

**CFF Candidate Questionnaire
Mayor and City Council Candidates
November 2019 Election
(2 year Term)**

Name: Dennis Whittie

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Please provide responses to the following prompts:

- Describe your community involvement.
 - I am a 4th generation Ferndalian. My great-grandfather, Felix Witkowski, immigrated from Poland, met my Great Grandmother, Bethel, in Tennessee, and they settled in Ferndale before it was a city (early 1900's). My grandmother and mother were raised in Ferndale.

After being a Ferndale resident for over 34 years, I was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Ferndale City Council in August 2019. Prior to this, I have been active within the Ferndale community including being a member of the Fiscal Review Advisory Committee, the Budget Recommendation Committee, and various community ballot initiatives.

Outside of local government, I support our community while volunteering for organizations including FernCare, Ferndale Pride, Dream Cruise, the former Fern-Ridge Environmental Coalition, and Lakeshore Legal Aid's Family Law Assistance Project.

- Why did you decide to run for City Council/Mayor? What has prepared you to hold a City Council/Mayor seat?
 - While I have wanted to serve on our local city council for years, I decided to run only after completing all of my education so that I would be best prepared for the position. When I learned that Ferndale was undergoing many changes including department heads being changed and elected officials deciding not to seek re-election, I believed that this was the best time to run for this position. Subsequent to qualifying for the ballot, a council seat was vacated. I sought and received the appointment as a council member until the end of the year.

My preparation for this position includes my education and experience.

Regarding education, after graduating from Ferndale High School, I earned the following degrees: Master of Public Administration (Wayne State University), Juris Doctor (WMU-Thomas M. Cooley Law School), Bachelor of Arts, Political Science (Wayne State University), Associate of Applied Science, Criminal Justice (Oakland Community College), and Associate of Liberal Arts (Oakland Community College). Additionally, I hold several certifications through the Department of Homeland Security including HazMat Operations, Incident Command, and Public Information Officer for Crisis Communications.

Regarding experience, I am an attorney who runs my own law practice that provides legal services for indigent persons. I also am an Emergency Management Coordinator through the Henry Ford Health System. Previously, I served as a police officer for over 12 years in the Cities of Hamtramck and River Rouge and served as an Emergency Medical Technician for the City of Detroit and private ambulance companies.

- What is the most productive relationship between Council and the City Manager?
 - The City Council are the policy directors for the city, whereas the City Manager is the Chief Administrative Officer. It is the City Council's duty to enact policy and overall direction, whereas the City Manager and staff carries out those policies and manages the City on a day-to-day basis. The best relationship is one where the City Council permits the City Manager and Department Heads to run their own departments as they are the specialist in their own fields (i.e., the police chief manages law enforcement functions, the city clerk handles elections and records, etc.). On the other hand, City Council must provide oversight of the City Manager and all city departments and services, to be accountable to the residents and business owners. Moreover, the City Council must still be directly responsive to the residents even when tasks are being carried out by the City Manager and City staff.
- When there is disagreement on any issue among members of the City Council what is the responsibility of each individual Council member?
 - It is important for City Council members to keep an open mind and not make a decision hastily without reviewing all of the available information and hearing from the residents and business owners. It is the City Council's duty to talk to each other, the residents, and the staff to make every reasonable effort to obtain information and consider each other's views. While a council member should express their opinions and the reasons for them, they still must keep an open mind during the discussion. It is important for council members to rethink their opinions and should not hesitate to change their mind if they decide their earlier opinion is changed by additional information and discussion. Ultimately, the council members should attempt to compromise to collaboratively find solutions to the issues facing Ferndale. Yet, any action or vote taken must be honest and in good conscience that the council member's vote or action is in the best interest of Ferndale.

- What role do Boards and Commissions play in Ferndale's Government? How should members be recruited/screened?

- Board and Commissions play a critical role in Ferndale's Government. Most are advisory; however, a few hold legal responsibility under state statutes to be decision makers on certain issues (Board of Zoning Appeals, Planning Commission. etc.). The residents who hold these positions are critical to Ferndale's success. Recruitment should be conducted by all forms of communication including social media, the Ferndale website, paper notices, at public city meetings, etc. When a resident requests to be appointed to an available position through an application, the City staff should, first respond and acknowledge receipt of the application, conduct any administrative procedures regarding the application, and then submit the applications to the City Council for decision.

Importantly, even when there are no positions available for a certain Board or Commission, any applicant should, at a minimum, receive a communication that their application was received and explain that there are no vacancies in the position they applied for. In these cases, City staff should hold these applications for consideration when there is an available position open.

Regardless of whether there is an open board or commission position, City staff must communicate with those applicants to acknowledge receipt and advise the applicant of the current status of their application.

- How will you work to promote inclusion of populations that might feel excluded in this community?
 - Fostering an open dialogue and valuing everybody whether they are a resident, business owner, visitor, city employee, or elected official. It is important that we keep an open mind and be accepting of one another. As a City Council Member, I would promote this inclusion by seeking out various opinions facing the city so that our population all feel a part of the community. I recently have done this in the east side of Ferndale when a proposed housing project was proposed. Recently, Councilwoman Raylon Leaks-May and I knocked on every door on the street for feedback. This communication itself permitted those who are not involved in city activities to feel included within the decision-making process for Ferndale.
- Describe the type of development that you see as most beneficial to Ferndale.
 - Development must fit within Ferndale community standards. I see future development that is diverse benefiting Ferndale. While we have plenty of dining and entertainment venues, we could use a hardware store, a pet supply store, or other small businesses.

- What specific ideas do you have for reducing expenditures while maintaining city services?
 - We must be mindful of the resources we have and plan accordingly. Unfortunately, the statutory state shared revenue has been steadily and drastically decreasing as the majority of the state legislature has been balancing the state budget on the backs of local municipalities and residents. Even so, Ferndale, while having hard financial times in the past, has maintained its services in many areas and they have been reduced in others. The City has decreased spending in areas to balance the budget. These reductions were made with resident priorities in mind. I would continue the three-year budgeting that we do and want engage residents to discover what city services are most important to them and then making decisions to balance the budget accordingly. Until I am able to receive that feedback and direction, I would not drastically cut any single budget. On the other hand, when there are revenue reductions, my decisions on which expenditures (i.e., services) to be reduced would be guided by the community's wishes and priorities.

- Describe one program you would champion to help foster community.
 - I would like to take part in informal meetings where residents and business owners meet with City Council members in a setting other than an official City Council meeting. One program the Ferndale Police Department is using are the "meet and greet" events around the city. I would like to expand on this type of format to bring community members together to not only share ideas with the City Council, but also with each other. We make the best decisions when we work together.

On the formal meeting side, as a new council member, I have attempted to include everyone's ideas and get their questions answered. I have pulled an item off of the consent agenda and placed it on the regular agenda solely because a resident wanted it discussed more fully. Additionally, I noted and used a resident's criteria in making a decision on the recent appointment of Mayor Dan Martin.

- Where do you see Ferndale in five years?
 - I see Ferndale as a thriving city that is diverse in terms of people, but also of activities, small businesses, etc. I see Ferndale continuing to be a city that many people will want to move to, and once they live here, will want to go nowhere else.