable plans for each section and major corridor of our city. I want to see actionable steps towards those plans. And, I want to see balanced effort, support, and resources across all areas of our city.

SHANE SEEMAN

Housing, connectedness, and transparency/access/accountability in government are the big three that I see at this moment.

For housing: We need to build more housing of all types: multi-family units as condos, townhomes, tri- and duplex, etc., and yes, single-family homes. I think the upcoming zoning rewrite is going to be a big step in correcting some of the issues we see with our housing supply. Removing restrictions on things like lot sizes, parking requirements, and setbacks will allow developers to be more flexible in more parcels. This should deliver varying types and sizes of housing, helping fit the budgets and lifestyles of people of all lifestyles, budgets, and stages of life. I think we need to lean into these upcoming changes and go further where it's feasible and adopt a pro-housing model throughout the city, push for mixed-use development in commercial corridors, and implement more options for commercial spaces to be converted to housing.

For connectedness, I mean this in two ways: First, there are negative attitudes between certain neighborhoods in Janesville. I think being a partner to those who feel neglected or unheard will be key to changing these stigmas. I would like to increase economic opportunity in neglected areas of the city, when necessary, through creative and strategic deployment of tax increment financing (TIF) districts. These investments should help get residents moving through the city and appreciating what makes each neighborhood unique. Second, I am a big believer in active and mass transit options. While federal and state agencies are exploring passenger rail expansion, we should be ready to maximize this opportunity. However, a transit system is only as strong as its weakest element. When considering this potential, I see reinvesting in bicycle and bus transit options as imperative to our city's future. I think we need to find a way to bring reliable, frequent, practical bus service to more residents in Janesville. My neighbors and I, for example, are served by a bus route that runs just once per hour, making it faster to walk downtown if we went to the stop and missed a pickup. We also need to fully connect our bicycle network, deploying curb- or parking protected lanes in our most-used corridors. This reinvestment would help us meet neighbors, ease congestion, be more active, get to work better, intensify economic development along transit routes, and serve potential rail commuters and tourists.

On transparency, access, and accountability: Residents of Janesville are increasingly feeling unheard and dismissed. While the administration is moving in the right direction on this, the council can and should be a stronger partner in helping people get and stay engaged. I'd like to hold informal or formal town hall meetings where folks can come and hear what we've been up to and weigh in on what they feel should get attention. I'd like to help share agenda items through social media and other means, and invite people to speak if they feel passionately about something. Today's technology also allows us to livestream and record meetings anywhere there's a sufficient internet connection. We've already proven we can host larger meetings at the Woodman's Center, so I know there's a way that we could hold them at the Rock County Resource Center or Hedberg Public Library or the schools, if they'd be willing to partner with us. While they may not follow the same format or have the same production level, I think we could have council meetings outside the chambers once in a while, getting into the neighborhoods that elect us.

LARRY SQUIRE

Affordable housing and the wage issues that go hand-in-hand. People need to be able to find quality housing that meets their individual needs and circumstances. This requires Janesville to be open to new concepts for housing, such as those being considered in the update to the building code. If we plan to improve affordability of housing, we must work to diversify and improve the wages earned and available to be earned by our citizens. Housing takes time to impact. It is not the same as going out to by a car and choosing what color you want at the lot. We need to bring resources together to see where we can have the best impact in the short-term as well as set a good strategy for future success.

Having a good quality of life for everyone. Janesville is known for excellent citizen safety, strong education, a wonderful park system, and much more. We need to be willing to invest in the fabric of our community that impacts us all.

Maintain a fiscally responsible and customer-oriented government in the City of Janesville. I operated by these same principles in my career. I will continue to listen to our citizens and learn what is important to them.

PAUL WILLIAMS

Janesville is not receiving its fair share of state revenue. The formula was broken from the start and needs to be corrected. The city needs to continue to work with state representatives in the capitol to fix the system.

The redevelopment of the GM/JATCO site is a major challenge. This is the largest redevelopment project Janesville has ever seen. The site poses many roadblocks (pollution being one) and the council needs to make sure it is done right.

The lack of housing is not unique to Janesville. The Plan Commission, of which I am a member, is currently working on redoing the zoning and building codes. These revisions, in my opinion, will open up more opportunities for builders and developers to provide more diverse housing options.

REESE WOOD

Housing supply and affordability – We need policies that encourage private development, reduce unnecessary barriers, and allow a range of housing types without overburdening taxpayers.

Redevelopment of major sites like GM/JATCO – We must pursue redevelopment in a way that is financially sound, transparent, and aligned with long-term tax base stability.

Public trust and civic confidence – Community confidence matters. Decisions must be made through open processes that residents understand and feel included in. My approach: fiscal discipline, transparent negotiation, and data-driven evaluation.



6. From your perspective, what are the key metrics and indicators that the City of Janesville should be using to benchmark its health and performance as a community?

BEN DOBSON

A healthy city should be measured by outcomes that reflect economic strength, quality of life, fiscal responsibility, and public trust.

First, economic vitality. That includes job growth, median household income, workforce participation, small business supports, and limiting commercial vacancy rates. We should also track how diversified our tax base is so we're not overly reliant on one sector.

Second, housing stability and affordability. Metrics such as housing starts with rental vacancy rates, homeownership rates, and the percentage of income residents spend on housing tells us whether people can realistically live and stay in Janesville.

Third, fiscal health. Property tax levy trends, debt levels, reserve balances, infrastructure investment, and long-term pension or benefit obligations matter. We must ensure today's decisions don't become tomorrow's burdens.

Fourth, infrastructure and service performance. Road conditions, response times for police and fire, park usage, and utility reliability are concrete indicators of how well local government is functioning.

Finally, community wellbeing and trust. Resident satisfaction surveys, public participation rates, volunteer engagement, and transparency benchmarks help us measure whether people feel heard and connected to their local government.

We should not rely on one or two headline numbers. A larger dashboard approach allows us to see the full picture and make informed decisions that strengthen the entire city.

CASSANDRA POPE

Here are some questions I would ask to assess our community's health and performance:

- Are we able to maintain the basic services, developments, and amenities that we already have in place?
Are we prioritizing people over profit?
- Are we supporting our local small businesses to the best of our ability?
- Are all sections of our city thriving?
- Do the members of the community feel heard and valued?
- Is community engagement and involvement our natural instinct?
- Are the community's needs being met?

If all of those questions are answered with "yes", then the next question is, are we growing and how do we continue that growth?

SHANE SEEMAN

Traditional metrics like asset-to-debt ratio, net new construction, and credit rating can only tell so much of the story. We need to also start looking more closely at taxable value per acre, jobs per acre, new housing starts, rent-burden rates, enrollment in our K-12 schools and higher education, and residents' basic happiness and satisfaction.

We should also consider new residents' needs and wants, commuting workers, students leaving for college and not returning, homelessness, and other housing-related indicators. These may be hard to track, but are very important when considering if we are doing the right things to strengthen our city into the future.

LARRY SQUIRE

I continue to review our current 5-year Strategic Plan, 2025-2029, to get an indication of how we are doing as a city. In that Strategic Plan are Guiding Principles that create the framework for what we do and how we do it. While there are seven Strategic Priorities, the three I am most focused on are:

Community Engagement – The city has many outreach activities with the police and fire departments. JATV continues to be good asset for communicating with citizens and our Hedberg Library has new programming. I don't have specific metrics for this area. It is an area we can get better at.

Housing for All – The 2400 Beloit Avenue Project is a good indicator of the city's commitment to housing growth. Also, we are in the final stages of the re-write of our building code. This will be a great test to see if that code change can stimulate housing activity. Partnerships with ECHO and Habitat for Humanity are just two examples of partnerships the city has in flight to focus on housing.

Financial Stability – This is an area we can benchmark with more tangible facts. We can benchmark ourselves against peer cities in areas such as real estate tax costs of our average home and expenditures per citizen. Janesville has a history of strong fiscal management. Monitoring trends and changes in revenue and expenses in the budget are key to maintaining our strong financial position.

PAUL WILLIAMS

One benchmark is it a growing community and it is a safe community. I believe Janesville is both of those.

REESE WOOD

The city should track:

- Property tax base growth vs. levy pressure
- Private capital investment levels
- Housing starts by type
- Infrastructure cost per household
- Debt levels and long-term obligations
- Business retention rates
- Resident satisfaction trends

Growth should improve fiscal sustainability — not increase hidden costs.



7. According to the 2025 National Community Survey, 56% of respondents rated their overall confidence in Janesville government as fair to poor while 45% rated it as good to excellent. As a council member, what would you do to engage the community and build trust?

BEN DOBSON

I have always believed the best way to engage a community and build trust is to disseminate information in a transparent manner. This includes open-dialogue, timely release of information, and opportunities for the community to ask questions. This also includes ensuring open comments at city council meetings are a safe place. Citizens should be able to make comments without a dismissive and condescending response from the council.

Also, being responsive to citizens is another way to engage the community and build trust. I would ensure that phone calls, emails, and other forms of communication are responded to in a timely manner. I would have regular meetings with the community, opportunities for them to check in and ask questions that they may have. I would also make sure to connect with the business community to ensure their needs are being met as well. Re-engaging the community is going to take baby steps. This won't happen overnight.

CASSANDRA POPE

The most important aspect of engaging the community and building trust is making sure the community has access to information. I am dedicated to getting as much information out to the public as possible and will extensively advocate for the city administration to do so as well. There are ways to get involved and major projects going on and yet there is still a large population of our city that has no idea what's happening or even where to go to find out what's happening. There has to be better ways to get information out to the masses.

I would like to work with the city administration to create and widely market a centralized place that citizens can go to for information. JATV has the potential to be that place. Also, the city's website could use a major overhaul to be more user-friendly and I would be in favor of allocating more funding to make that happen.

Another way I would build trust is to openly acknowledge that citizens are smart and capable. There are no education or experience requirements to be on the city council. I understand that council members are most likely not the smartest or most experienced people in the room. Though the city administration has hired experts in whichever field, there are many other experts and professionals and people with experience that live in our city. This is why I will take every opportunity to get public input and feedback. We have more to bring to the table collectively than we do individually. Everyone has the right to have their opinions heard and to be taken seriously.

We need to treat everyone with respect and be as inclusive of citizen input as possible in all of our processes. I believe that when our city government puts confidence in the city's residents, and, as I said previously, when the residents feel heard and valued, it will lead to greater engagement and trust from the community.

SHANE SEEMAN

I think that the best way to build trust in the community is to be honest with people. When a potential project comes before the council, we need to be upfront with the public about where the idea came from, what it means for everyday life, and why the administration may think it's the right thing to do. We also need to do better seeking input from people of all backgrounds and areas of concern by actively inviting folks to submit public comments and attend committee and council meetings.

We could also do better to let people know what's coming up on the agenda, what votes we just took, and what comes next after the decision is made. I hope to help these issues by being active on social media and being available through email or text. I would also explore hosting informal town hall sessions in different parts of the city to talk about what projects the council and city staff have been working on.

LARRY SQUIRE

To me this is all about communication again. Especially making sure we are setting good and agreed upon expectations of that communication. Unfortunately, it is not realistic to have everyone involved in every conversation about everything taking place that impacts Janesville. So then, how do we create a process and set of expectations where people feel heard and valued?

I will continue to make myself available to all constituents any time they want to discuss this key topic. And I will work with the City Manager and staff to continue to improve the customer service communication our citizens deserve from city staff.

PAUL WILLIAMS

I feel the lack of trust is not only a local issue, but a national issue. I have always listed my personal cellphone number on the city's website and on my city-issued business cards. The city must continue to be as open as possible with citizens and the media. We need to hold informational meetings before an issue becomes controversial.

REESE WOOD

Trust comes from consistency and transparency. I would:

- Clearly explain votes and reasoning
- Avoid dismissive rhetoric
- Encourage early public engagement on major projects
- Support open records and sunlight in negotiations

Even when residents disagree with decisions, they should understand how and why those decisions were made.



8. Housing is a key challenge for Janesville. Janesville business leaders listed housing as a top barrier to growth in Forward Janesville's 2025 Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) Report and Housing For All is a strategic priority in the City of Janesville's 2025 – 2029 Strategic Plan.

In the 2025 National Community Survey, respondents were asked about what type of housing was needed in Janesville. 95% responded that affordable housing was needed, 95% responded that detached single-family homes were needed and 77% responded that townhouses or rowhouses were needed.

The City of Janesville took a proactive approach to the housing shortage by exploring a mixed-residential development on city-owned property at 2400 Beloit Ave. What is your perspective on this approach and the community engagement process that was used?

BEN DOBSON

I would support mixed-residential development on city-owned property. It's clear that housing in Janesville is a significant need across the city. When we add to the housing stock, we are adding to the overall health of the city. Housing brings new residents to the city, these would be residents who spend money in the city supporting local businesses. Housing brings additional tax revenue to the city, this will always be an important issue for me. Adding to the tax revenue will be impactful throughout the city.

I also appreciate the growth being proposed on the south side of the city. This is an important area of the city that will greatly benefit from additional growth. I would recommend and support continued exploration of these types of projects. I had no issues with the community engagement process for this project. It seemed to be well done and thoughtful in nature.

CASSANDRA POPE

For the most part, I think the city did a great job of including citizens in that process and giving them opportunities to voice concerns and ideas. I feel the city could have done a better job of meeting people where they're at, such as holding the meetings and engagement sessions in the neighborhood where the development is being proposed, not closing the meetings early when foot traffic was slow, and mailing out information to a larger and more calculated group of people.

The sessions themselves were otherwise well put together and effective. The consultants took input and feedback into consideration and made requested alterations, which was good to see. Neighbors brought up concerns that may have been slightly less related to the project itself, such as neighborhood safety and traffic, that could still use follow-up. Good process includes proper follow-through. Overall, it was a great step in the right direction of considerate community engagement. The development itself is a great opportunity to get much needed housing and to implement a more modern, mixed approach.

I think where a lot of people are struggling with this concept is the lack of an over-arching plan for that area. There is no broad-ranged, long-term plan for any of the South Side. The proposed neighborhood hasn't had the chance to weigh in on what they want their collective identity to be, what they want their neighborhood to look like, or what the future of the neighborhood could be. The development itself is great, but without the drive and backing of an agreed upon plan, it's hard to get behind it and visualize it as part of their neighborhood. This is why planning is so important!

SHANE SEEMAN

I was able to attend a couple of the engagement sessions for the 2400 Beloit Ave plan. I think the approach to these sessions was 90% of the way there. I really appreciated the openness of the dialogue. Most of the design, scale, and open space conversation was open-ended and any outlying disagreement was able to be discussed before moving on. The variety of stakeholders that were able to attend was also a plus. It seems like the administration did a good job reaching out to immediate neighbors of the site and residents generally.

I do think that the administration could have done a better job conveying the "why" of this project. The most I really remember hearing about why this site was ideal (and ideal for this kind of project) was that the city owned it. We could have had a broader conversation about less-dense development not generating enough property tax to pay for its own infrastructure. I think we could have had a good discussion around the general lack of housing and how far "in the hole" we are in new housing starts, or we could have talked about what the business community needs in terms of housing stock. In general, I think we could have framed the conversation better.

LARRY SQUIRE

I think the proactive approach used by the city with the development process for 2400 Beloit Avenue was a very good approach. In fact, the city council recently unanimously approved moving this forward to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process with potential developers.

It took a property owned by the city and put it out there for citizens to get involved. I felt the process had a very good flow and communication process using an outside consultant to help guide the process. This consultant has experience they could bring to help guide the city and citizens on options and ideas for the redevelopment of the Beloit Avenue property. There is now very good information for potential future developers to use in their analysis and eventual project proposals.

PAUL WILLIAMS

I feel the engagements have been good and there will be more to come. You are never going to satisfy everyone.

REESE WOOD

Housing supply is clearly a top issue. We need:

- Streamlined permitting
- Flexible zoning where appropriate
- Support for mixed housing types
- Encouragement of private investment rather than heavy subsidy models

Affordable housing increases workforce stability and strengthens our business environment.



9. The city owns the GM/JATCO site after a purchase-in-lieu-of-condemnation-process that concluded in July 2025. According to the 2025 National Community Survey, 6 in 10 respondents felt that it was important to pursue development efforts on the GM/JATCO site in the next two years.

a) What is your perspective on the process the city is using to evaluate brownfield developer Viridian Partners' proposal to remediate the GM/JATCO site and build a data center campus there? The process includes the city's initial Request for Proposal (RFP) and subsequent public meetings.

BEN DOBSON

I only take issue with the process when I see current council members being dismissive of the concerns being vocalized by the community. I appreciate the public meetings that have occurred and I would like to see additional public meetings before any final decision is made.

I do believe the optics of the process could be better, I would like to see very clear explanations about the NDA that was signed and the closed-door meetings that happen with the council. I would suggest the city continues to move slowly through the process and allow for the November referendum to occur before any additional decisions are made.

CASSANDRA POPE

The process should have begun with a vision and plan for the site, being led by the wants and needs of the community. However, the community was never asked if it wanted a data center - they were told it was being considered whether they wanted it or not. If that is the process, then the process is wrong. I understand that we want to be considerate of developers who take an interest in the city, but other options should have been considered as well.

SHANE SEEMAN

I think this process is moving too quickly. The site has been sitting empty for a long time, but if we are going to decide the correct path forward, we need to take a little extra time to do it right. Any industrial development that would fill this site will help shape the culture and economy of Janesville for at least two decades, so we must have as responsible a process as possible. The administration is now hosting informational meetings on these types of projects, but these meetings could have been much more impactful back in 2025 while the council was still considering the Letter of Intent.

LARRY SQUIRE

I am comfortable with the process the city has used and is using as it relates to issuing the initial RFP, evaluating Viridian's initial proposal and the proposal from a second potential developer, and the current process, including public meetings, being used to evaluate and review Viridian's proposal prior to making any next decision.

The key is recognizing this is a very complex project and issue and therefore the process around evaluating proposals and their impact on the city is also complex. That means we need to be very patient to be sure we (the city) explore all aspects of the proposal and the project and work to develop good strategies and come to good decisions.

The city has held listening sessions before recent city council meetings that focused on key topics. These have provided very good information. City Manager Lahner has also been or will be at multiple service club meetings sharing the findings and timeframes.

PAUL WILLIAMS

Large-scale projects like this are very complicated. Most, if not all, require the signing of a non-disclosure agreement (NDA). NDAs are standard business practices but usually raise suspicions among the citizens. I feel the process has been good so far.

REESE WOOD

Redevelopment of the GM/JATCO site is important. However, the process used to evaluate proposals — particularly the use of nondisclosure agreements — has created unnecessary distrust. When projects of this scale involve public land, potential tax exemptions, infrastructure impacts, and long-term financial exposure, transparency is not optional — it is foundational.

The “legal” process is not the same as a healthy civic process. If large portions of negotiation occur under NDA, the public cannot meaningfully evaluate risk. I support redevelopment, but I do not support major public commitments being shaped in environments where residents are asked to trust what they cannot see.

b) What is your perspective on the GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board and its role in the redevelopment of the GM/JATCO site?

BEN DOBSON

If used effectively, I think the GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board has an integral role. I would like to see a Redevelopment Board that represents the whole community and not just certain sectors or sections. I don't have a history of the current members of the Redevelopment Board, so it's hard for me to say if the Board currently represents the entire city.

CASSANDRA POPE

The GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board has no input on whether or not the site should be a data center. Their input only comes into play if a data center is not approved or if/when the data center developer deeds back any unused land to the city. Why have them go through consultant interviews and pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for a consultant for the site if the city is just going to put a data center there anyway? The GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board, after extensive community engagement and consultant deliberation, should have a say in whether or not a data center is the right option for that site.

SHANE SEEMAN

Setting up this advisory board and then quickly pivoting to a certain project decision comes off as a signal that this board shouldn't be involved with the eventual choice. Whether that's the intent of the administration or not, the perception is real. In deciding the future of the site, we can't fully explore our options if we rush to sign a development agreement. The board has been given important access here, so I hope it is being included in any discussions around the development negotiations and that the members' input is taken seriously.

LARRY SQUIRE

The GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board must play a key role in determining what the best options for the site will be. The Board has a great group of individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. We are very fortunate to have their combined expertise working together. They will be able to provide direction on what are good options and opportunities for the site. Options and opportunities that meet the needs of the city and in particular, the surrounding neighborhoods of the site. This includes social, environmental and economic impacts. And both short-term and long-term impacts.

It is important that the GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board's work be done in synergy with any work done by the city as it relates to working with Viridian or any future developer of the GM/JATCO site.

PAUL WILLIAMS

The Board needs to investigate options for the redevelopment of the site. They will bring those options to the council for consideration and a vote.

REESE WOOD

The Redevelopment Board plays an important advisory role, particularly in brownfield expertise. However, advisory bodies should enhance transparency — not insulate decision-making. Their responsibility should be to:

- Ensure remediation standards are met
- Provide independent cost analysis
- Protect taxpayers from long-term liability

Any redevelopment board must operate with the understanding that public confidence is as important as technical feasibility.

c) A core responsibility of the GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board is to guide the site's transformation alongside a qualified consultant with brownfield experience. In January 2026, the board recommended that the city hire Stantec as the consulting firm. If hired by the city council following the board's recommendation, Stantec expects to deliver key findings on market conditions, site feasibility and redevelopment options by mid-summer. Additionally, they will have conducted extensive community engagement.

As a council member, how will you use that information to make decisions on GM/JATCO's redevelopment?

BEN DOBSON

I would do my due diligence and review all the key findings delivered by Stantec. Stantec appears to have a wealth of knowledge and experience with these types of projects.

As a city council member, it would be my responsibility to review and assess all information that is presented to me. The Stantec findings alone would not be enough for me to make a final decision. It's my responsibility to use all sources of information and key findings from other partners before making a final decision. I do appreciate Stantec's focus on community engagement, this will be a key for me when reviewing their findings.

CASSANDRA POPE

If Stantec is going to be delivering key findings on market conditions, site feasibility, and redevelopment options, then I think it is vital that the City Council does not approve any kind of Purchase and Sale Agreement until AFTER those key findings have been presented so the Council can weigh those findings against the potential risks and rewards of any potential project.

SHANE SEEMAN

Unfortunately, I think so far, a lot of discussion around the site focuses on a few very specific pros and cons, and we have not done a great job considering the totality of the situation. I will do my best to consider each side of any potential options, and weigh opportunity costs when compared with the others. I think Stantec will provide insights on the site that we haven't yet considered, so I think having more perspective will help us paint a more complete picture of the potential.

LARRY SQUIRE

I am really looking forward to the work of the Redevelopment Board and what findings they create. I intend to use this information in conjunction with the information discovered in the process the city discovers with Viridian or any other developer.

We need to use the Board as one of the three perspectives on the site currently in flight. Those three perspectives include:

- The GM/JATCO Redevelopment Board
- Viridian and the use of the site for a potential Data Center
- The proposed ordinance on the GM/JATCO site on the November 3, 2026 ballot

These three perspectives/teams have the ability to be synergistic in providing positive insight into options and opportunities to the site.

PAUL WILLIAMS

I will use this information just like any other city business that comes before the council. I will look at the information, do research, and get input from the board, the administration, the consulting firm and citizens before making a decision.

REESE WOOD

Consultant reports are tools, not conclusions. I would use Stantec's findings to:

- Assess long-term fiscal impact
- Evaluate infrastructure burden
- Compare redevelopment scenarios objectively
- Determine opportunity cost

Consultants should inform decision-making — they should not substitute for independent judgment.



10. On Jan. 21, 2026, the city clerk certified a direct legislation petition to enact an ordinance requiring a voter referendum on any project on the GM/JATCO site exceeding \$450M in total project costs. On Feb. 9, the city council voted unanimously to send the proposed ordinance to the ballot. On Nov. 3, Janesville residents will vote to approve or reject the ordinance.

a) What is your perspective on the proposed ordinance?

BEN DOBSON

The direct legislation petition group gathered over 4,600 signatures as required by statutory law to get the referendum on the November ballot. Because of that, I support the ordinance being voted on by the community this November. There are several sections of the proposed ordinance that I would like to gather additional information and clarity on.

CASSANDRA POPE

The petition wouldn't have been necessary in the first place had the city had a deliberate long-term plan in place before making any development considerations. Instead, they rushed into the first development that came knocking at the door. The first and easiest option is not necessarily the right or best option.

It also wouldn't have been necessary if the city had done proper community engagement and involvement. The ordinance proposed in the petition will give the community the opportunity to weigh in on what they want for the future of Janesville, which is an opportunity they should have been afforded to begin with.

SHANE SEEMAN

I signed the petition, and I think the organizational effort to get this certified within the required time limit should be commended. I know that there are some legal concerns with the final language of the ordinance, so that is an area I need to learn more about. When we have the vote in November, at the very least it will provide the council and the community at-large with important data on how people are feeling generally about the project.

LARRY SQUIRE

I am very concerned about the perception this ordinance creates for potential developers looking to do projects in Janesville. While the proposed ordinance references the GM/JATCO site, developers will see this as a message that if a portion of the community doesn't like a potential project, they start another direct petition drive to get it stopped. This brings a level of uncertainty that developers do not want to have to consider when they are deciding if they want to consider Janesville as a potential location.

Perception is reality and this ordinance could give the perception that Janesville is not a welcoming community to large developments. We must be sure we are taking the concerns and desires of citizens on this critical site into account. That is what active listening and good communications can accomplish.

PAUL WILLIAMS

The proposed ordinance will have a negative effect on this development and on others.

REESE WOOD

I support voter referendums for projects of extraordinary scale. When a project exceeds \$450 million, the long-term infrastructure, environmental, and fiscal impacts are generational. Giving residents a direct vote is not anti-growth — it is pro-accountability. Major commitments of public land and resources deserve direct public consent.

b) How do you think the proposed ordinance will impact the redevelopment of the GM/JATCO site?

BEN DOBSON

This is an impossible question to answer. There are too many unknowns with the proposed ordinance. Reviewing the City Memo that references this proposed ordinance, a lot will depend on if the ordinance passes during the November election. Since I am clearly not a lawyer, I can't speak to the legality of the ordinance and what would happen if it passed this November.

CASSANDRA POPE

I think the proposed ordinance will give the city, particularly the people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding the GM/JATCO site, the chance to decide for themselves if the risks are worth the rewards for any massive projects that could go on that site.

For over 100 years, neighbors lived next to a mega-polluting factory. We now know the pollution and health effects of those kinds of developments. We know better and should do better. We should want better for the members of our community. The neighbors should have a say if that, or worse, is what they want to live next to for the next however many years.

SHANE SEEMAN

Overall, I think that the petition could have some slowing effects on larger projects here, but I think projects that would provide numerous, long-term, well-paying jobs in manufacturing real goods would have no problem passing a referendum. There's been a lot of discussion recently about how long processes for very large projects can take, so I don't think having to wait for an April or November vote would necessarily take a developer too far out of their expected timeline.

The ordinance petition was organized on a grassroots basis, and a development company with a project that large should have the resources to make their case to the community and be successful in a referendum. I also think limiting potential projects in this site to a certain size could also help keep development right-sized to the surrounding neighborhood, which immediate neighbors have been vocal about.

LARRY SQUIRE

If this ordinance is in place, it could definitely have a negative impact on the potential redevelopment of the site as discussed in (a.) above. This ordinance would very likely put Janesville at a significant disadvantage when seeking competitive projects for the site. We may not even be considered for them.

PAUL WILLIAMS

If the ordinance is not struck down by the courts and goes to a vote in November and is passed, the redevelopment of the site could be delayed for years.

REESE WOOD

Some argue the ordinance creates uncertainty. I would argue it creates clarity. Developers pursuing projects of that scale should be prepared to withstand public scrutiny. If a proposal is fiscally sound and beneficial, it should survive a public vote. The real risk to redevelopment is not public input — it is public distrust.

c) How do you think the proposed ordinance will impact business in Janesville?

BEN DOBSON

Again, any impact on business in Janesville will depend on what happens in November. Without having a clear picture of what the actual ordinance would impact it's hard for me to answer this question. My hope would be that if the ordinance passes it won't have a direct impact on other business opportunities in the city.

However, if the ordinance would have a direct impact on business opportunities in the city, I believe it would be imperative to take another look at the ordinance to ensure growth isn't stunted because of it. I strongly support growth and development for the City of Janesville, as long as it's smart growth and the pros and cons are clearly discussed.

CASSANDRA POPE

Any massive scale development that would breach the \$450M threshold will take years to fully pass. There will be plenty of opportunities for a referendum without it disrupting major timelines or development decisions. For example, the Viridian proposal has already been on the table for one, possibly two election cycles before a decision will be reached on whether or not to approve a Purchase and Sale Agreement. There has been plenty of time for the community to weigh in on a referendum for the project.

This ordinance should not hinder development, it will just ensure the development is right for the community. \$450M is probably larger than any one development currently in Janesville. That means there are a ton of redevelopment options for that site that would not require a referendum. Regardless of whether or not the project is great or terrible for the community, it should be up to the members of the community to make the choice if they want it or not. It's their neighborhood, their lives, and their community.

SHANE SEEMAN

As I understand it, the ordinance would require any sufficiently large project at that site to go to a referendum for approval. I know that this is concerning for some in the business community, and I am sensitive to those timeline concerns. The referendum only applies to the GM/JATCO site and still leaves a lot of potential throughout the city, however. It also would not touch a smaller project like a grocery store, regional warehousing or manufacturing, or certain sized mixed-use developments. There's even a solar project 4 times the site's size proposed for Whitewater that's estimated for \$150M - 1/3rd the ordinance restriction.

I think the proposed ordinance is trying to strike a balance between economic development, direct community involvement, and protecting a site that many residents have a strong connection and history with.

LARRY SQUIRE

If this ordinance is in place, it could definitely have a negative impact on future large projects and developers' view of Janesville as discussed in (a.) above. This ordinance would very likely put Janesville at a significant disadvantage when seeking competitive projects. We may not even be considered for them.

PAUL WILLIAMS

The proposed ordinance has already negatively impacted businesses in Janesville. Businesses thinking about expanding or locating to Janesville may wait to see what happens between now and November.

REESE WOOD

Predictability matters. But so does legitimacy. A process that produces backlash and division harms business confidence more than a transparent vote does. Investors prefer stable communities with clear expectations. Clear rules that apply evenly to all projects can strengthen — not weaken — the business environment.



11. The city has limited tools in its economic development toolbox. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is one of them. What is your perspective on TIF and how will you approach TIF as a council member?

BEN DOBSON

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an important tool for Janesville. The reality is, cities in Wisconsin operate with limited economic development tools, and if we choose not to use TIF strategically, other communities will. I'm pro-business and pro-growth. When used responsibly, TIF can attract employers, create jobs, redevelop underutilized areas, and expand our tax base over time. That benefits residents, local businesses, and helps stabilize long-term finances. That said, TIF should never be automatic. As a council member, I would approach TIF with three guiding principles.

First, clear public benefit. Every TIF district or agreement should have measurable outcomes, job creation, wage standards, redevelopment impact, or long-term tax base growth.

Second, transparency and accountability. Residents deserve to understand why a TIF is being proposed, what the city is committing to, and what happens if benchmarks aren't met.

Third, discipline. TIF should be used where it truly makes a difference, where would not happen "but for" the incentive. It should not become a routine subsidy.

If structured correctly, TIF is not a giveaway, it's a partnership. My goal would be to ensure those partnerships are fair, competitive, and beneficial to the entire community. I can be very business friendly and still be a thoughtful steward of taxpayer resources.

CASSANDRA POPE

TIFs can create or incentivize opportunities, but we need to make sure they are used in moderation. Each TIF district is tying up funds that could be used for current community needs. There has to be balance between current needs and future growth. There are many other incentives that can be offered to a developer. There could also be potential grants available for development. We need to be researching and utilizing all of our options. A TIF is one of those options, but not always the only option. I think it can be useful, but it needs to be thoughtfully considered before being put into place.

SHANE SEEMAN

TIF is one of the few options we have for incentivizing development throughout the city. I wish it weren't this way. If we must use TIF to develop a certain area, we should be selective in applying them to the areas with the best immediate economic outcome. People have short memories, for better or worse. If the public does not see improvements quickly enough, they lose trust and become skeptical of TIF and public incentives generally.

Any TIF should also be used to truly fulfill the "but for" test, especially in the sense of any large valuable corporations relying on them for potential development. We should preferably use them for diverse, smaller-scale, mixed-use development that can be flexibly repurposed into the future, according to the city's and market's needs.

LARRY SQUIRE

Janesville has a very good track record with using TIF as a tool for economic development. We have not had any failed TID's (Tax Incremental Districts) in our history of using this tool. We have been able to capture an extra year of TIF funding on many recent TIF's as they expire and put those funds into our City Housing Fund for low-income housing.

Our use of pay as you go TIF funding has proven very successful and has demonstrated a consistent approach. I believe consistency in our policies is very important to ensure potential users of TIF know what to expect when they apply for TIF support.

I am very confident that city staff and our consultants are making the best use of TIF possible to encourage growth while balancing the needs of our development community and businesses.

PAUL WILLIAMS

The best practice of using a TIF agreement is a pay-as-you-go agreement. Under this type of agreement, I feel, the taxpayers have the most protection against any losses.

REESE WOOD

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be a tool, but it should be used sparingly and only when a project would not occur “but for” the assistance. TIF should not become routine corporate subsidy. As a council member, I would:

- Require clear but-for analysis
- Limit duration and scope
- Ensure infrastructure investments benefit broader neighborhoods
- Avoid shifting long-term costs to residents

Economic development should expand the tax base without increasing long-term taxpayer exposure.



12. Per the 2026 City of Janesville Budget, the largest revenue stream for the city is property taxes (64.1%). The second and third largest revenue streams are state shared revenue (17.2%) and services charges (6.9%). Janesville can only raise the property tax levy by net new construction.

Given that one of your main responsibilities as a council member is budget development, how will you balance budget priorities and growth while not burdening taxpayers, specifically residential taxpayers?

BEN DOBSON

Balancing growth and fiscal responsibility start with recognizing that residential taxpayers should not carry a disproportionate share of the burden. A healthy city grows its tax base in a way that strengthens finances without simply increasing the load on homeowners.

First, I would focus on expanding and diversifying the commercial and industrial tax base. Sustainable economic development reduces pressure on residential taxes and creates long-term revenue stability. Again, this would need to be smart expansion and diversification of the commercial and industrial tax base.

Second, I believe in disciplined budgeting. Every budget cycle should include a clear review of core services, performance metrics, and opportunities for efficiency. We must distinguish between needs and wants, prioritize essential services, and ensure new initiatives have defined outcomes and long-term funding plans.

Third, I support long-term financial planning. Multi-year forecasting, responsible debt management, and maintaining strong reserve levels that prevent sudden tax spikes and protects residents for uncertainty.

Finally, when appropriate, development tools should be structured so that new projects contribute to the infrastructure and services they require rather than shifting those costs onto residents. Responsible budgeting is not about avoiding investment, it's about making strategic investments that strengthen the tax base, improve quality of life, and protect homeowners from unnecessary increases.

CASSANDRA POPE

Long-term deliberate planning can eliminate so many of the issues when it comes to growth. Right now, it feels like we are desperately throwing in development projects wherever and however we can just to meet net new construction goals. It's creating dissention and distrust. If we had proper plans in place for each area of the city, we could start meeting needs with opportunity. Growth is necessary, but we need to be driving the growth, not the growth driving us. Then, when we spend our budget, we are spending it wisely instead of desperately.

Personally, I think there needs to be a different model used to determine levy limits other than net new construction to avoid this very issue. Local governments all around the state are struggling to keep up with rising inflation costs and are rushing into development decisions, without community input or agreement, in order to stay afloat. The system is broken, but that's beyond a city council member's job description. This is why it's so important to vote for the right state leaders.

SHANE SEEMAN

I think the upcoming zoning rewrite will help us grow in a more responsible manner. When we build more densely, the number of residents contributing to the property tax rolls increases while keeping infrastructure costs in check. With limited land available for development, further building of single-family homes encroaches on township and farmland, while costs keep climbing - leading to higher assessments and property tax bills.

With this zoning reform, we will also be able to get more land like surface parking lots back on the tax rolls for commercial and mixed-use developments, further taking the tax burden off of residential taxpayers. This has the dual effect of helping improve net-new-construction figures to increase our levy limit. We also need to work more closely with smaller and independent developers to maximize these types of projects, including individuals who would like to just build a home on a smaller lot.

In a potential economic disruption, we cannot allow ourselves to cut critical services if the budget is facing transient shortfalls. Quality of life and public safety should not be a sacrifice for market forces beyond the city's control, let alone the residents'. I think the changes in the zoning code will help us be more flexible and resilient in responding to such disruptions, and we should be prepared to adopt, expand, and iterate on these ideas.

LARRY SQUIRE

This will be a very key area of management in 2026 and in the 2027 budget. The 2026 budget was essentially a budget with no new expenditure areas or growth in staff. Our Net New Construction increased only 1.6% in 2025 while we budgeted approximately a 3% increase in expenses in 2026.

Unfortunately, because of our revenue restrictions and especially our low percentage of state shared revenue, we may be forced to make cuts in expenditures or go to a referendum to increase our property tax levy. Other peer cities, like Eau Claire, have done this in recent years. I hope we can do everything possible to avoid that referendum.

We must make Janesville as welcoming as possible to encourage existing businesses to expand, bring in new businesses, and have solid residential development. Our Economic Development efforts must be proactive.

PAUL WILLIAMS

A council member always needs to make sure the city is getting the "best bang for the buck." I am continually looking for ways to cut expenses and find additional revenue sources. We must look for ways to save money by sharing services (e.g., partnering with other communities on buying large pieces of equipment). We must continue to review fees to make sure the city is being reimbursed for the time spent by city employees.

REESE WOOD

Property taxes already represent the largest revenue source. Residential taxpayers cannot be the automatic backstop for ambitious projects. I would prioritize:

- Infrastructure maintenance over speculative expansion
- Careful debt management
- Long-term cost forecasting before project approval
- Growth that improves net tax base, not just gross construction value

Sustainable growth means ensuring that new development pays for the services it requires rather than relying on future levy pressure.



13. As a council member, how will you maintain decorum and model respectful civic engagement?

BEN DOBSON

Maintaining decorum starts with remembering that disagreement is not disrespect. As a council member, I would approach every meeting with a mindset that we are colleagues working toward the long-term health of our community, even when we see issues differently.

First, I will prepare thoroughly and focus on the substance of issues rather than personalities. Policy disagreements should be about data, priorities, and outcomes. Not motives. Second, I will listen actively and allow residents and fellow council members to finish their thoughts before responding. People deserve to feel heard, even when the final decision doesn't go their way. Third, I will model calm and measured communication, especially in tense moments. Tone matters. Body language matters. Leadership is demonstrated not just in what you say, but in how you say it.

Finally, I believe accountability and respect can coexist. I will ask tough questions, when necessary, but I will do so professionally and without personal attacks. Civility does not mean avoiding hard conversations, it means handling them with maturity.

CASSANDRA POPE

I say this often, "I believe that the majority of people are trying to do what's best. The challenge comes when we don't agree upon what's best." It's almost impossible to make everyone happy. That's when compromise comes into the picture. We just need to make sure that we aren't compromising on the health and well-being of the community. That should be something that all members of the city council and city administration agree on. Otherwise, what are we doing here and why bother?

Being civil is not contingent upon agreement. We can model respectful civic engagement even when we disagree. There are almost always differing perspectives to each situation, so we need to listen to each other and respect each other and each other's opinions. If we can remember that we are all trying to do what's best, it will shift our thinking from, "Those who disagree are my enemy," to "How can we work together with these differing ideas to accomplish our goal?"

SHANE SEEMAN

As a council member, it's important to follow the rules of procedure of the body and actively listen when another member may have the floor. It's basic manners for me. I do like to lean in and ask extra questions of guests when the opportunity presents itself, but I always try to recognize when I may be speaking out of place or if it's a question or comment for another time. I also think we should come to every conversation in good faith and act with an open mind.

Another part of modeling good civic engagement is to share what I know and what I learn. When items on the agenda are not "regular business" items, I'll plan to share them out and hear what people have to say about them and encourage them to participate. I think it will be important to also follow up after meetings and let people know what the next steps may be.

LARRY SQUIRE

I will keep doing exactly what I have been doing since I have been elected. I feel I have acted with respect in my communications. I believe everyone deserves to be heard. I am committed to helping find a path to build trust and confidence.

Over my career and involvement with many organizations in Janesville, I have worked to be a positive problem-solver. That includes encouraging everyone to have their voice heard and to be patient in gathering the necessary information to make good decisions. We must constantly be open to creating and exploring opportunities to make Janesville better for all. I will continue to look at the whole picture and do it with respect and integrity.

PAUL WILLIAMS

I have always tried to maintain decorum and respectful civic engagement in my 20 years on the council.

REESE WOOD

Disagreement is inevitable. Dismissiveness is not. As a council member, I would:

- Respond respectfully to public comment
- Avoid personal attacks
- Encourage structured debate
- Separate criticism of policy from criticism of people

Civic trust depends on tone as much as policy.