

# 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 \***

Sarah Pieper

**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)*

I was born and raised in Caledonia, MN. My husband and I moved to Lanesboro in 1994 to start our own restaurant in the community. It was important to us to find our home in the town that we did business and have resided in Lanesboro all these years. I have owned a local business in the community for almost 29 years, I have been on various boards and committees over that time including:

Lanesboro Library Board Member, 2019 - Present

Current Board Treasurer and on Personnel & Budget Committees

On the Buffalo Bill Committee, 1998-20, 2023 and 2024.

Member of the Lanesboro Downtown Business Committee, 2015-2022

Chair for a Lanesboro Art in the Park food booth. Fundraiser for various Lanesboro School activities, 2009 – 2019 and 2021

Co-chair of the Lanesboro Girls Day Out Committee, approximately 2013-2018

Lanesboro ACT Board Member (now Lanesboro Chamber), approximately 1999-2003,  
President 2003

Served on the Marketing Committee and Membership Committee for Lanesboro ACT/Lanesboro Chamber

I have raised 3 children while in Lanesboro and volunteered for MANY different school activities, fundraisers, and chaperoning. I was Knowledge Bowl Advisor for 5 years, a sub at the Lanesboro School, and ran the Lanesboro Child Care Center from 2007-2011.

I would like to be a City Council Member because I feel it is important to assist in the growth of our community by serving as an active member in different organizations. I believe our community stays strong when each of the community members takes their turn to be part of the process of good government.

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**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)*

The role of a city council member is to serve the community. Council members need to listen to our citizens. I would engage with other committees and organizations to work together. We need to stay in touch with our long-term goals and not get distracted with smaller issues that makes us lose focus. I would take time to research issues brought to the council and work hard to move them forward using all the information we can gather to make the most informed decision on any issues before the council. I would continue to be a champion of the public library.

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**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)*

Highway 250 construction that will run through the main street of the downtown.  
Improve affordable housing.  
Continue the independence of the public library.

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**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)*

Tourism and agriculture are both very important to our economy and our identity. We will always be a farming community. We need to continue to find ways to keep young people returning to their farming roots in Lanesboro.

Tourism is what keeps our downtown businesses strong and able to survive here. We must support those businesses and our Chamber of Commerce to attract more people to stay in Lanesboro. Our lodging tax and downtown business tax must continue to ensure that tourism helps support the services provided for everyone's benefit.

My experience as a business owner has shown me that we have difficulty with attracting people to some of the tourism related jobs. I would like to see what other seasonal tourism communities have done to improve this issue.

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**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)*

STRONG COMMUNICATION. Give well publicized work updates with good public education on the process. Before construction begins have the best step-by-step plan to keep the project on the proposed time-line.

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**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 attend all engineering meetings, closely watching all spending on the project. See that we hold all involved accountable for any issues as they arise. I would listen to community members and businesses when making decisions regarding this construction project. It is important to the downtown businesses to accomplish this project on schedule and following the construction plan as determined with the MN Department of Transportation and Bolton & Menk.

I would invite our State Representative and Senator to project update meetings.

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**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)*

According the "Minnesota Public Library Trustee Handbook and Standards for Minnesota Public Libraries" all statutory city library boards are governing boards. Lanesboro is a statutory, plan A, fourth class city of Minnesota so the Lanesboro Library should have been set up as a governing board. As a Library Board Member since 2019 I believe we have run our board as a governing board and should continue to do so. We have a strong library in our community run by an experienced and able Library Director with the assistance of a governing library board. I have been fighting and doing my research to protect the rights of the Lanesboro Library. This will not stop if I am elected to the City Council.

The City Council needs to utilize its energy on issues that will strengthen and improve our community. Their time should be better spent; instead I would propose an ordinance to codify the Library Board as a governing board so this question will be put to rest.

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**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 listen to the City Administrator on the information they were providing the council and would expect all resources to be documented. If an issue required more in-depth research, I would refer it to the appropriate subcommittee where more comprehensive research could be completed for legal issues, how it would affect community members, what the overall affect would be on the community, and be sure all aspects of the issue was completely reviewed. If I were on that committee, I would examine the issue, reach out to experts to help clarify any questions and work with the committee to come up with a sound, researched recommendation to resolve the issue. In this way, the full council would be prepared at the next council meeting to discuss and vote on how to proceed.

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

*(2,500 character response limit)*

Very Important. Lanesboro has many historic buildings over 100 years old. Most have been repaired and preserved for the benefit of the community. It is important to embrace our history in part by preserving the buildings and landmarks we have in our town. As the owner of the Old Village Hall Restaurant, we worked with the Historic Preservation Society to maintain the historical appearance and structure of the building. While we also have to consider the functionality of the building for a new business purpose, I believe it is possible to create vital new businesses in the historical structures. It is important that we maintain the historical community that has fostered our strong tourism community. "The Magical Hamlet" is part of the draw to tourists who come to stay here every year and contribute to our financial stability. As an owner for 29 years for one of those businesses I can tell you first hand how it is important to protect our historic buildings and downtown historic district to keep our tourism strong.

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**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 is important to always be looking for ways to recruit new families and businesses into our community. Some ideas that I think could assist Lanesoboro growth would be: to create a family recruitment program (a number of MN cities are currently doing this), to actively recruit builders for affordable housing, and to promote our city's high speed internet for remote work.

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**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)*

No. Typically homes for sale in Lanesboro are higher than the neighboring communities. I have had people tell me they were looking for housing in neighboring communities because houses for sale in Lanesboro were priced much higher.

We need more multi-family housing to accommodate young people to return to the community. We need to find ways to create more rental property as a transition for new people who can not afford to purchase a home initially.

Finally, Property taxes here are high and keep getting higher. The city needs to cut spending to decrease property taxes.

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**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)*

My visions for Lanesboro is a family oriented community that facilitates remote work, local jobs, and business growth in the community. I believe there is the potential to gain remote businesses that do not need a large physical building. With the constraints of the river and bluffs we do not have a lot of unused space in the downtown. We need to find ways to reach that demographic to show them how our community offers high speed internet for work, a great community for family, a strong school system, and beautiful outdoor recreation. These businesses could run year-round and compliment the farming and tourism industry.

Work with the EDA to see where we could reach/educate more people on the opportunities available to families living in Lanesboro. Our community already has a high number of residents who have "transplanted" here; reach out to the newer citizens and find out what encouraged them to relocate here. By increasing our population over time, it will also draw more businesses that provide ammenities to the population like a grocery store and other service businesses.

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

*(2,500 character response limit)*

Enforce the current ordinances. Don't allow businesses to build grain bins or other buildings that are not in compliance. Be sure that new businesses are following the ordinances before they receive permits and don't start building until all plans are reviewed and approved. However, the city also needs to do their research, keep the public informed, and resolve issues in a public and timely manner.

Get input from the businesses that will be directly affected by an ordinance. Our elected officials can not be experts on all issues, we need to talk to those business owners because they can tell us more specific ways that an ordinance or policy will impact them.

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**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)*

To invite more community members to participate in city activities, local committees, and attend events. I appreciate that the city website gives any person the ability to sign up for city emails to be informed when events are taking place. Could the city do a "recruitment" to increase the number of people receiving these emails? Additionally, the city must post this information in several public settings for all others to be aware of city issues coming before the council. Lanesboro should research methods successfully utilized by other small cities to get information to its citizens in this electronic era.

I believe there is always room for improvement to engage community participation. We are fortunate in Lanesboro to have many citizens who are taking an active role on boards and committees but I would like to reach even more community members.

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**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)*

I have been an active member of the Lanesboro community for 30 years. I ran a local business, have worked on several boards and committees, was a volunteer for many school activities, and always worked to improve the opportunities available to my children, myself, and my neighbors. If elected to the City Council, I will work hard, do research to assist in shaping Lanesboro into a stronger community that attracts new citizens and businesses.

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

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