



TAXPAYERS RESEARCH COUNCIL
YOUR TAX ADVOCATE SINCE 1937

NEWS AND NOTES

October 26, 2011

SIoux CITY MAYOR/COUNCIL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The TRC has issued a candidate questionnaire for Sioux City Mayor/Council candidates. The TRC would like to thank the candidates for their responses and their willingness to serve the public. The questionnaire can also be found online at www.siouxlandtrc.org under Sioux City. All answers have been unedited.

1. The citizens of Sioux City were told Speed and Red Light Cameras were installed to enhance public safety. There are a number of significant financial and policy questions involving the use and management of these cameras.

A. Sioux City's fines for Red Light Cameras are higher than any other city in the state and over triple the amount of some cities in Iowa. Would you consider lowering the fine or changing the system to a sliding scale for multiple offenders?

Bob Scott: I would definitely be in favor of reducing these fines. These fines at the present rate are excessive and are a hardship for working families. I would consider a sliding scale because people need to be concerned about safety so frequent violators should be treated differently. We should establish a system that allows the person to start over if they go a certain period of time with no violations.

Tom Padgett: I am on record as being in favor of the reduction of the Red Light Camera fines. If we are truly concerned about public safety the fines should be in line with punishing the offender and not creating an economic hardship. A sliding scale that would punish the multiple offenders more would be acceptable to me.

Rhonda Capron: I can tell you this...I'm a veteran of Red Light Cameras!! I've had two of them, and it has certainly slowed me down. With that said...I have one big problem as far a sliding scale goes, its not always the same person driving the vehicle. Yes, I would consider lowering the fine, but I need to see data on this information first.

Flora Lee: Currently the fine is set at a rate that I find to be extreme and may cause undue financial stress on individuals and families. I would not support a sliding fee scale, yet I do believe the fee needs to be lowered and affordable.

B. Speed and Red Light Cameras have court costs built into the fine. However, few violators ever protest in court. As a result the City charges the offender about \$65.00 for a court costs that the City gets to keep since the vast majority of ticket recipients never actually go to court system. Most other cities in Iowa have implemented a system which allows the loser of a court challenge to pay the court fees. Would you support removing the court costs from the current fine amounts?

Bob Scott: I would want to remove more than the cost costs. I believe the cost for a red light violation is \$195.00 and if you reduce that to \$130.00 that still seems too high to me. I would be in favor of a fine more in the \$80.00 to \$90.00 range for a first time offender.

**Thank You for your
Membership!**

FiberComm

Green Gables/Transit Properties

Benson Building

Ellen Dickey

John Meyer

Jebro

Pathology Medical Services

Roger Caudron

Three Rivers Benefits

J D Davis, Northwestern Mutual Representative

Knoepfler

Downtown Partners

Tegra

Office Systems

Concrete Products

Sioux City Journal

Dr. Rossiter & Dr. DeMay

Mullin Awning & Siding

Mills Shellhammer Puetz

Able Development

Nichols, Rise and Company

Handy LLC

Briar Cliff

Chesterman

St. Lukes

Tom Padgett: If there are not “court costs”, it makes little sense to charge them. I favor removing the court costs and going to a flat dollar amount of \$100. For those who lose a court challenge an additional fee could be collected.

Rhonda Capron: I would support and advocate removing the court costs. This is a city ordinance, so “us” as council members have the power to do this. Court costs should only be collected when you “go to court”.

Flora Lee: The court costs need to be built into the fine. The City needs to determine the administrative court costs incurred in the processing of the tickets. The actual court costs are defined this needs to be added into the fine amounts. This should take into account clerical staff, attorney, mailing notices and other factors which would contribute to administrative (court costs).

C. When construction along I-29 is finished, would you support removing the speed cameras from city limits?

Bob Scott: I would not be in favor of removing them without some discussion. We will always have construction going on in the city and I think it is important that we are concerned about the safety of the workers performing these jobs. As for just placing them randomly around town the police department would have to make a good case for safety why they are needed in these areas.

Tom Padgett: When I voted for the speed cameras, it was with the intention that they would be used for the time of I-29 construction only. That would still be my intent. It is gratifying to note that since the cameras have been installed the number of those speeding through the area has dropped from 38% to 1%.

Rhonda Capron: Maybe, that’s several years down the road yet, but I know for sure that the cameras are needed and are helping the construction workers feel more safe. I have had long chats with many of them.

Flora Lee: It is my understanding the speed cameras were installed as a safety precaution/measure while the highway is under construction. The cameras would be removed upon completion of highway construction. The City needs to adhere to this policy.

D. The city has an estimated budget of approximately four million dollars in fine revenue from Red Light Cameras and Speed Cameras. The net effect is a system of millions of dollars of new revenue. Should the city use these revenues for one time projects or should the money be deposited in the general fund to reduce real estate tax askings?

Bob Scott: I can understand that a case can be made for both of these arguments but if it is a fine and because most fines go to the general fund then I think that is where the money belongs. Otherwise you get staff and councils thinking about projects that may not be necessary just to spend the money. As I stated in my first three responses to this question, I would hope that this revenue would be reduced by be more reasonable in the fines we place on our citizens.

Tom Padgett: I do not believe that the funds such as these should be used for ongoing projects as they could disappear at any time. While it would be nice to deposit those funds into the general fund, the State Legislature has the ability to modify or eliminate red light fines and modify the speeding fines at their pleasure. I would prefer that we reduce tax askings by other means.

Rhonda Capron: I am against putting Red Light money into the general fund. You cannot count on this money for revenue. The Red Light Cameras are set up to help slow people down. They ARE doing their job. Therefore, the revenue is less. I feel we are better off putting the dollars towards Public Safety, which is large percentage of the budget.

Flora Lee: The money should be shared between the general fund to reduce estate tax askings and one time projects. This strategy would continue to provide real estate tax relief and support one time projects. I believe that due to the economic times we must be creative in the manner in which we utilize and share our revenue between departments and budgets.

2. This current fiscal year the city lowered their overall tax levy and took in \$1,130,084 less property tax revenue, while collecting three to four times that real estate tax reduction in Red Light and Speed Camera Fines. The city manager has asked each department to submit budgets with a possible 3%, 5% and 7% reduction for the next fiscal year.

A. Do you support increasing, decreasing or staying the course on property tax revenue?

Bob Scott: Obviously I would be in favor of reducing taxes if at all possible. I suspect that this maybe a difficult task with the tight budgets that have supposedly been presented the past few years. I would scrutinize every budget as I always had and look for savings where possible. I would work hard to not increase taxes and would only consider such increases if I felt that the public safety of the

citizens would be compromised without an increase.

Tom Padgett: I believe that we need to stay the course on property tax revenue. It would be nice to reduce that revenue each year, but it is unrealistic to promise reductions at a time when it is difficult to even hold the line.

Rhonda Capron: I believe in staying on the course on property tax!

Flora Lee: The City has cut the budget annually over the course of the past few years. Instead of reductions in department budgets I would like to maintain the current status of each department without making deep cuts to budgets. I think if we can maintain the current course of property tax revenue we would be able to maintain current city services.

B. Even though the city received less property tax revenue, they are now projecting to collect several millions in Speed Camera and Red Light Camera Fines. Do you support holding the line on the city's total spending?

Bob Scott: I can see nothing on the horizon that would lead me to believe that spending should be increased dramatically. Our citizens are having difficult times with their family budgets and we need to be as concerned as they are about the economic uncertainty we presently face.

Tom Padgett: The only realistic way to hold the line on taxes is to hold the line on spending, so I would support that approach. As mentioned in the answer to 1.d, depending on an income source such as red light and speeding fines is too risky as that source could dry up quickly.

Rhonda Capron: Yes, I do, we the taxpayers can't afford any more taxes and we need to hold our City accountable for their spending.

Flora Lee: As stated in the answer for the previous question, I believe we must explore holding the line on spending and budget reductions. The city must seriously explore how we can maintain current services which we provide to our citizens.

3. The recent contract between the city and Siouxland Paramedics Inc. (SPI) has the city subsidizing SPI services and has the fire department housing and manning a back up ambulance.

A. Do you support or oppose the subsidy?

Bob Scott: I am going to try to answer all three questions at once (A, B & C). The problems facing the ambulance services are not new nor unique. We have as a community wrestled with this problem for over 25 years, and our solutions always seems to be let's just throw more money at the problem and hope it goes away. This should stop and we should have a discussion in this community as to what services the city should provide and how should the services be delivered. This discussion should involve all the players from the providers to the consumers. We need a long-term plan because continuing to do what we have done simply is not working.

Tom Padgett: I supported the subsidy because it has a cap and can only be collected after it is determined that the costs association with the request are clearly the responsibility of the city.

Rhonda Capron: Support

Flora Lee: I do not have enough information to support an answer to this question, because I have several questions to ask prior to coming to a conclusion on this issue. 1) Why is the City subsidizing SPI services? 2) Is this mandated by federal or state code? 3) How long has the city been subsidizing SPI? 4) Is this practice in line with other communities of our size to subsidize ambulance services? 5) How does this impact the City budget department? 6) Which department budget is the subsidy charged to? 7) What happens to SPI if the City does not subsidize the service? 8) How will the citizens of Sioux City be served if the City does not subsidize SPI?

B. Do you support the fire department manning a back up ambulance?

Tom Padgett: Having the Fire-Rescue department house a back up ambulance makes sense for public safety.

Rhonda Capron: Yes

Flora Lee: I would support the fire department manning a back up ambulance with conditions, the conditions are: 1) The circumstances, duties, responsibilities are defined, necessary training for firefighters, impact of shifts and budgets which are thoroughly re-

searched and planned with labor, management and SPI representatives (labor and management).

C. Do you support or oppose the Fire Department taking over all of SPI functions?

Tom Padgett: At this time I do not support Fire-Recsue taking over all functions of SPI. Chief Everett has proposed continuing to train Fire-Rescue personnel to the highest EMT levels as they are usually first to arrive on the scene. However, the idea of having fire-rescue personnel off line for transportation purposes does not make sense fiscally or in terms of public safety.

Rhonda Capron: I need to talk to staff, both Fire Department and SPI, and get more information before I can make a decision at this point.

Flora Lee: I do not currently believe the Fire Department can take over all of SPI functions. In order to determine this action, there would be a need for further information. Yet at this time I think SPI and the Fire Department provide separate services to our community.

D. Currently SPI serves the Sioux City metropolitan area, as well as supporting the entire region on an as needed basis (Up to 60 Miles out of the City). Would you support or oppose fire fighters leaving city limits to provide EMS services to the surrounding communities?

Bob Scott: The city of Sioux City invests heavily in our fire department and as a result we have one of the best trained, best educated departments in the country. I have a difficult time sending our people to other areas and leaving our citizens without protection while they are not in our city. If after having the discussions that I proposed earlier it makes good economic sense to consider providing these services I might entertain the idea. This would only be done if we don't compromise the services to our citizens and it is an economic benefit to our city.

Tom Padgett: We provide HazMat services to a side area in the tri-state region, but that is funded and supported in an entirely different way, and I would oppose having our fire fighters leaving Sioux City unless it is for a traditional "mutual aid purpose."

Rhonda Capron: I do not support the fire fighters leaving the Sioux City area guidelines. We would need more firefighters to cover Sioux City if a rig is 60 miles out. Homeowners insurance is based on keeping the ISO rating (fire protection grade for communities) at a reasonable number. That may drop because of the area the firefighters would have to cover.

Flora Lee: I would oppose firefighters leaving the City to provide EMS services to surrounding communities. Who would pay for the services, how would the city be billed, what would the 28E Agreement look like, what would be the City's liability and how would this impact the citizens of Sioux City who would be in need EMS services.

4. What steps would you take to revitalize downtown Sioux City?

A. Would you support or oppose the removal of parking meters?

Bob Scott: I believe that parking meters have lived past their usefulness. I think they are detriment to downtown development and would consider their removal if we can make sure that we have a system in place that does not allow unlimited all day parking. I would still maintain the meters around the government corridor. We would have to look at the effects on parking revenues and if this can be replaced without too much of a hardship I would vote to remove them.

Tom Padgett: In the past two years we have already taken a number of steps to revitalize downtown. These include the new Sioux City Pubic Museum; new infrastructure and street scaping in the Historic Pearl St Region and working with developers to start and expand businesses such as PAn Architecture, McCarthy & Baileys; Jitters, Innovative Benefit Consultants; and additional façade development. In the region; the Wesley Parkway infrastructure; the 4th and Jackson project; completion of the United Center, In addition there is a downtown planning study underway to come up with innovate ways to incorporate the new Cone Park and the development of other public-private partnerships.

At this time I would oppose the removal of **all** parking meters. The city is currently working with the Parking and Skywalk board and Downtown partners to investigate a removal of some meters for a "test" of that idea. At the current time it would not make fiscal sense to remove this enterprise fund.

Rhonda Capron: I would love to see Downtown Partners and City and Chamber of Commerce all come together to come up with ideas that could help or be innovative and think outside the box. We need to come up with new ideas to jumpstart are Downtown.

The City needs a cheerleader, that can instill some spirit into the downtown, and also to make the Citizen's feel good about Sioux City again. I feel the city has a lot of resources just in the people who live here that are willing to step up and help with economic development, and to make it easier to get businesses started up in our Downtown area. We are not limited to just local resources, but can tap in all over the State of Iowa to see what other cities are doing. Let's not have tunnel vision when it comes to businesses and jobs.

I support parking meters. I feel that they need have an extended time frame to 3-4 hours on the meters, and get rid of the 1-2 hour parking. We need extended time frames around City Hall, Library, County Courthouse, Federal Courthouse, Woodbury County Law Enforcement Center, Juvenile Detention Center area, Motor Vehicle. All medical facilities should have extended 3-4 hour parking meters. We have a lot of citizen's complaining that they need this extra time to do all their business and the 1-2 hour meters makes it hard to accomplish some of their business they have downtown. The same complaints go for the Library and Medical facilities to see the doctors with their appointments. I feel we need to be more user friendly when it comes to the parking meters, encouraging the citizen's to be downtown. When you take the revenue away, you need to replace it with other means of revenue. We must be very careful.

Flora Lee: Parking meters provide revenue for the City and employment for those who monitor, repair and collect monies from the meters. Removal of meters located near state and local buildings need to be considered, to allow citizens the time to conduct business and complete their transactions. The City department handling this project needs to present to the Council pros and cons of removing the meters, which would include the impact on the city budget, benefits to downtown businesses and other support documentation as to why the meters should be removed.

B. Would you support or oppose a change of 5th and 6th Streets to two-way traffic?

Bob Scott: I would certainly be open to this change. If it appears that traffic can be moved just as effectively I think it make sense to consider such a move.

Tom Padgett: Due to the success of the return to two-way on 4th street I would entertain the idea of reopening 5th and 6th to two-way. However, because of cost projections previously given to Council, I would have to reserve judgment on support of the project until I see all the data.

Rhonda Capron: At this time I would ask 5th and 6th streets to remain the same we do not have the dollars to spend to change to two-way traffic.

Flora Lee: The purpose of changing the traffic patterns of the two streets is not clear; would this be for economic development and job growth? Construction costs and funding would need to be considered prior to making this decision.

5. What specific details can you present which would encourage quality (\$17.00 and up) job growth within Sioux City?

Bob Scott: Creating jobs in these times will be difficult. We must be more pro-active in trying to develop the expansion of the employers we presently have in Sioux City. I would like to establish a committee of local business people that would work with the Mayor and the economic development department to help in this process. Far too often in government we don't reach out to the private sector for help. We need to foster our relationships with the state and with the local chamber of commerce. We cannot have a "go it alone attitude" and we need to be open to helping the communities around us grow. I would much rather work with a neighboring community to secure jobs than seeing to go to a city outside our region if we can't make the deal work in Sioux City. The bottom line for me is this has to be a focus and one that we constantly are working towards.

Tom Padgett: For the growth of "quality" jobs in Sioux City we must do several things. First we must be willing to provide economic incentives that will make it possible for current businesses to expand and new businesses to come to Sioux City. These can take many forms such as Targeted Jobs, EDA grants, support through TIF etc. For large firms we must provide "shovel ready" sites such as those at Southbridge and Expedition Business Parks where the infrastructure is in place so that businesses and site selectors can make rapid decisions. We need educational opportunities such as those provided by WITCC and the two areas liberal arts institutions for worker training. In addition to these things we must have the quality of life amenities that businesses seek for their employees and families.

Rhonda Capron: I am willing to Advocate and Lobby at the State level to let Governor Branstad know the importance of these higher paying jobs for the Northwest Corner of Iowa. Also to let our voice be heard and that we need these jobs in Siouxland now! I will also ask to sit on or be notified when the Iowa Partnership for Economic Progress meetings are so I can add input and stress the

need for these higher paying jobs. I am willing to make the trips to Des Moines and anywhere else to be part of this process. It is so crucial to our Community right now we can't afford to have tunnel vision on jobs and limit ourselves as elected officials, the taxpayers count on us to bring the businesses and jobs to Siouxland.

Flora Lee: The City could and should review and identify targeted jobs in our area labor market and training opportunities in our community. This process must be in collaboration with City, Educational Institutions, Business Leaders, Downtown Partners, Volunteer Organizations and Labor. All parties are at the table to identify how we (City/Community) can and will make better use of the Targeted Jobs Pilot Program.

In this process identify and develop a solid marketing and recruiting plan that will strongly encourage businesses to expand or locate to our community. We as a City must be strategic in identifying and recruiting businesses who are exploring expansion, new businesses and minimizing red tape (where possible), stress the Targeted Jobs Withholding Tax Credit Program. Once businesses are recruited we should ask the business for commitment to remain in our city for a period of time, we cannot longer allow businesses to take advantage of us.

Develop a "Spruce Up Your Neighborhood Project" (similar to the Christmas Decoration Contest), this program being year round and encouraging homeowners, renters and citizens to take pride in their City.

We need to not just rely on what the State has to offer, but what does Sioux City have to offer to incoming businesses and families. Promote our schools (public and private), museum, art center, Orpheum, Library, safety, restaurants and quality of life in Sioux City.

The bottom-line is we need a solid strategic plan to spread economic growth. A plan which needs to be developed soon, reviewed, adjusted and committed to by City Leaders, Staff and the Community.