

North Ada County Foothills Association (NACFA)
City Council Election Candidate Survey
October 2009

For "check a block" questions, please feel free to add narrative in any/all cases to fully and accurately characterize your philosophy, approach or opinion.

A. Philosophy and Approach

1. Describe the role of an Eagle City Council member as you see it. What motivated you to seek a Council seat? Please discuss your views on the interests of Area of Impact (AOI) and foothills residents and the Council's role in responding to them.

The City Council is the legislative and policy making branch of Eagle city government and the role of a Council member is to work with the others on the Council, the Mayor, staff and members of the community to make the best decisions possible and provide essential city services to our residents.

I am a candidate for Eagle City Council for the same reason that I applied for the vacant Council position to which I was appointed in early 2008: Eagle is a great place to live and raise a family and I want to play a part in helping keep it that way through responsible growth and economic development, prudent fiscal policies, and meaningful citizen involvement.

I welcome input and involvement from residents of the AOI and foothills. It helps us make better, more informed decisions. While our immediate, primary responsibility is to the residents of the City, we have a special responsibility to respond to and work with the residents of the AOI and foothills as neighbors, potential future residents of Eagle, and members of our extended community.

2. What do you think the City is currently doing well that you would continue to support? What does the City need to change...and why?

Eagle provides excellent law enforcement and protection through the Ada County Sheriff's Office, a wonderful library, and several great parks. I will continue to support these and other essential city services. The City needs to change the way it budgets, including the need to set priorities. This is necessary because of limited resources; it is also the right thing to do, regardless of the economic climate, in order to keep taxes and spending in check. I believe the City can always do a better job of soliciting and listening to public input. We must avoid the "us v. them" mentality and work together.

3. What are major issues facing the City in the next four years? Ten years? How would you approach each?

The major issues facing the City of Eagle in the next four to ten years are

economic growth, taxes and spending.

Promoting the right kind of economic growth requires us to work directly with the business community, as well as the residents of Eagle and the surrounding area. We must avoid putting unnecessary hurdles or overburdensome regulations in place that would hinder economic growth. For example, I led the effort to disband the Local Improvement District, which would have hurt many local businesses and residents. I also opposed the push for a more restrictive smoking ordinance in Eagle, which was opposed by many rank-and-file Eagle residents and businesses. I will continue to oppose unnecessary and overly burdensome regulations in our city. At the same time, we must make certain that development is done in a deliberate, responsible, managed and planned manner. As part of this, we must pay special attention to water supply and transportation needs.

The tax issue requires us to refrain from taking the 3% budget increase allowed by state law, at least while the economy is down, and also refuse to raise taxes. I have successfully led the effort each of the last two years, refusing to increase Eagle's budget by 3% during these difficult economic times. I also opposed any increase in the tax levy rate during this year's budget process.

Eagle's spending woes stem from the economic downturn and resulting reduction in revenues. Rather than opting to raise taxes, I advocate for cutting spending to bring the City's budget into line with economic reality. I voted against the most recent budget because it raised the property tax levy rate, rather than making additional spending cuts. We must make sure that the costs incurred by City government are necessary for essential city services. I advocate mechanisms like zero-based budgeting and task-based budgeting to set priorities for the city and make sure we are as lean and efficient as possible.

4. The current comprehensive plan was adopted after a great deal of citizen input and is based on the community vision of Eagle's future. The City has generally welcomed developer requests for semi-annual changes to the adopted comprehensive plan—an approach that has been highly controversial and contentious. Describe how you would balance citizen priorities v. those of the development community. Articulate those circumstances you regard as valid causes for changes to or departures from the adopted comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plan changes should be the result of an open, inclusive public process, involving all interested parties. I am, and will continue to be, an advocate for bringing all parties -- the development community and the general citizenry -- to the table together to discuss these issues. I prefer a collaborative approach to the traditional adversarial model. The factors that would justify changes to the comprehensive plan -- as specified in city code -- would best be interpreted through such a collaborative process. Without or without such guidance, the decisions must ultimately be made by the City Council. Again, I prefer having as much genuine public involvement as possible to help guide us in our decisionmaking.

B. Financial Management and Budget

Troubled economic times have created budget problems for most cities, including Eagle—where development and growth fees historically contributed heavily to revenue. Recent budget discussions demonstrated differing philosophies from City officials, with some members stressing cost savings and others more focused on finding revenue to continue current City operations and levels of service.

1. Describe additional revenue sources you would like Eagle to explore and develop in order to create a more stable resource base—one less reliant on growth and less vulnerable to economic downturns.

I oppose new or increased taxes. We need to prioritize our spending -- including making tough choices during difficult economic times -- build adequate reserves, and enhance our economic base.

2. Would you be ___ willing or X **unwilling** to support an increase in the levy rate?

While it is easy for a candidate or public official to say that he/she opposes tax increases, it is another thing to stand up for your beliefs and vote accordingly. I have done just that, including my debate and vote against the most recent Eagle budget. The priority must be on setting spending priorities, not blindly raising taxes. I advocated an alternative to the budget that would have done this.

3. Please characterize how you would approach reducing City expenses, should that continue to be necessary, by ranking the following elements, from 1 (first source of cuts) to 11 (12, if you list under “Other”) (last source of cuts):

Ideally, these decisions should be made with public input and collective discussions among the Mayor, Department heads and City Council. The decisions are also dependent upon the actual circumstances that may exist at the time. However, here are my "first to last" sources of potential cuts:

10_ Library

11_ Police

8 Planning (I interpret this category as including the statutorily mandated planning, not just staffing levels, salaries or benefits)

6 Reductions in City staff (specify department(s)) (specific departments would need to be identified through priority setting)

4 Across-the-board reductions in hours worked by all City staff (v. layoffs)

5 Reductions in pay and benefits for City staff

9 Parks maintenance/improvement

7 City Hall building (**I interpret this category as including adequate facilities for city business, public hearings, etc.**)

3 Mayor's compensation

2 Council Members' compensation

1 Contributions to regional entities (COMPASS, Blue Print, Valley Ride, etc.)

___ Other (please describe)

4. Describe the emphasis you would/would not place on expanding the City's commercial base and, if appropriate, how you would achieve that expansion.

The City Council should work with the Chamber, local businesses, interested residents and folks from the surrounding area to identify the commercial services that are needed in our community and work together to recruit and promote the right ones to our area. Again, a collaborative process is preferred.

5. Describe how the development entitlements for 10,000+ new as yet un-built housing units granted over the last several years will or will not influence your position on future development applications and the City's ability to provide services to new residents. How do you see the absorption of these un-built developments being handled by the City?

I judge every proposed development on its own merits, under the relevant code provisions, and with an eye toward the public testimony and other evidence that is provided. That is what I am required to do. In doing so, I must be fair and impartial. Issues such as services for future city residents are very relevant and must be considered in making such decisions. In addition, existing entitlements are not unlimited. They have deadlines and they can and do expire, even after any appropriate extensions that may be granted; conditions must also be followed.

C. Infrastructure

1. What role, if any, do you see for the City in ensuring the protection of

regionally-shared water resources for all area residents, including those currently reliant on private wells in the City, the AOI and the foothills?

The decision whether and how much water to allow to be appropriated from the public water resources of the state is constitutionally and statutorily vested in the Idaho Department of Water Resources. It is also the Department's responsibility to manage the resource for the protection of existing water rights. The City can and must cooperate with the Department, interested parties and others to make certain that decisions are made based upon the best possible information. To manage the water resources of the region effectively, we need an adequate baseline of scientific data (regularly updated), a well thought out management plan (including a water budget to manage toward), and effective implementation of the plan (including monitoring and adjustments, as needed) -- all with the benefit of citizen involvement and a local advisory committee. As part of this effort, Eagle should be involved in the Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP) process for the Treasure Valley, which is just getting under way. We should also consider re-engaging the Eagle Citizens' Water Committee.

2. ACHD (<http://www.achd.ada.id.us/Projects/ProjectsPast.aspx>) and ITD (SHs 16, 44 and 55, Three Cities crossing) have transportation planning efforts underway for Eagle and the North Foothills, largely in anticipation of growth in both the City and the North Foothills.

a. Do you **support** or not support these plans?

I am not intimately familiar with all of the details of these studies, but transporation planning is absolutely critical and I support these efforts, even if the final outcomes are not yet determined.

b. Do you **agree** or not agree that development should proceed based only on contemporaneous construction of new roadways, including upgrades to existing roadways outside the development, and/or other means of transportation to provide for the impact of that development?

Although the timelines will not always match perfectly, we need to ensure that development is done in tandem with smooth transporation planning and implementation, both in Eagle and the region.

c. Are there specific transportation plans in place that you would like to see changed?

Again, I think these decisions are best made through collaborative efforts. If elected, I will seek to continue my work as the Council liaison to the Eagle Transporation Committee -- which makes recommendations to the City Council on transporation project priorities -- and the cooperative efforts that we have in place with ACHD, ITD and other transportation authorities. I would also like to see more public input.

D. Foothills vision, open space and rural character, public recreation opportunities

1. Describe your vision of the foothills as a part of the community and/or the priority you would assign to the following by ranking from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important):

I really value the input of NACFA and others in the area and would welcome their ideas on what is most important. I also think that the tour that we took with NACFA last year was very beneficial and would welcome additional interactive dialogue in the future. In the meantime, here are my rankings, realizing that they are all important and that the difference between some of them is not very great.

1 Rights of property owners

2 Adherence to the adopted foothills comprehensive plan and the community vision

3 Location of density adjacent to existing and planned major highways, with preservation of central open space

7 Preservation of wildlife habitat and restoration of native plant species

5 Creation of an interconnected trails network for non-motorized recreation

6 Avoidance of development in steep and visually sensitive areas

4 Preservation and enhancement of Eagle's unique rural and equestrian lifestyles

2. Do you ___ support or ___ oppose (or **X** **unsure**) the City's plans to lease and ultimately acquire 1900+ acres of BLM land north of Beacon Light Road (proceeding east from SH16 to Willow Creek Road) for development of a regional park for non-motorized recreation?

I like the idea of a regional park. However, I have serious concerns about the costs, how those costs will be borne (both for development/construction and operation/maintenance) and what the precise configuration of the park should be (I have been an advocate of a citizen steering committee to assist in this process). Until the process plays itself out, and these questions are answered, I will remain "unsure".

3. The City has identified the following possible sources for funding regional park development, operations and maintenance. Indicate by a mark in the space provided those you support (leaving blank those you do not support):

X Impact fees generated by new development (limited to park development and construction; not available for operations and maintenance) (**realizing that these fees have already been agreed to by**

M3);

General fund (available only on a fiscal year basis) (**only if the costs are budgeted as part of a zero-based and/or priority-oriented budget and "make the cut", with no increase in taxes**);

User fees/passes for “nonresident” users (assessed via passes for those not City residents; operations and maintenance revenue)

Foothills levy approved by and applied to City residents (available for development, operations and maintenance; requires voter approval of 50% + 1 votes majority; must be renewed every two years)

Volunteer labor and donations

4. Discussion by the Planning and Zoning Commission at recent hearings considering annexation of this BLM land has raised the possibility of creating a Community Improvement District to supplement impact fee revenues.

Do you favor or oppose (or **unsure**) the creation of a CID?

I need more information before I can take any kind of position on this proposal.

5. Describe your vision of the regional park and/or the priority you would assign to the following elements of the City’s preliminary plan (City cost estimates provided) for park development by ranking the following from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important), leaving blank any elements you do not support (in which case priority assigned to least important will be the same as the number of elements you support):

Again, I value the input of NACFA and other interested parties on these questions and prefer that a citizen steering committee assist us in making these decisions. I am also very concerned about the costs and how they would be covered. Therefore, I am not making any firm commitments or in anyway prejudging my decision as part of the Council. In the meantime, however, here are my current rankings.

3 Linder Road trailhead (\$436,600 construction; \$8,000 p.a. operations and maintenance)

1 Hartley Lane Trailhead (\$193,100 construction; \$1,200 p.a. o&m)

5 Hartley Lane Restrooms (\$80,000 construction)

2 10 miles of 2-3 foot earthen multi-purpose trail (equestrian, hikers, cyclists— \$18,000/ mile construction; \$4,000/ mile p.a. o&m)

4 8 miles of 10-12 foot earthen multi-purpose trail through Little Gulch (\$60,000/mile construction; \$4,000/mile p.a. o&m)

___ Riding and rodeo arena—8 to 10 acres (construction funded by user groups with City providing land and infrastructure; p.a. o&m not yet determined) **(I do not have enough information to support this yet.)**

___ 500-seat seasonal amphitheater located off Linder Road (\$1.26 million construction for facility, parking and infrastructure; p.a. o&m not yet determined) **(I do not have enough information to support this yet.)**

Thank you for your participation.

Thank you for taking an interest in the Eagle City Council race, and thank you for the opportunity to provide this information. I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to our interview on October 13.

Norm Semanko