

# Douglas County Voters' Guide Omaha City Election

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER OMAHA

Primary: April 4, 2017 / General: May 9, 2017

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## MAYOR

**Christopher N. Geary (I):** Website: <http://www.Geary2017.com>. Current public office, dates held: N/A. Past public office, dates held: N/A. Occupation: Martial Arts Grand Master. Education: High School Diploma. UNO. Military: I am a patriot. I proudly served my country in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1990 to 1994, earning an honorable discharge and the rank of Corporal. My service was the foundation on which my beliefs are anchored. I continue to be proud of my service. Volunteer experience: I have been actively involved in the community by volunteering my time to teach self-defense to the disabled. I have helped raise money for children with cancer. I have also worked with kids who came from tough economic and social backgrounds.

**Heath Mello:** Website: <http://www.heathmello.com>. Current public office, dates held: N/A. Past public office, dates held: Nebraska Legislature, District 5, 2009-2017. Occupation: Executive Director, Nebraska Career Education and Innovation Foundation. Education: Bachelor's in Political Science, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Military: N/A. Volunteer experience: Local Board and Committee Memberships: South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance South Omaha Business Association South Omaha Environmental Task Force Q Merchants Association inCOMMON Community Development Omaha by Design Executive Committee, Heartland 2050.

**Ean Mikale:** Website: <http://mikaleformayor.com>. Current public office, dates held: None. Past public office, dates held: None. Occupation: Business Owner. Education: Omaha Central High School, Georgetown University Junior Statesmen of America Academy, Washington, DC, Howard University, Washington, DC, University of Nebraska College of Law, Lincoln, NE, CBL International Law & Business School, Dubai, U.A.E.. Military: None. Volunteer experience: National Small Business Association - Leadership and Technology Council, Bryant Center Association - President, Howard University Chapter of Students for Barack Obama - Founder, Heartland 2050 Vision Committee, MENTOR - National Spokesperson.

**Taylor Royal:** Website: <http://www.taylorjroyal.com>. Occupation: Financial Services. Education: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bachelor of Science in Business Administration: Finance & Accounting, Southern Methodist University Masters of Science in Accounting: Tax Concentration, Certified Public Accountant. Volunteer experience: Watermark Community Church, Dallas, TX-- Community Group Leader and Sunday School Group Leader Dan D. Rogers Elementary (DISD), Dallas, TX-- After school reading volunteer for ESL students Citylight Church, Omaha, NE-- Citygroup Leader.

**Jean Stothert:** Website: <http://jeanstothert.com>. Current public office, dates held: Mayor, City of Omaha - Sworn in June, 2013. Past public office, dates held: Councilmember, Omaha City Council, 2009 - 2013, Member, Millard Board of Education 1997 - 2008. Occupation: Mayor, City of Omaha. Education: B.S. degree in Nursing, Seattle Pacific University. Volunteer experience: Millard Board of Education, NE Medical Guild, Metropolitan Area Planning Authority, League of Municipalities, American Nurses Association, Salvation Army Board of Directors, NE Humane Society Friend, South Omaha Business Association, Millard Rotary.

## **WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE ISSUES YOU FEEL MUST BE ADDRESSED IN THE NEXT FOUR YEARS AND HOW WILL YOU DO SO?**

**Christopher N. Geary:** 1. Economic Growth - Omaha's economic future depends on attracting new industrial development and new jobs. By using all methods possible, I will work to bring new development to the city. The use of Tiff Funding for new developments is one way to attract investment to our city. 2. Crime - The time & manner in which to change a culture is to reach the young people. We need to develop programs in our schools and community where Police Officers get to engage our kids and their parents in constructive conversation. The kids will get to know the officers as someone to trust instead of fear, someone to run to and not from. 3. Taxes - Taxpayer dollars should be first spent to keep our city safe. The police and fire departments must be at full strength while reigning in the costs through better contract negotiations. City streets are in need of major repairs, the budget needs to address this constant issue.

**Heath Mello:** My three top priorities as Omaha's next Mayor are to modernize our transportation and infrastructure; to reinvent City Hall to build the economy of the future; and to reduce crime in all zip codes. To address maintenance for our current roads and to develop a 21st Century transportation system, I've proposed an "Omaha Infrastructure Bank" that would serve as a public-private partnership financing mechanism. Second, Omaha faces a chronic lack of vision in planning for the future of our economy. We must capitalize on our innovation-driven higher education institutions and growing entrepreneurial ecosystem and startup community. Through collaborative partnerships, the metropolitan area could become a national leader in creating and supporting 21st Century jobs in advanced industries. Thirdly, in all corners of the city, I hear concerns about crime. We must build on our 21st Century policing techniques, including data analytics and predictive software, and body-worn cameras for every officer. An independent staffing analysis will help improve response times. Most importantly, we must address the root causes of crime, such as lack of access to living wage jobs, affordable housing, and reliable transportation.

**Ean Mikale:** E3 - Education, Entrepreneurship, and Emerging Technologies are the three biggest issues we will address. We will create a world-class educational system. We will create an oasis for the development, retention, and attraction of high-skilled talent. Also, we will diversify our local economy and create high-wage jobs, through strategic investments in emerging technologies. In the educational sector, we will focus on creating a high quality early childhood educational environment, providing increased funding, resources, and collaboration with early childcare centers and in-home providers. We will create technology apprenticeship programs, support existing and expansive programs for the trades, and implement character development within the schools. In order to compete globally, attract innovative and growing startups, Fortune 500 Companies, and to organically grow hometown businesses into the next Fortune 500 companies, we will provide unprecedented access to capital and mentoring for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs. We will diversify our economy into emerging sectors, such as commercial drones, Bitcoin, Virtual & Augmented Reality, Artificial Intelligence, and other high-growth sectors with positive job-outlooks in 25 years.

**Taylor Royal:** Restoring and Revitalizing North Omaha – There is so much untapped potential all around our city. It is time that City Hall joins other stakeholders to restore & revitalize our community. I will office in North Omaha two days a week to promote public-private partnerships & encourage investment from our business community to North Omaha. I will promote skills initiatives & technical training in our high schools, & help create a pathway of success towards meaningful careers for our young men & woman through strategic partnerships with our business community. Modernizing City Services – Our local government's delivery of city services to taxpayers is oftentimes inefficient & costly. We need to manage & operate our local government like a business by creating an effectively-managed outsourcing initiative. This initiative will allow us to find strategic opportunities to drive down costs & improve the quality, scale, & efficiency of city services to taxpayers. Reducing the Omaha Tax Burden – We will better steward taxpayer resources & systematically remove the restaurant tax by 25% each year over 4 years. I will remove the pesky parking meter tax during nights & weekends to encourage community activity & patronage downtown.

**Jean Stothert:** I believe the three most important issues facing Omaha are improving public safety, ensuring our transportation systems are well maintained, modern, and safe, and, keeping taxes as low as

possible while providing the highest quality city services that taxpayers deserve. Our relentless and daily focus on public safety has included the addition of 56 new police officers and restructuring of some police department operations. We are making progress. Omaha's homicide rate at the end of 2016 was the lowest in 13 years and gun assaults are down. My vision for the future of transportation in Omaha and the metro is to provide reliable, safe, efficient and well-managed transportation systems that move residents, employees, and commerce across a wide variety of transit modes. The City of Omaha will soon have doubled the amount of funding dedicated to street resurfacing and repair since I first took office four years ago. Finally, an ongoing challenge in Nebraska is our level of taxation, especially compared to neighboring states; those with whom we compete for economic development opportunities. We have lowered Omaha's tax rate twice since I've been mayor. Our first tax cut was the first property tax rate reduction in 14 years.

## **WHAT STEPS SHOULD THE CITY OF OMAHA TAKE TO EXPAND ECONOMIC GROWTH?**

**Christopher N. Geary:** I would work with businesses and educational training facilities to provide the necessary training programs to fulfill the needs of local employers. When the two come together it will produce a ready-day-one work-force that will make businesses more profitable. That will in turn, improve the lives of workers and benefit the city with increased tax revenue from the economic prosperity.

**Heath Mello:** Our goal should be to foster a culture that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation, and gives start-up businesses the freedom they need to succeed. We must assist, as a city, the small businesses and entrepreneurs that drive so much of our local economic growth. This begins with embracing an "economic gardening" approach to help our existing small businesses with innovative technical assistance and market research. Our city also has a unique opening to capitalize on our manufacturing industry that must continue to be an economic driver in a rapidly changing economy. Proactively working to develop productive relationships between emerging and existing businesses and City Hall is key to our city's growth and economic development.

**Ean Mikale:** The G.R.E.E.N. Plan stands for Green Zones, Rail (Light), Electric Energy, and Net Zero. We will create Green Zones in our city, which will harbor organic food stores, juice bars, eco-friendly small and startup-businesses, and LEED as well as Living Certified Buildings. For half of what it will cost to build an electric car system from TD Ameritrade to Midtown, we will build a light rail system from Downtown Omaha to the front Gates of Memorial Stadium. Next, we will save taxpayers \$200 Million over 10 years, and \$1 Billion over the next 50 years by converting the 5000 city-owned vehicles into electric and placing an array of Wind Turbines on city land. We will create net-zero communities, saving residents from paying utilities period.

**Taylor Royal:** I firmly believe that stewarding our city better will initiate and spark economic growth. We need to work hard to restore and revitalize North Omaha, modernize city services, better steward taxpayer resources, and overhaul our road maintenance processes. Omaha already has first-class people – with incredible diversity and unmatched hospitality. These initiatives will allow us to 'show off' our city and match our residents' greatness with a better-managed city. This mentality, partnered with a Mayor who has a vision & strategy to promote Omaha to outside businesses and millennials is vital to expanding our City's footprint.

**Jean Stothert:** An ongoing challenge and opportunity for any city is job creation and neighborhood development, especially in our urban core. More jobs and better opportunities have a positive effect on public safety, civic engagement, housing opportunities, and Omaha families. We are strongly supporting job training and work initiatives that create opportunity such as the Greater Omaha Chamber's REACH program for small and disadvantaged companies, Heartland Workforce Solutions, and the Step-Up Summer Jobs program. In terms of general economic development, we benefit from growth among our young professional and young family communities, enhancing the city's transportation system, reducing tax rates, and leveraging civic partnerships.

## **ARE THERE SERVICES OR OPERATIONS THAT YOU THINK THE CITY AND COUNTY SHOULD CONSIDER MERGING AND WHY?**

**Christopher N. Geary:** There are many services that could be combined. One they were trying is the Crime Lab, but that didn't pan out. I believe that 911 services are something they are working on. Looking into the combination of any services the city could combine with the county would be a priority that could save taxpayers money. Anything that we can do to lower the cost of city and county government would be good for the taxpayers in both Omaha and the county.

**Heath Mello:** I would look to merge individual services through a consensus-building approach. Anything less than having consensus on any merged service will make it almost impossible to achieve the desired results for both the city and the county. I believe the City of Omaha and Douglas County should be constantly evaluating opportunities to merge similar services that affect the same taxpayers. However, since I believe any merged service should be done through consensus, I do not believe the City of Omaha or Douglas County should try to unilaterally try to take over each other's responsibilities. This "my way or the highway" approach is detrimental to building a positive working relationship between city and county offices and employees.

**Ean Mikale:** Will conduct a strategic assessment of city and county services, in order to determine which services are duplicative, which are in need of modernizing, and which are in need of expansion by updating the city Master Plan within the first 90 days of taking office. The City Master Plan guides future land use and community vision as a legally binding document. The Master Plan is required by law to be updated every 10 years. The current Master Plan has not been updated in 30 years. In 1990, Windows 3.0 came out. We will bring every community together to incorporate the collective vision for the city into a Modern Document, which will assess current and future needs, with genuine guidance and collaboration with average hard-working citizens.

**Taylor Royal:** Modernizing City Planning – Neighborhood developers long ago shortcut on proper development of our infrastructure and some of our City's main thoroughfares (144th, 156th, 168th, and 180th from Fort Street to Dodge) should have been four-lane roads from the beginning. It is crazy that we put in two-lane roads and inconvenience 50K+ people by tearing out the roads and putting in four lanes that should have been there from the beginning. Contrast this approach with Des Moines' planning. Des Moines builds four-lane roads and the infrastructure to the middle of nowhere because they have a vision and a strategy to grow their city. Adopting a growth-oriented city planning mentality will save taxpayer resources and transportation headaches.

**Jean Stothert:** One specific area of merger and cooperation that I strongly support is to merge the existing crime labs operated by the Omaha Police Department and the Douglas County Sheriff's Office. Although there is currently good cooperation, more can and should be done to improve these services to taxpayers. I have been advocating for a merged and accredited, full service crime lab at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Campus. This has been supported by the Douglas County attorney, the Omaha Police chief, and several local public officials. The savings could be significant from operating one crime lab with one management structure, one location, and centralized laboratory equipment.

## **CITY COUNCIL**

### **District 1**

**Paul Anderson:** Website: <http://PaulAnderson4citycouncil.com>. Current public office, dates held: None. Past public office, dates held: None. Occupation: Retired Railroader Retired US Navy Reserve. Education: High School Diploma Kensington Ks. 1971. Currently working on an associate degree in construction at MCC. Military: 20 Years retired US Navy Reserve, 2004 Mobilized to Iraq, 2005 Mobilized to Hurricane Katrina Relief Effort. Volunteer experience: Habitat for Humanity, DAV VA Hospital (Driver), Salvation Army (Bus Driver), American Red Cross (Donate Blood).

**Pete Festersen:** Website: <http://www.petefestersen.com>. Current public office, dates held: Omaha City Council, 2009-Present City Council President, 2013-2015. Past public office, dates held: Omaha Planning

Board, 2005-2009. Occupation: Vice President, CHI Health. Education: B.A. Connecticut College Master of Public Administration, University of Nebraska at Omaha. Volunteer experience: Board of Directors - State Chamber of Commerce, State Trauma Board, NE Early Childhood Collaborative, Omaha Children's Museum, College World Series, Inc, Omaha By Design, Benson-Ames Alliance, Ak-Sar-Ben Future Trust.

**Grant Sturek:** Website: <http://grantsturek.com>. Occupation: Student. Education: Omaha Central High School University of Nebraska-Omaha.

### District 2

**Tanya Cooper:** Current public office, dates held: none. Past public office, dates held: none. Occupation: Billing and Subscriptions Omaha Star. Education: Associates from the Art Institute of Colorado in Music Video Business 1997, BFA Multi-media from the University of Colorado Denver 2008, Leadership Program Chamber Connect Class of 2011. Military: none. Volunteer experience: President - OIC Neighborhood Association, Board member 24th Street Corridor, Board member Douglass Project-community initiative "Activate85", Chair - Nebraska Black Chamber of Commerce 2014-16 Creator of Youth Economic Summit for teens 13 - 17yrs.

**Gwen Easter:** No response received.

**Krystal Gabel:** Website: <http://www.facebook.com/krystalgabel>. Past public office, dates held: candidate for MUD Board, November 2016. Occupation: Community Activist and Technical Writer. Education: BA in Writing. Volunteer experience: Co-owner and volunteer at the South Omaha Community Peace Garden, a free-food green space. Volunteer petitioner and notary for Legal Marijuana Now and Nebraska Green parties.

**Ben Gray:** Website: <http://votebengray.com>. Current public office, dates held: Omaha City Council June 2009-present. Occupation: City Councilman. Education: 3 years college. Military: 6 years United States Air Force. Volunteer experience: Gang Intervention, Our Healthy Kids Alliance, NAACP, Empowerment Network, African American Achievement Council.

**Maurice Jones:** Website: <http://www.MauriceOmaha.com>.

**Bradley Whitmore Jr.:** Website: <http://bwhitmorefordist2.wixsite.com/bradfordist2>. Current public office, dates held: NONE. Past public office, dates held: NONE. Occupation: Emergency Medical Helicopter Communication. Education: Omaha Westside 1997 Highland CC Highland, KS CNA/CMA, Social Services Designee Town and Country EMS, EMT. Military: NONE. Volunteer experience: UNMC 1994-1997 3,000 hours.

**Dennis Womack:** No response received.

### District 3

**Gilbert Ayala:** Current public office, dates held: n/a. Occupation: Currently work 4 jobs. Education: Univ. of Texas El Paso Bachelors in political science. Minor in history. Military: na. Volunteer experience: volunteer at my church.

**D'Shawn Cunningham:** No response received.

**Mark Elworth Jr.:** Current public office, dates held: Acting State Chairperson Legal Marijuana NOW Party of Nebraska. Past public office, dates held: 2016 Legal Marijuana NOW Party Vice-Presidential Candidate. Occupation: Freelancer. Education: Westside High School, University of Omaha- Fine Arts, Colorado School of Real Estate. Military: Warrior in the War on Drugs. Volunteer experience: Operator of the Peace Garden of South Omaha (community garden), Volunteer Petitioner for Marijuana and Green Party.

**JR Jasso:** No response received.

**Chris Jerram:** Website: <http://chrisjerram.com>. Current public office, dates held: Omaha City Councilmember- District 3 2009 to present. Past public office, dates held: Omaha City Councilmember,

2009-present Omaha City Council Vice President, 2015 to present. Occupation: Attorney, Chris Jerram Law. Education: Juris Doctor, Creighton Univ School of Law 1991, BA Ohio Wesleyan Univ 1987. Volunteer experience: Douglas County Board of Health, Durham Museum Board of Directors, Governor's Council to Keep Nebraska Beautiful, Morton Meadows Neighborhood Assoc., Holy Cross Church, School & Booster Club, Omaha Zoning Board of Appeals. Mercy High School.

#### **District 4**

**Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan:** Website: <http://www.voterebecca2017.com>. Current public office, dates held: N/A. Past public office, dates held: N/A. Occupation: Wife, Mother, Nana, Friend, Neighbor, Community Leader. Education: Graduated South High 1976 College credits, Iowa Western, Metro Tech. Military: I am Pro Veteran and a member of the Patriot Guard Rider and have several family members who are currently serving in the arm forces, including a Grandson. Volunteer experience: Founder of Burlington Road Neighborhood Association since 2003 Founder of This Is Your Neighborhood, an Anti-Gang and Graffiti Program Nebraska's Heart for Missing Children/A Hand To Hold, The Amber Harris Project.

**Vinny Palermo:** No response received.

**Jim Rogers:** Website: <http://votejimrogers.com>. Current public office, dates held: NA. Past public office, dates held: NA. Occupation: Food and beverage. Education: Attended Holy Ghost School, Gross High School; Graduated from Bryan High School and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Military: NA. Volunteer experience: Sienna Francis House; Habitat for Humanity; annual Labor Day parade; Building Trades Annual Chili-cook-off, which raises money for youth scholarships; Salvation Army; for the City of Omaha during the flood of 2011; and for American Legion Post 216.

#### **District 5**

**Rich Pahls:** No response received.

#### **District 6**

**Brinker Harding:** No response received.

**Dwite Pedersen:** Website: <http://DwitePedersen.com>. Current public office, dates held: NA. Past public office, dates held: Nebraska State Senator, 1993-2008; Learning Community Coordinating Council, 2009-2012. Occupation: Alcohol & Drug Counselor. Education: Bachelor's Degree in Counseling from Doane College, 1995. Military: NA. Volunteer experience: Former member, Boys Town Volunteer Fire Department; Volunteers with Omaha homeless shelters; Active Tom Osborne Teammate.

#### **District 7**

**Aimee Melton:** Please see [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) for candidate response.

**Brian Thommes:** Website: <http://brianthommes.com>. Occupation: QT Store Manager. Education: Bachelors of Continuing Studies, University of Nebraska, Omaha. Masters of Management, University of Phoenix. Volunteer experience: President of the OGLBT Sports League.

**WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE ISSUES YOU FEEL MUST BE ADDRESSED IN THE NEXT FOUR YEARS AND HOW WILL YOU DO SO?**

#### **District 1**

**Paul Anderson:** Taxes - The state of Nebraska, as I understand, ranks in the top ten in the nation as to what "we the people" pay in our taxes. In my view it is the leading reason for the "brain drain" and why many retiree's leave the state! As a councilman, I pledge and promise, I will work with the council, mayor, and the legislature to abolish the restaurant tax. Cross Roads Mall - As a councilman I will work with the owner, city council, and the mayor in getting this redevelopment project underway. Streets - I'm certain

that improvements can be made as to how our tax payers dollars are spent on building new streets, and keeping them maintained.

**Pete Festersen:** My top priority has always been keeping our neighborhoods safe and strong. I have done so by focusing on public safety improvements such as adding police officers and passing a property crime ordinance to deter burglaries and theft; focusing on the city's finances such as balancing our budgets, pressing for pension reform and cutting property taxes; and focusing on community development such as the renovation of the Dundee, Benson and Florence Business Districts. In addition to these top three issues, I think we must focus on addressing our street maintenance and transportation needs, the demolition of condemned properties, and the poverty and economic disparities that exist in our community over the next four years.

**Grant Sturek:** 1. High property taxes are literally taxing people out of their homes. If elected, I will work to replace the city property taxes with income and excise taxes, lowering the cost of living for the people of Omaha. 2. Last year, violent crime increased by 2%. I will work to partner the city with school districts and community organizations to keep kids off of the streets and reduce the systemic poverty that leads to criminal behavior. 3. Omaha has no laws restricting the amount of money that candidates for local office can accept from individual donors, leaving us vulnerable to having our democratic institutions suppressed by profit-motivated political machines. I will place a cap on campaign contributions in local elections.

### District 2

**Tanya Cooper:** 1. Streets – the plan is to work with the legislature pushing for the use of funding from the gas tax which is approximately \$13 million dollars per year to improve streets across the city. Streets are a problem in every area of town and this is one solution that could benefit all Omahan's. 2. Economic growth and talent retention – by reducing the tax burden for new businesses and increasing loan opportunities Omaha can become more competitive to those who want to stay here and create industry. These entrepreneurs will attract more talent, as their business grows. 3. Crime reduction – To reduce crime there must be alternatives. The creation of jobs is key, but there has to be better adult education to prepare a person for those jobs.

**Gwen Easter:** No response received.

**Krystal Gabel:** Board transparency - I want to implement a blog (or similar tool) to communicate what is happening behind the scenes and in meetings, provide updates on action items, and encourage residents to participate in the conversation. Improve public spaces - Public spaces for all residents to share discourages crime, violence, and drug use. We need to build rec centers, implement free city-wide Wi-Fi, open public community gardens, and plant more trees. Give small business and non-profits the space to open, grow and succeed - Remodeling abandoned buildings into small business cooperatives will grow District 2 and Omaha from within. If more local businesses were given space to incubate and succeed, we could reduce reported/unreported unemployment.

**Ben Gray:** Unemployment: Provide more resources to Heartland Workforce Solutions to address the hard core unemployed. continue to encourage more investment by businesses in North Omaha bringing more jobs. Continue supporting "Step Up" summer jobs. Problem properties and bad Landlords: Work on a Landlord registry, build on the Land Bank, More prosecution of Slum Landlords. Gang Violence: Support the work of YOUTURN the new gang intervention organization. Continue the work of the 360 violence prevention group. Continue to build police community relations.

**Maurice Jones:** As a representative of my community on the City Council, considering development in the facets of living, I would put Food Access and meeting Basic Needs as my first items to prioritize. Food is essential to life. Access to fresh, healthy foods rich in nutrients is important. The City can promote such access, and further planning and development should take careful consideration of meeting these Basic Needs. When we find our community members in Suitable Housing, then we know we've accomplished a basic tenant of being together. I sincerely believe that it is in everyone's interest that the City remain vigilant in providing Shelter. We should increase funding for incubator programs for small business and communal ventures.

**Bradley Whitmore Jr.:** Improving the Image of North Omaha and destroying the negative stigma that North O is a dangerous place to live/visit. I will do this by Removing trash and weeds from empty lots, eliminating abandon properties, and initiating neighborhood improvement projects. I will also seize every opportunity to sell the good in North Omaha to the rest of the city. There is way more good going on than bad. Continue and accelerate the improvement of infrastructure. Specifically our streets are long over due for an overhaul. I will fight to direct more money and resources to our neighborhoods. We will not be overlooked anymore. Crime control. Crime needs to be better controlled. We can do this by getting our police and leaders on board and fight!

**Dennis Womack:** No response received.

### District 3

**Gilbert Ayala:** Lower taxes, lower government spending, and less business regulation from the city. I will implement this by being very forceful about this with fellow members of the city council.

**D'Shawn Cunningham:** No response received.

**Mark Elworth Jr.:** 1.fix the streets. 2. improve education. 3. build free wi-fi network

**JR Jasso:** No response received.

**Chris Jerram:** 1. We must keep our neighborhoods safe and strong by continuing to support our police and fire departments and neighborhood and community groups. We now have 860 police, 100 more than when I was elected. As our city's population grows, we must continue our commitments in these areas. 2. We must continue our efforts to keep Omaha an affordable place to live by responsibly managing our budget. We have reduced the city property tax mill levy rate in 2 of the last 4 years. We must make sure we develop and maintain affordable housing options. 3. We must continue our city's economic development and job growth with opportunity for all Omahans. We must now expand on our new pilot programs helping the poor and unemployed find good paying jobs.

### District 4

**Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan:** Public Safety is always #1, Police and Fire Departments in Omaha, should have all equipment necessary to do their job safely. Taxes and fee's should be a ballot issue, when it comes to high cost like the Omaha Combine Sewer Overflow Project. I am the only Candidate that sat on this CSO Advisory Committee. These Unfunded Mandates put pressure on each of the 770+ cities in America. With high costs to fix old Omaha CSO problems. we should take care of our homeowners, they need a break as we pay for clean water! In our community, I have always lobbied for quality of life issues, I will continue to fight for equity throughout Omaha for District 4.

**Jim Rogers:** 1. Ensure all neighborhoods receive our fair share when it comes to city services. For example, we need to pave neighborhood streets when they look more like something from 1917 than 2017. 2. I have faith that we can grow our local economy by expanding on tourism. District 4 already has a top attraction in the Zoo. But we should also promote the rich diversity of our cultural heritages, similar to major ethnic festivals hosted in other great American cities. All taxpayers will benefit when we expand our economy. 3. We can continue to prepare for the future, by educating our workforce for a changing economy and the jobs of tomorrow. The City should continue to cooperate with our learning institutions in promoting job training.

**Vinny Palermo:** No response received.

### District 5

**Rich Pahls:** No response received.

### District 6

**Brinker Harding:** No response received.

**Dwite Pedersen:** Infrastructure. We must find a way to better address poor conditions for residential streets throughout Omaha. Public Safety. We must make sure we have efficient and effective response to emergency calls for Police, Fire and Rescue services. This includes all Omaha neighborhoods, including those annexed in recent years. Economic Development. To remain a vibrant City and not place undue tax burdens on retired homeowners, we need to promote economic development that creates new and better jobs and grows our local economy. In turn, this economic growth will also increase opportunities for our children and grandchildren to find career opportunities here in Omaha.

### District 7

**Aimee Melton:** Please see Vote411.org for candidate response.

**Brian Thommes:** The issues that I see as needing to be addressed are: 1) Sustainable economic development: we cannot predict the future, however, we must work with developers to build mixed-use developments that work to enhance the area that they are in. 2) Long term infrastructure growth and improvement: we need to look for ways to improve overall city services for the community, roads, police fire, and transportation 3) Keeping young people in Omaha: we have some amazing colleges and universities in the metro that are nurturing our youth. We need to leverage Omaha's advantages to bring businesses into Omaha and work with our universities and colleges to identify potential startups, that as a city, we can promote and invest in for our future.

## **WHAT STEPS SHOULD THE CITY OF OMAHA TAKE TO EXPAND ECONOMIC GROWTH?**

### District 1

**Paul Anderson:** In my view, the only step that will expand economic growth here in Omaha and across the state of Nebraska is to get something done about our high taxes! I'm convinced, this is the key reason Con Agra moved their headquarters to Chicago. Our high taxes in Omaha, and Nebraska, discourage many business's in bringing their corporation here.

**Pete Festersen:** The City of Omaha should continue its collaborative approach with the Omaha Chamber of Commerce to retain and attract new business to our city in an aggressive manner. We should also work with the development community to encourage projects that enhance our built environment and that are attractive to young professionals so we can recruit the workforce we need to be successful in the future. At the neighborhood level, I'd like to see the public-private model we created in the Dundee, Benson, and Florence Business Districts continue throughout the city in areas such as Blackstone, Old Millard, Elkhorn, and Vinton. If we are to achieve our true economic potential, however, we must also address our economic disparities.

**Grant Sturek:** We need to be more proactive about attracting businesses and young people to our city. Many people of my generation think that Omaha is too boring, which causes them to move elsewhere, which in turn causes businesses to avoid Omaha because there aren't enough young, educated people in the labor market. I will create a partnership between the city government, local businesses, and community organizations to hold Omaha career fairs at colleges and universities around the Midwest. Graduating college seniors need jobs, and local businesses need talent. This effort will grow our economic base, diversify our economy, and create more service jobs for non-college graduates.

### District 2

**Tanya Cooper:** 1. The City needs to have volunteer requirements for people who are unemployed. By volunteering a person learns what they are good at and gains valuable skills they can use elsewhere. 2. Start teaching children 13–17 about banking, entrepreneurship, and investing. Young people are innovative thinkers, and Omaha can only prosper by encouraging that innovation.

**Gwen Easter:** No response received.

**Krystal Gabel:** We expand growth by focusing on education and our people before they move out of state to better opportunities. To keep our people in Omaha, we must prioritize education, build public recreation centers, open community gardens, and improve parks, among other community-focused initiatives. Additionally, we must make big-box corporations pay their taxes, and lower taxes for small businesses through TIFs and community cooperatives.

**Ben Gray:** Many steps are already being taken. Among them, supporting more development especially east of 72nd street, giving the Convention and Visitors Bureau more tools to be competitive in the open market, supporting for profit and not for profit home builders to increase our affordable housing stock. The more property we can put back on the tax roles the better for economic growth.

**Maurice Jones:** My top priority is to invest in the infrastructure of Omaha. Noting that the U.S. President, and many candidates and government office-holders support our country spending up to \$1 Trillion in our roads and bridges and upkeep, then I find it imperative that I be an advocate to bring those funds to Omaha. I will prod all our federal representatives to bring those monies to Nebraska. Moreover, Omaha is an expansive city that 's hard to conveniently travel if you do not have a car. This is an active monetary and physical barrier for many, but especially for citizens of North Omaha. As a way to bring in competitive work and career opportunities, Omaha needs a skilled workforce. One important aspect of this is to have a well-educated labor pool.

**Bradley Whitmore Jr.:** As your city council person I will stay in close contact with commercial real estate firms, the chamber of commerce, and other agencies to identify potential new business and market our area.

**Dennis Womack:** No response received.

### **District 3**

**Gilbert Ayala:** Lower taxes, lower government spending and less business regulation from the city. If this is done the city will prosper. The city needs to get out of the way of budding new business and with our current business operators.

**D'Shawn Cunningham:** No response received.

**Mark Elworth Jr.:** 1. Lower taxes for small business, families, and individuals. 2. Improve education. 3. Improve infrastructure. 4. Improve parks and recreation centers. 5. Create Community Business Co-op Centers, re-purpose old retail space into malls for small local business, give local people a place to start and grow their own businesses

**JR Jasso:** No response received.

**Chris Jerram:** Our district is a leader in our city's growth. I regularly meet with people to promote Downtown & Midtown. Aksarben Village had 3 buildings under construction in 2009. We are now nearing build out there and HDR's HQ is on underway. We have many, many parking lots in Downtown and Midtown. These are valuable properties and represent opportunities for redevelopment which can add large property tax base. We should also continue to invest in sensible public-private partnerships like with UNMC, which is creating nearly 2,000 high paying jobs and millions in development. Vision 2050 is another great opportunity for major growth in Downtown and Midtown, from Saddle Creek (Former Omaha Steel Castings site) to Creighton and North of Downtown.

### **District 4**

**Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan:** Economic Growth is very important to a community. Having had a successful business, I know first hand what it takes and the hardship that small businesses face. We in on the City Council should be lobbying for advance technology to grow our businesses and build our local neighborhoods. Helping with more neighborhood grants, to better the quality of life in every part of

Omaha. Build on families, and they will stay, build on business and will grow and make our city is Stronger! No new taxes or fee's unless there is a city emergency.

**Jim Rogers:** Job training remains a key component as we build a strong workforce that can meet the needs of business and industry. We can continue and expand the team approach of Omaha's business, labor and government sectors to develop and promote sensible incentives that help existing businesses to grow and convince new businesses to locate in our community. Those incentives should be tied to the creation of new and better jobs. City tools such as Tax Increment Financing can help revitalize our neighborhood business districts while also growing economic and employment opportunities.

**Vinny Palermo:** No response received.

#### District 5

**Rich Pahls:** No response received.

#### District 6

**Brinker Harding:** No response received.

**Dwite Pedersen:** Omahans have an excellent work ethic and we must match that productivity with the educational and training opportunities to prepare our workforce for new jobs in our ever-changing economy. The City of Omaha should continue to work with investors willing to grow or locate their business operations in our community. Wise choices in applying incentives such as tax increment financing can pay great dividends in terms of immediate job growth and long-term expansion of the property tax base.

#### District 7

**Aimee Melton:** Please see [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) for candidate response.

**Brian Thommes:** Omaha needs to embrace a long-term strategic plan to bring all areas of the city together. Build faster, permanent transportation routes that people can rely on to get to work. We need to ensure that all citizens are earning a living wage so that they can afford to live in the city. We should promote tourism. We should work to revitalize neighborhoods that have been overlooked for the last decade.

### **ARE THERE SERVICES OR OPERATIONS THAT YOU THINK THE CITY AND COUNTY SHOULD CONSIDER MERGING AND WHY?**

#### District 1

**Paul Anderson:** I support merging the Douglas county crime lab with Omaha's crime lab. This merged lab should be located at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. This merger would pool tax payers dollars of Douglas county and the state of Nebraska. This would create a "cutting edge" crime lab that could be used by all law enforcement agencies across the state! Simply put, this would be the "common sense" solution to this issue.

**Pete Festersen:** I am a proponent of city-county merger and have been directly involved in the merging of services in the areas of convention and tourism, information technology, and purchasing. I have also been a proponent of full city-county merger given the city's planning jurisdiction and population now cover a large percentage of Douglas County. In absence of full scale merger, however, I favor continued progress on the functional mergers that have the potential to improve service to the citizens and save taxpayer resources such as a joint city-county crime lab.

**Grant Sturek:** There is definitely an unnecessary level of overlap between many city and county services, but I will not commit to merging any city and county services until I have access to cost-benefit analyses to determine whether such proposals are prudent. Policy proposals ought to be based on reliable data, and at

this time I do not have the necessary information to support or oppose the prospect of merging any particular county and city operations.

### District 2

**Tanya Cooper:** 1. The city and county should consider merging OPPD and MUD to create a Public Service type entity with one fee and lower costs. Residents are currently seeing fees on their bills that exceed service usage with no explanation of fees. Late fees are placed on seniors who do not receive checks in time to pay their bills. The city of Omaha can do better by its' residents.

**Gwen Easter:** No response received.

**Krystal Gabel:** Residents and public officials are struggling to maintain basic City services - from bad roads and bridges to public school defunding from the State. Merging services or operations with the County forces our resources to extend even further and is a distraction from other Board obligations. Let's focus on what we have here in Omaha before we cover County areas.

**Ben Gray:** If we are talking about merger to save money I not convinced any merger will do that. If we are talking about eliminating duplication of services merging the crime labs should happen so that one source is responsible for everything and the chain of evidence in a case is not compromised.

**Maurice Jones:** The City and County governments work well for their interest and their citizens. One item I would want to look at is health-care services and how both City and County can work together to provide comprehensive medical care. At a time of uncertain health-care coverage and lack thereof, I find it crucial that we are creative and resourceful to seek solutions to maintaining the health of individuals in the community.

**Bradley Whitmore Jr.:** At this time I do not think there are any. However I will research this.

**Dennis Womack:** No response received.

### District 3

**Gilbert Ayala:** Merge any departments if their is substantial savings.

**D'Shawn Cunningham:** No response received.

**Mark Elworth Jr.:** No, it's too expensive for our city to over reach and cover rural areas.

**JR Jasso:** No response received.

**Chris Jerram:** Several years ago, I joined with then State Senator Brad Ashford in calling for the merger of the city and county crime labs. I continue to believe that reasonable people can reach solutions that makes financial and operational sense. Another area I have suggested for discussion is the possibility of merging county sheriff patrol officers into city police patrol officer positions. We will soon have a 5th police precinct covering the far west areas of our city and it makes sense to explore. We also should be discussing merging city and county planning departments and preparing a longer term dialogue to study merging the county engineering office with the city public works department. As our city grows, we must continuously consider this.

### District 4

**Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan:** Lots of talk on this subject, as a student of Crime Scene Investigation, I know that technology and it's advancement on DNA could make or break a case. It is important to me to look more at why, things are the way they are. When I am there, it is for the people, District 4 and Omaha as a whole to keep our community safe. I am for merging the City of Omaha and Douglas County Crime Lab, I hope we on the City Council will collaborate to bring these two entities together so we could be good stewards of taxpayer monies.

**Jim Rogers:** I thought the Crime Lab was an intriguing opportunity to explore potential improvements, cooperation and efficiency between City and County governments. But mergers can be complex and require elected officials to get beyond politics. We also must be aware that not all merger proposals would actually save tax dollars or improve the delivery of essential services to taxpayers. There have been effective functional mergers in the past, but we should not engage in mergers just for the sake of merging. They need to make sense both in delivering better service and doing so with greater cost efficiency.

**Vinny Palermo:** No response received.

**District 5**

**Rich Pahls:** No response received.

**District 6**

**Brinker Harding:** No response received.

**Dwite Pedersen:** Merger is always worthy of consideration, but primarily if it saves tax dollars and continues to deliver efficient and effective services to taxpayers. Closing the city jail, merging city and county park services, combining computer services between the City and County are proven examples. We can also enter inter-local agreements to share facilities or services even when we don't have a full merger of certain functions. One example might be locating a potential new police precinct at Douglas County property in West Omaha. Our goal should be to provide the quality of service taxpayers deserve and find cost savings and relief for taxpayers when that is possible.

**District 7**

**Aimee Melton:** Please see [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) for candidate response.

**Brian Thommes:** Anytime that Omaha and the county can combine services and save money by merging is a benefit. However, this cannot happen at the expense of anyone's safety. Without researching more in depth, I cannot completely answer this question.

The League of Women Voters contacts candidates during each election cycle and invites them to participate in the print and online editions of the Voters' Guide. Candidates provide their biographical information and their positions on selected issues. Candidates are aware in advance that the biographies and answers will be printed exactly as submitted without edits for content, spelling, punctuation or grammar.

All citizens over the age of 16 are invited to membership in the League of Women Voters. Dues for first time members are \$45. Please check our website for more information.

Note: In an effort to reduce our print footprint, this is the last time the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha will produce a print version of the Voters' Guide. Please visit **[OmahaLWV.org](http://OmahaLWV.org)** or **[Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org)** for responses to additional questions and printable content for your voting district.

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