

Candidate for 4th District at Large Robert Westfall



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- 1. Each candidate brings a passion for office and special skills to help them succeed. Describe what drives you most to run for office, your qualifications and skills, and why we should elect you versus your opponent. Include any current endorsements.**

What drives me most is the fact that we don't have a real vision for Kansas City based on a shared set of values. We have spent the past 20 years on large, taxpayer projects, but haven't been tackling big issues, like growing economic disparities and disadvantage, lack of affordable housing and healthcare, crumbling streets and sidewalks (if there are any), education that isn't preparing our children for the economy of the future.

My opponent doesn't talk about the role of government in these terms. What's worse is she relies on her 30 years of political power and influential supporters to carry her through election after election. I have taken ZERO dollars from any PAC, special interest group or company. When I am in office there will be no donor or endorser whispering into my ear that they are coming to collect on the support they gave me in the past. My opponent Katheryn Shields can't say the same thing.

When I evaluate projects or proposals I will be doing so on their merits and not to ensure that the well-connected get the bulk of the benefits.

- 2. If elected, what will your top 3 priorities be in your first year of office? Name 3 things you plan to accomplish during your term.**

Shifting our focus from taxpayer-subsidized projects in the are of town where I live to the parts of the city that have been ignored and have fallen further behind in the economic rejuvenation of our city. I will bring needed infrastructure dollars to these same areas, and

use tools like TIF to create smart, focused development projects that combine job taring with new job centers based on the employment needed in the future and not the past, while also adding quality, housing that average citizens can afford. All of this in close proximity to each other so the ability to attract additional private investment with zero public subsidy is higher. That is how we change the economic opportunities of areas forgotten for too long.

3. Over the last decade, Kansas City has experienced so many positive changes, but the murder rate and number of violent crimes are still major issues. What suggestions do you have for reducing crime in Kansas City?

- We need to realize that solving crime and combating senseless violence is the responsibility of all, including parents and families, community groups, health and wellness organizations, the police, the justice system, and yes local government.
- COPS ON THE BEAT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS - not just community information officers, but we need officers interacting on a personal, daily basis with the community so that trust between institutions can be rebuilt.
- JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT IS NOT INCARCERATING A GENERATION OF NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS - We need more education and less incarceration. It is not hard to see that young people coming out with criminal records combined with the economic lack of opportunity I described above, can lead some to revert to even more serious offenses, and a spiral effect takes over. We can't let this happen anymore.
- PEOPLE NEED TO HAVE FAITH THAT IF THEY HELP THE POLICE CATCH A CRIMINAL IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD THEY WON'T BE VICTIM OF RETRIBUTION
- WE NEED TO CONSIDER INCREASING THE FUNDS WE GIVE TIPSTERS
- INCREASED MEDIATION AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
- COMPREHENSIVE, FOCUSED, MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – SKILLS TRAINING, JOB CENTERS, HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE, RELEVANT GOODS AND SERVICES

4. The limited availability of affordable housing and limited access to public transportation options make it challenging for low-income residents to find stable housing and employment opportunities. Likewise, employers describe difficulties filling jobs and finding stable employees because housing, transportation and distance to work. How do you propose to increase affordable housing and access to employment opportunities in Kansas City?

See my answer above about using the tools at our disposal in a strategic, focused manner where we combine improved infrastructure with robust job training programs and job centers matching employers with these newly trained skilled workers. Also by bringing these economic improvement centers into the disadvantaged neighborhoods we remove the necessary distance many have to travel now for gainful employment. This reduces time people are in transit via car or bus, and allows more time to be involved in the lives of their

children and families, which as we all know is a big factor in keeping children on a positive path. As I often say, the work we need to do is complex as everything relates to everything.

- 5. Many citizens are still confused about what the approved GO Bonds will fund, how moneys are being used, when improvements are expected, property owner responsibilities in the interim, and whether there are still shortfalls in funding. This has led to unrealistic expectations, mis-information and frustration. How would you propose to educate the community, and improve communication and transparency about projects and schedules?**

I would be holding numerous information session throughout the city, where I would not just show a list of what was decided, but really dig into the thinking behind it. But before I do that, I have to find that out myself. And sadly my opponent and other current Councilmembers can't articulate a truly comprehensible explanation for why projects were picked, when we know there were many that could have been classified as "shovel-ready." The fact is too much backroom deal making and lack of transparency allowed projects that in the words of the city "would yield additional economic investment" to be chosen over those that severely impact average citizens. This needs to change.

- 6. The condition of roads, curbs and sidewalks is a major issue for the City. Developers and property owners often cite infrastructure as a major issue impacting property values, development feasibility and decisions about private investment. Likewise, the perception of well-established centers like Brookside or re-emerging corridors like Troost are impacted by crumbling infrastructure. How would you propose to prioritize infrastructure for established and emerging areas versus infill or new infrastructure? What ideas do you have for additional funding to address shortfalls?**

See previous answers as they directly relate to this question. I will make the additional point that what you are describing is as much a test of political will, or lack of to be honest, of our current local leaders. You really need to look at the results coming out of the council and not just what councilmembers like my opponent Katheryn Shields voted on. Professional politicians know how to count to seven, and when there are times they they want a project to go through, but don't want to be seen as supporting it, they wait until 7 votes pass the project and then they come and vote against it. This gives the politician a win-win as they get the project they wanted, but can still campaign on their "fight" against it.

- 7. Illegal dumping, neglected properties, and deferred maintenance are major issues. The City's limited resources often mean these issues go unaddressed for long periods impacting the surrounding community. How do you propose to deter bad actors and improve enforcement?**

By using better video surveillance, streamlined reporting of dumping, vigorous prosecution of illegal dumping to the extent that a strong deterrent will exist. IN addition, when

possible we need to put up physical barriers around the most prominent dumping sites, making it more difficult to dump there. Force the dumpers to go to a different place where we have in effect the "trap" set of video surveillance and physical monitoring. On a less overt front, I would also say that we need to do a better job of having resources in place where legal dumping of hard to dispose of items is available.

- 8. Vacant, abandoned, and run-down buildings and housing can attract crime and destabilize surrounding areas. Likewise, the vacant lots left behind after demolition can have the same impact. What do you propose to address vacant/abandoned, run-down buildings / housing and to stabilize the surrounding areas?**

We need to have more staff able to investigate on a case by case basis, exactly why these buildings are in the condition they are in. If it is a matter of citizens who truly want to improve their properties but cannot, then that requires a a unique set of solutions around helping them make the needed repairs.

When it comes to speculators and property owners who are just sitting on housing stock until such time as they can sell land for a profit, we as a city must exert maximum pressure and punishment to motivate them to act. If they continue to ignore our efforts then we should take ownership away and put the land into the hand so the community itself, using tools like community land trusts for example.

- 9. The delivery and cost of basic City services including sewer, water, trash collection, and snow removal affect us all. What suggestions do you have to improve and maintain city services without major financial impacts to residents?**

By eliminating a number of the taxpayer incentives currently used to prop up rents for developers in the heart of the city we can redirect those resources to deliver more efficient, proactive, and comprehensive services across the metro.

- 10. Tax incentives have helped spark new investments but have come under scrutiny for use for high-end projects and projected impacts to taxing districts. At the same time, real incentives can be warranted in distressed areas or for rehabilitation where development and reinvestment are challenging. Would you propose to modify tax incentive policies, and if so how? If so, how would you help ensure investment in distressed areas like Troost Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, and 63rd Street is encouraged and what incentives or other tools would you support using?**

Please see the several previous answers for how I would use the tools of economic development to bring about the first real sustained economic revitalization in these parts of town in several generations. I am on the record saying that I am not opposed to tools like TIF at all. But they have been misused and corrupted by our local leaders for too long. While you are likely aware that the state of Missouri's definition of blight is incredibly

broad, and it is because of that, may projects that don't pass the smell test for blight have received taxpayer funding.

To be clear, there is NO rule on the books preventing the current City Council, including my opponent Katheryn Shields, from adopting its own more focused and equitable definition. Again it is a lack of political will and decency that keeps this from happening. I will change that.

- 11. A lot of resources are dedicated to attracting large companies, but statistics show that Kansas City's small businesses create more new jobs and have a more financial impact on the local community. How will you help foster and support small businesses, and minority and women owned businesses, in addition to working to attract major employers? Any suggestions on how incentives or resources might be better weighted toward small businesses?**

I have launched and operated my own small business in KC so I know the hurdles it takes to do such a thing. I have worked with the Kauffman Foundation on initiatives to advance local business ownership. Again, see my answers above about comprehensive economic development planning. Small, locally owned businesses are at the heart of those efforts, as this keeps the dollars generated within the community being served, thus increasing wealth, and influence for these communities

- 12. The 1/8th Central City Economic Development Sales Tax is intended to help a portion of the City's distressed neighborhoods and commercial corridors but doesn't include several fringe areas just outside the sales tax district like Troost Avenue or Marlborough Heights. What incentives, programs or support do you propose to help other distressed areas, or areas on the fringe? Do you support the creation of similar districts or use of other tools, and if so, how would you fund them?**

Identifying where specific tax benefits ends would be the guidepost for outlining boundaries for the targeted economic development projects I have described in this survey. I don't want to prohibit people from wanting to consider creating fair, and properly managed CIDs for instance to help generate funds. But it's important to remember that new taxing districts do eventual put a strain on those who lest can afford it.

- 13. Community Improvement Districts have helped improve several KC areas including commercial districts and neighborhoods through cleaning, security, added maintenance, promotion and other efforts. However, the use of CIDs has come under scrutiny when used for single properties or when controlled solely by development interests. Do you support the use of CIDs, would you propose any limits or conditions, and if not supported, what other tools would you propose be used to achieve improvements?**

See previous answer. Their creation has to be done in a very careful way so as to not put too much of a strain on the form of sales taxes for food and necessities on those who can least afford it.

- 14. Many projects like redevelopment of City property at 63rd and Prospect require long-term support and coordination across multiple council districts. How do you plan to work with other council members to address these types of issues? Do you have any suggestions on how to energize stalled projects like at 63rd and Prospect?**

I can tell you from my many months of interacting with the candidates in other districts, that we are going to have a great working relationship, particularly because of my commitment to shift economic development focus to areas east of Troost and in South KC and in areas of the Northland.

- 15. Kansas City's population has been affected by the limitations and perceptions of public education. Alternatives and improvements are helping change that perception. Although the City has limited authority, what are some ways you would propose to help foster improvements and collaboration around education?**

The most direct influence the city government can have on schools is to stop taking millions of dollars of funding away from school districts when we give ridiculously generous subsidies for luxury developments and other projects that are not truly a benefit to the city as a whole.

- 16. Elected officials have to balance time needed to make change, with need to engage the community and be available to constituents. Likewise, there has been recent frustration over limited public engagement in some major projects and initiatives. How would you propose to remain available to constituents and to work with organizations like ours, area neighborhoods, and other major stakeholders if elected?**

I currently work about 55 hours a week on my day job while campaigning and filling out questionnaires like this one. It has been a huge time commitment on my part but I have made it work. So I have no issues working long days and digging into long documents to find the hidden truth about policies that professional politicians don't bother to find. When I take office the job of Councilman will be my new full time job and I will treat it with the respect and diligence it deserves. I will also be using the time available to be out in front of

neighborhoods all across the City, and not just once a year or at election time, but as needed and when needed. That is my promise to all citizens.

17. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about you or how you would serve?

I would simply ask for your support on June 18th and if you decide to vote for me please, don't keep it a secret. The only way we can take on the well-financed political machine is by the work of individuals like you and me. Thank you, Robert.