

Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce City Council and Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Hello, thank you, and congratulations on running for the office of mayor or city council in our great town!

The Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce* is a non-profit 501(c)6 membership organization whose purpose is to serve as a catalyst for economic vitality by providing advocacy, information and services to our members AND to promote the City of Lanesboro and the Lanesboro area as a desirable place to visit, live, work and play.

One of the ways we strive to accomplish our mission is by engaging with candidates for local office and connecting you with local issues our members care about. As such, over the past couple of weeks we have been soliciting thoughts and questions from our members so we could put together this questionnaire. Our goal is to produce an informational document, containing your answers to these questions in full, to be published for the benefit of our membership and community. A character limit has been placed on each response in order to make the resulting voter guide as digestible as possible for those reading it.

Please answer any or all of the following questions and hit "Submit" when you're finished. The questions will be published along with your answers. If you opt to not answer any of the below questions, the phrase "Answer not provided" will be shown underneath those questions in the published voter guide.

Thanks in advance for taking the time to answer these questions on behalf of our members and the Lanesboro community!

**LACC does not endorse or represent any candidate for political office.*

Your name *

Don Bell

What office are you running for? *

(Choose one)

- Mayor
- City council

Please introduce yourself to chamber members and the Lanesboro community. Some potential prompts to help you think about this:

- What's your Lanesboro Story?
- How long have you lived in Lanesboro?
- Why do you want to serve the city of Lanesboro?
- What do you see as your main goal to accomplish as mayor or a city council member?
- Where do you see the biggest needs in our community?

(5,000 character response limit)

My family and I moved to Lanesboro in 2010 from Pittsburgh, PA. We had visited a few years earlier and thought Lanesboro would be a great place to move our family and work.

My mother was from Lanesboro and her family had a history with the town back to its founding. I lived here as a kid when my father was stationed overseas in the Occupation after World War 2.

I spent most of my adult life working as an Audio and Broadcasting engineer. I have designed and overseen complex electrical engineering projects. I enjoy challenging projects and problem solving.

The fact that Lanesboro has in place components of self sustaining energy production is very forward thinking and positive. This a great start on future needs.

We also have a number challenges to the future, including a growing school population and housing shortages. These also need to be addressed.

We also have a major highway project on Rte. 250 coming in the near future. Planning and community involvement around it needs to start now.

The citizens of Lanesboro should know more of what our needs are and how we are going pay for the necessary improvements and repairs to our current infrastructure. The citizens of our city need to be part of the planning for coming disruptions. They also need to understand how we foot these bills far into our future.

We need to review our current engineering consultants, and may also feel prompted to put out a call for proposals from area firms.

How would you describe the role of the office you're running for [city council/mayor]? If elected, how do you see yourself taking on these responsibilities?

(2,500 character response limit)

I want to hear from the community about their concerns and make sure they are being heard. I also want to know that city officials are listening and taking these thoughts into consideration as we go forward. These plans are for all of our citizens, not just a few that speak the loudest.

In your opinion, what are the top three issues facing the City of Lanesboro over the next 2-4 years?

(2,500 character response limit)

Future growth and capacity is very important. In spite of the shortage of local housing, we have an increasing school population. Though the city's population may not show growth, the demands on our infrastructure have grown. Tourism and local attractions put an ever increasing strain on our local resources. We need to have the capacity to supply water, sewer treatment and electricity to meet future needs. This is not always reflected by our local population count. It is driven by the fact that we are a destination for bicyclists, sport fishing, nature lovers, theater lovers and people wanting to escape life in big cities, even if only for a few days. They should be part of our town, not a burden on it.

The Lanesboro Sales Commission has been a part of Lanesboro for a long time. It was an important part of our town when the railroad was a major part of our transportation infrastructure. The railroad is long gone but the Sales Barn has grown and continues to expand. We need to work with them to improve their access to transportation while improving the living conditions of people that live near them and are affected by their daily operations.

The grain dryer is also a part of our "Industrial Park" and has some of the same issues of needing to understand the concerns of its neighbors. We also have to study it's ongoing effect on transportation problems in light of the Highway 250 project.

Without adequate communication and planning, we may find ourselves with a logjam of issues and a lack of plans and resources to address them. Everyone needs a seat at the table and a vote on the plans as they go forward.

How do you describe Lanesboro when defining the town's character and purpose? e.g. The roles of tourism and agriculture as economic drivers, etc.

(2,500 character response limit)

For it's first 100 years or so, Lanesboro was a typical farm town community. It was busy and thriving until the farm crisis of the 70's when farmers were told: "Get big or die" by Earl Butz, Jimmy Carter's secretary of Agriculture. Towns like Lanesboro were forced to find new means of surviving. I remember in the 70's that Lanesboro was a ghost town with most of the businesses closed and downtown storefronts vacant. One of the groups that took advantage of the situation were the Amish who found farmland cheaper than Ohio's, where many moved from. They have become an important part of Fillmore County.

When the Rails to Trails program gave new life to towns like Lanesboro, it was a breakthrough for economic life here in town. The repurposing of the old Victorian relics that no one could afford to heat became a source of income as Lanesboro became the Bed and Breakfast Capitol of Minnesota.

Tourism can be a great boon but it has its downside. Example: What do you do in the Winter when everyone has gone back home or to Arizona?

We are fortunate we have businesses like Preston Specialties, Lanesboro Sales Commision , Vis Plumbing and S&A Petroleum, lodging providers and Commonweal theater which provide jobs for local residents and are going year round.

Our biggest local employer by far is the Lanesboro School District. It is part of the glue that holds our community together. Our city government needs to have a close, ongoing relationship with our school to keep this important asset informed about city programs and projects.

What do you see the city's role is in supporting Lanesboro businesses during the proposed Highway 250 construction project?

(2,500 character response limit)

Obviously, we need to provide alternate roadways to keep our school and local businesses going and keep our economy alive. Staging and managing alternate routes is Minnesota Highway Departments job. We need to rely on our elected and appointed State Officials to make this happen. They need to be in intimate contact with City Officials to make sure plans are in place and fully implemented. The transportation of our school students is a big part of this picture. There should be a website in place to give daily conditions and updates while this project is underway and it should be implemented well ahead of time. Local contact with State Highway officials will be a vital part of the project. Communications is of the utmost importance. Without a system in place and an open communication, this could be a big problem. Having a central clearing house set up in Lanesboro to deal with communications will be vital.

If elected, how do you plan to work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Bolton & Menk, and our state elected officials in regards to the proposed Highway 250 construction project?

(2,500 character response limit)

I would like to see the plans already in place to make this project a success. We need to know what has already been proposed and planned by the Minnesota Dept of Transportation. Where is this information posted? Do we have a liason from the City in place to begin making this project become a reality? An internet presence, likely attached to our City's website would be a best place to provide this information. All planning should be public information involving adequate public input.

Do you have an opinion on the structure of the Lanesboro Public Library board? i.e. Should it be a governing or advisory entity? And why?

(2,500 character response limit)

The Lanesboro Library has had a governing board in place for decades. It has functioned well for its entire history. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

If elected, how would you handle an issue that came before the council that you don't know intimately? Describe the steps you would take in fact-finding and your decision-making process.

(2,500 character response limit)

I would start by considering the facts as presented, and talk individually to all parties involved to try to understand what the core of the issue might be. It's important to discuss the issue with all parties publicly. I would try not to use initial impressions to come to a conclusion. It is not always obvious what the motive behind an issue may be. It is always a good idea to talk with others who may be more familiar with a problem before coming to a conclusion.

How important is Lanesboro's history and historic preservation for you? Why?

(2,500 character response limit)

A city's history is where it has come from. Remembering your past and where you came from can help shape your vision of the future. Getting stuck in your own history can also be a problem. If you are unwilling to see the future as it is unfolding, are you willing to find a way forward? Sometimes you have to lean into it and other times you have to step back. If you are lucky, you can guess right every time. I have been a member of the Lanesboro History Museum board for a couple years. They do a great job of documenting our history.

What are your thoughts on how the City of Lanesboro can encourage more people (particularly families and younger folks) to move to Lanesboro as full-time residents?

(2,500 character response limit)

It would be nice to see Lanesboro get back in the Small Cities program or something like the one we were involved in the past. It provided small loans and grants to people fixing up houses or starting businesses. I would consult with past City Administrators to learn more about these programs.

In your opinion, is Lanesboro currently an affordable place to live and/or operate a business? If so, what are steps the city can take to keep it that way. If not, what are things the city can do to make Lanesboro a more affordable place to live and do business?

(2,500 character response limit)

There is a shortage of affordable housing in Lanesboro as well as commercial real estate. Having an inventory of current housing and business properties along with potential uses or community needs is important information. I still don't understand why we can't seem to keep a small grocery store operation in Lanesboro.

What is your overarching vision for Lanesboro? Where would you like our town to be in 5, 10+ years from now?

(2,500 character response limit)

I would like to see Lanesboro further along with regard to energy independence. Getting our school converted to electric buses and battery storage system tied to local solar arrays feeding the grid would be a good next step in moving forward to a local "Minigrid". We have a long history of powering our own future starting with our dam at our very beginnings. Some have questioned the usefulness or effectiveness of our local electrical system but we need to keep it in our plans.

How can the city ensure it is prioritizing our business community and enacting business-friendly ordinances and policies?

(2,500 character response limit)

This is a very leading question and doesn't address the concerns of our entire citizenry and community. If a business is good for our community it will grow accordingly. Providing employment is important. Making a profit and sustaining a business is the goal of every business owner. Good communications and public process is the best way to make everyone succeed, businesses and citizens alike.

What do you think is the best way the city council can engage with residents and business owners so that their voices can be heard?

(2,500 character response limit)

Set up a clearing house for questions and answers on the city web site is a start. We should more actively engage in discussion with citizens who come before city council to address their concerns. We aren't all crackpots. We need to trust one another. Our general quality of life reflects a great deal of good in our residents, I respect this about my Lanesboro neighbors.

What else should people know about you and your candidacy? If you have them, include websites or other sources of information where people could find out more information about you.

(5,000 character response limit)

You can contact me at bisko7737@gmail.com if you seek more information.

I have read the League of MN Cities Mayor's handbook, and am very willing to take classes offered for newly elected officials.

I have served on Lanesboro's EDA and Public Utilities boards in my history as a resident. I know there is a great deal more to learn in order to work effectively with and for our city, and I believe a good framework already exists in the boards and employees of the City of Lanesboro.

This form was created inside of Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce.

Google Forms