



# WINONA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

City Council

Jerome Christensen – At Large Candidate

- 1. Please provide a brief biography detailing your background and including your occupation, job title, employer, and education.**

I've lived my whole life here in the chunk of Minnesota wedged between Wisconsin and Iowa. I came to Winona in 1970, fresh out of Caledonia High School, lured to Winona State by Prof. Henry Hull's incomparable tales of exploding steamboats, rampaging buffalo and the ladies of Second Street "who would go steady for money." It sounded like an interesting place to live.

For almost 40 years I've made a career out of listening to people. That's what journalism is – listening to what folks have to say; hearing what concerns them, trying to understand what is important to our community. I can't count the hours I've spent in local government meetings, puzzling over budgets, plans, policies and problems. From incinerators to dredge spoil to annexations to Mount Frac, I've been there ... listened to it, thought about it, written about it. I'll take those years of experience at the press table to the council table. I'll keep on listening, thinking, and probable do some writing as well – conversation goes both ways. For all these years Winona's been a good place to live ... let's work together to make it even better.

- 2. Among the Chamber's top priorities are economic development, workforce development, and community promotion. Explain how you see those priorities as important to our community and explain how you would work alongside the Chamber and business community on such initiatives?**

Every member of our community deserves a good place to live, a good place to work, a good place to play. The health, safety, and quality of life of every one of us is -- and will be -- my top priority. I believe Chamber members share that priority and I look forward to fostering the public/private partnerships that will make this a better community for all of us. I'm not about to say, "Elect me and I'm gonna do this or I'm not gonna do that..." I don't know what might happen in January, much less what we might have to deal with four years down the road. I can only point to the values that will guide my choices.

- 3. Winona has a long history of being a transportation, business and manufacturing hub in the region. Winona has experienced a new surge in tourism and arts industry in the last decade. What strategies do you embrace for the future of Winona? (You may pick more than one)**
  - a. Expand Port, rail, trucking and other transportation facilities and related infrastructure.**

- b. **Enhance tourism development with focus on downtown, limiting truck traffic and encouraging new small business in downtown.**
- c. **Pursue additional commercial/industrial land for future expansion of Winona’s existing and emerging manufacturing businesses.**

b. If we had a city motto it might well be, “Come, let us party together!”

Face it, Winona is a fun city. Folks here take their pursuit of happiness seriously...and we ought to. Having fun is serious business – folks from out of town spend a lot of money when they come to Winona looking for a good time. And having a good time is no small part of what makes living in Winona something lots of folks want to do. It’s in everybody’s interest to solidly support and encourage arts, entertainment and recreation.

A vibrant, vital, fun downtown is an important part of the mix, but only part. Folks are drawn to Winona for our outdoor recreation opportunities; for music, art and theater; for festivals and celebrations. Our downtown provides the amenities that enhance and enrich their visit. Tourism supports downtown.

c. Winona is often billed as “the Island City” and when it comes to land within the city, they just ain’t making any more of it -- therefore we’d best use what we have creatively and wisely. This may well involve rethinking and reimagining zoning and land use policies and growth patterns.

**4. What do you believe are barriers for business growth and what would you do to influence how the City addresses these barriers?**

Poor products, poor planning, poor decision making, lack of capital and plain, old bad luck are the real barriers to business growth. There isn’t much the city can directly do about any of them. The city’s economic development arm, adequately funded and staffed, can offer assistance and expertise in certain areas, but cannot substitute for astute, forward-looking management.

**5. What is the role of City government to improve the start-up business environment in Winona?**

Watkins. Fastenal. Behrens. Peerless. Hal-Leonard -- Winona has a tradition of turning ideas and ambition into world-class companies. Community support for entrepreneurs, start-ups and growing enterprises will help assure a healthy, diversified local economy, providing opportunity and employment now and into the future. Flexible zoning policies that allow for home/neighborhood-based enterprises and start-ups offer opportunities to incubate innovation. The city’s economic development arm, adequately funded and staffed, can offer assistance and expertise in overcoming the hurdles involved in nurturing an infant enterprise.

**6. Winona’s success has led to questions and discussion on how to manage increased growth. How would you ensure the city appropriately balances the need for additional government (public safety, serves, etc.) without unfairly burdening citizens and businesses (zoning regulations, increasing taxes, etc.) as we address the symptoms of growth?**

“To whom much is given, much will be required...” (Luke 12:48).

**7. What is your vision for the future of Winona?**

I envision the future Winona as a supercalifragilisticexpialidocious place to live, work, and play.

**8. Each of Winona's three higher education institutions has distinct and unique issues as we move into the future. How do you see the City working with the colleges and universities issues?**

Higher education is a repository of expertise, insight and initiative that should be engaged in partnership with the city to the advantage of the entire community. In short, smart people are our city's most valuable asset.

**9. As a City leader, what approach would you take to balance community growth and the rights of private property owners?**

Private property owners have no right to act in a manner inimical to the interests and welfare of the community.

**10. Where do you stand on possible future pandemic mitigations? How would you balance having a vibrant local economy while maintaining a safe community?**

This isn't even a question. In the face of a pandemic quelling the spread of infectious disease and protecting the health and well-being of the public supersedes any and all pursuits of private profit.

**11. Where do you stand on the Police & Fire Safety Center (eg. East End Rec) issue from a standpoint of business growth and development.**

Council action has, at least for now, taken the East End Rec site off the table as a possible location for combined public safety facility.

However, "saving the rec" doesn't resolve the ongoing challenge of inadequate public recreation space for young, old and everyone in between. Frankly speaking, one aging gymnasium at Carimona and Fourth is not adequate public indoor recreation space for our entire community. A few cinder block raised beds on a concrete slab don't cut it as community garden space for all of our people. A few isolated slides and swings is a sorry excuse for children's play space for the city west of Huff Street, and the shortcomings of the senior friendship center's present location have long been documented. Investment in quality public recreation facilities and programming is essential if our community is to attract and retain the high-quality workforce needed for continued business success.

**12. Many communities across the state have seen many public safety officers leave or retire early from their positions. These same communities are having difficulty re-filling these positions due to negative public perceptions and lack of funding. What steps do you believe need to be taken to ensure that our community's law enforcement is adequately funded and supported so that our community remains safe and healthy.**

Public safety isn't all about cops and robbers. It's more than a lack of criminal activity or effective law enforcement. It's also fire, rescue, EMTs. It's mental health and family services. In a safe, healthy community, people have stable jobs paying a living wage, quality housing they can afford, food in the fridge, assured health care, and neighbors they know and care about -- who know and care about them. It comes down to "When we all do better, we all do better" -- and are safer as a result.