

**CFF Candidate Questionnaire
Mayor and City Council Candidates
November 2019 Election**

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Please provide responses to the following prompts:

1. Describe your community involvement.

My husband Jim and I have been Ferndale homeowners since 2004. Immediately after I moved here, I jumped into getting involved in my community. I volunteered on the Downtown Development Authority for five years, serving as Chair of the Business Development Committee and as a member of the Organization Committee. Former Mayor Bob Porter appointed me to the Zoning Board of Appeals where I also served for five years.

In over a decade of public service, Ferndale voters elected me three times to serve on the city council. Prior to becoming an elected official, I have served on the Planning Commission, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Ferndale Environmental Sustainability Commission, city council representative to SEMCOG and the Michigan Municipal League, and various committees and task forces throughout my council tenure.

As a nonprofit professional in community and economic development, I have worked in over 30 Metro Detroit communities. I currently serve as the Chief Operating Officer at Jefferson East, Inc., a neighborhood nonprofit taking a progressive approach to neighborhood growth in Detroit. JEI created a new model of development, something that has never been done before.

2. Why did you decide to run for City Council/Mayor? What has prepared you to hold a City Council/Mayor seat?

When I ran for the city council in 2009, I pledged to apply my professional experience and training to help steward the city forward. Working with residents and business owners, I was able to implement progressive policies that resulted in a positive impact on the community.

More important, spending tax dollars wisely and strategically is a mayor's top priority. I have 10 years of experience managing multi-million dollar budgets, identifying and negotiating cost reductions, championing service enhancements,

and leading major departmental restructurings. I helped lead Ferndale through the Great Recession when our financial picture was bleak, and set us up to stabilize our tax base and rebuild the high level of services that our residents value.

3. What is the most productive relationship between Council and the City Manager?

The city of Ferndale is a city-manager form of government. In this structure, the mayor and city council hold the city manager accountable to manage the daily operations of the municipal organization. The city manager is responsible for hiring, managing, and delivering services with the staff she hires.

I've served with three city managers during my ten years. I have found the most productive partnerships are built on open, honest and collaborative relationships. The mayor and council are responsible for establishing strategic priorities, developing policies and approving the budget. The city manager is responsible for setting performance expectations with department directors and their direct reports to deliver services.

Personally, I view the mayor, city council and the city manager as the leadership team, where everyone's perspective and talent are leveraged to obtain the best possible outcomes for the community.

4. When there is disagreement on any issue among members of the City Council what is the responsibility of each individual Council member?

Disagreement among council members is a natural part of serving on a body of elected officials. Healthy disagreement leads to new possibilities and uncovers solutions that might otherwise not have been heard, as each individual brings their life experience, values and beliefs to the conversation. A diverse team of voices leads to better outcomes.

Individual council members have the responsibility of treating their elected peers with civility, respect, and compassion. An effective public official builds a trusting relationship and environment even when conveying differing views. It's up to the elected official to find common ground and not destroy relationships.

In Ferndale, I have found that residents expect their elected officials to uphold these standards of behavior. There is little tolerance for infighting and throwing a council person under-the-bus publically in order to damage a reputation.

My leadership has been about building safety and confidentiality about our personal lives, not gossiping about family, work and our health. This is a foundational trust-building position while holding public office.

As mayor, I will leverage the strengths and talents of each council member. We are a team that serves with purpose.

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

Boards and Commissions serve a critical role in leveraging resident engagement to advise on the community's strategies, policies and investments. Certain boards such as the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals have legal obligations to uphold the city's ordinances and regulations as defined by state and federal law. The city seeks resident volunteers that have professional alignment and a passion for the board or commission they wish to serve.

The city requires all interested individuals to complete an application expressing their area of interest and professional background. Certain boards and commissions perform best with balanced expertise (ie: architect, planner, real estate, engineering, design, finance, legal) like the Planning Commission, which receives the most interest, yet has the lowest turnover of appointed volunteers. Staff screen candidates to forward to the mayor, who reviews and considers the recommended candidate. On occasion, the mayor may call the candidate to get a better feel where their interests fall on select issues.

The former online board and commissions application used to contain areas of knowledge and expertise most helpful, though not required, listed by each board and commission. Listing these knowledge areas helps set expectations about the roles and responsibilities for potential members. A volunteer needs to know the time commitment required, requirements about ongoing training (planning, zoning, environmental policy, for example) and what the responsibilities entail.

Ultimately, the board and commission members serve as mayoral appointees. If a member was fairly and properly recruited and screened and may be eligible, the mayor makes the final decision whether or not the candidate moves forward to be appointed by the city council.

6. How will you work to promote inclusion of populations that might feel excluded in this community?

Ferndale has made great strides in its intentionality on diversity, equity and inclusion. The guiding principles stated in the city's strategic plan are integrity, inclusiveness, innovation and inspired that serve as the bold vision for our community. Ferndale is well-known as a welcoming community, supportive of the LGBTQ community and supporting religious tolerance.

Achieving inclusiveness is ongoing, focused work led by city leaders. As mayor, I will work to promote economic inclusion that is directly tied to affordable housing. Economic inclusion is making sure lower to middle income residents have access to opportunity to resources within their community. Access to transit and job opportunities are also impacted, and I will continue to advocate for better transit for Ferndale and the region.

As mayor, I will fight bigotry in all forms. Racial bigotry feels like it's becoming more normalized and sadly, city leaders and our police department have had to respond to the anti-semitic, Nazi propaganda that was distributed multiple times in our public parking lots in the last year. The community is fortunate to have the Ferndale Inclusion Network leading difficult, but necessary conversations on race.

As the Michigan Municipal League board president, I was appointed to the MI Department of Civil Rights (MDCRC) Council of Local Governments and Education on Equity and Inclusion. Through this experience, I had a MDCRC hearing impaired department director informed me that Ferndale had a growing deaf population and asked me to make city council meetings closed-captioned for members of this community. They were excluded from participating in and accessing the most basic of local government--their elected officials conducting business. Three months later, the city approved closed-captioning service with our transition to city council meetings on the Youtube service.

Sometimes the little investments have a big impact on inclusion. It was another lesson for me that networking and relationship building are critical to listening and learning what the needs are for traditionally underrepresented populations.

7. Describe the type of development that you see as most beneficial to Ferndale.

As a practicing urban planner, I focus on creating great, walkable places in our downtown and building strong healthy neighborhoods. A healthy and livable community offers a range of housing options for all income levels, household sizes and all stages of life, places to shop and dine, provides jobs for the local and regional workforce, offers a range of amenities that residents can easily access and places for seniors, parents and children can be active.

Ferndale is a well-known municipal leader in promoting responsible, managed growth, fulfilling a 20 year vision to grow the downtown that offers a mix of building types, a range of housing opportunities and jobs to support the local and regional workforce. The city's master plan guides what type of growth we want and what it should look like.

The city's most valuable physical asset is access and proximity to Woodward and Nine Mile, two major transit corridors. Density and walkability are the things that attract people to live, work and play in Ferndale. Well-designed, mixed use development, a mix of retail, office, commercial and housing, offers the most benefit to any urban area. An increase in tax base, living options, ability to live car-free and have access to transit to live and work and reduce traffic and walk to everyday amenities is a sign of a healthy, thriving community. After the Great Recession in 2016, when the real estate market recovered, is when Ferndale saw our first increase in new mixed-use development in decades.

A range of housing options is also needed. While 80% of our city is zoned for residential uses, our homes are built on 35 to 45-foot lots, creating tightly knit neighborhoods. Small multi-family buildings are incorporated into nearly every

street, allowing for mixed-income neighborhoods, not the monotonous McMansions of the exurbs. Our residential neighborhoods allow for accessory dwelling units, often called “granny flats”, which can provide affordable housing options without dramatic alterations to what an existing neighborhood looks or feels like. We are planning for fewer cars, stronger transit connections and even greater walkability by building residential density near our commercial and transit hubs.

More important are the policies the city has in place to guide the development we want to see in our community. The city’s current master plan was developed with significant public engagement and policies to guide smart growth. In 2018, the city passed a design-based code ordinance for our downtown that will help keep Ferndale a community that is walkable, prepared for transit, inclusive of various housing needs, consistent in appearance and visually welcoming. The ordinances also incentivize things like public green space, eco-friendly features, and affordable housing.

8. What specific ideas do you have for reducing expenditures while maintaining city services?

City budgets do not track with the economy because of the state’s broken municipal finance system. While housing values may be going up quickly, city revenues do not go up nearly as fast. In 2014, the city’s budget bottomed out. City council made tough budget cuts to maintain adequate service levels. Staffing levels were significantly impacted.

However, adequate as the standard wasn’t good enough. The city manager and council determined to find a way to survive and thrive during deep budget cuts. In the last five years, we transformed how services are delivered to provide higher value at an effective, manageable cost. It’s not sexy to talk about internal processes and systems, but diving into these is the primary way to find more efficient ways of delivering service. Meanwhile, inflation and higher labor, construction materials, insurance costs go up while budget remains relatively the same, for example.

Rather than making the goal of arbitrarily reducing expenditures without understanding what the impact of a budget reduction means, I believe the strategic question we need to ask is: how effective is the government at serving the community and providing value within its budget constraints?

The city changed our organizational culture to value continuous improvement, to provide more value to our residents, making enhancements and lowering costs, where reasonable and possible. Staff and council are always looking for more efficiencies and ways to offset costs.

Our city staff excels at writing competitive grants to bring in additional funds for our streets, parks, police and fire departments, etc. The city seeks multiple bids to get the best price for the work needed. Council is always seeking potential partnerships to lower costs, including exploring intergovernmental collaboration

with another city or new technology to lower the cost of service delivery. Another way to reduce expenses is to defer projects to the following fiscal year where it will fit into the budget.

9. Describe one program you would champion to help foster community.

Building a stronger community is about knowing your neighbors and being a good neighbor. One area near and dear to my heart is the development of neighborhood groups and block clubs. Unlike Detroit and other inner-ring suburbs, Ferndale has a limited number of groups and block clubs though in the past few years residents are grassroots organizing their streets and neighborhoods--more are forming. Our master plan calls for more city support to neighborhood groups, because we rely on block clubs and neighborhood associations to participate and engage in guiding how our neighborhoods evolve and change.

Years ago, I helped co-found the Dales Neighborhood group and personally know first-hand how difficult it is to organize around positive experiences relating to and engaging with your neighbors. Typically residents convene to protest or deal with a persistent issue like crime or other issues relevant to the neighborhood. While these are important, one-time related issues make it hard to build positivity and longevity in sustaining a group.

As Mayor I will encourage the city to provide more support to form and sustain these groups, from technical resources on how to form a 501c3 and leadership governance documents, to how to build a block club, recruit volunteers and ask for small donations. These are all needs that I've heard our residents who are doing the heavy lifting to get neighborhood groups off the ground express, and I know we can support them.

10. Where do you see Ferndale in five years?

Ferndale has been a leader on planning for the future and being the first to implement progressive changes that positively impact our community. Thirty years ago we invested in narrowing and rebuilding Nine Mile, creating a downtown that other cities now envy. Now we are adding protected bike lanes, mixed use developments, proudly championing support for the LGBTQIA community and making it easy for entrepreneurs to start their business. Even though we are a small community, Ferndale has a big voice and big ideas, just like our residents!

The biggest influences that will impact Ferndale and metro Detroit over the next decade are in transportation, mobility and workforce development. More immediate, in five years we will have better, reliable mass transit such as bus rapid transit that is serving more people, reducing car use, lowering traffic and parking needs. We are planning ahead to navigate the increase in autonomous vehicles and an influx in delivery trucks in our downtown and communities. One goal is to have more Ferndale residents working in Ferndale. Right now most people live here but commute to another community for work. Our demographics indicate more one or

two person households instead of families. I want to see the city identify ways to attract and retain more parents and children. And most important, the city is working toward more energy dependence to becoming carbon free.