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ELECTIONS 2011

Keys to the Candidates: Bloomington City Council, at large races

Five candidates running for three seats

Compiled by the League of Women Voters of Bloomington-Monroe County and produced by The Herald-Times
October 11, 2011, last update: 10/11 @ 9:25 am



EDITOR'S NOTE: No corrections or changes have been made to the candidates' responses. An asterisk () next to the candidate's name in the list of candidates for each race indicates the candidate has signed the League of Women Voters' Code of Fair Campaign Practices.*

Timothy Mayer,* Democrat

Jennifer Mickel, Republican

Andy Ruff,* Democrat

Susan Sandberg,* Democrat

Ed Schwartzman,* Republican

What are your qualifications for the office you are seeking?

MAYER:

City Council: 1983-87, 1996-present. Experience: Plan Commission, BZA, GPP, Community Development Block Grant, Utilities Service Board, Social Service Funding, Council sidewalk committee, B-Line Trail committee.

MICKEL: Bloomington resident 24 years including childhood. Small business/property owner. Council respondent private property rights/budgets/land-use/traffic. Lived abroad — discovered government's mistakes. I.U. alumna.

RUFF: 3 terms service on City Council, Master's Degree in Public Affairs, 10 year employee Monroe County Planning, former staff-member for Congressman Baron Hill.

SANDBERG: An experienced at-large incumbent since 2007, I listen respectfully to the residents of Bloomington. My leadership style is collaborative, and I can make tough decisions.

SCHWARTZMAN: I'm a common-sense business owner, fiscally conservative, socially moderate — supporting free-market competition and less government intrusion — which raises the quality of life for all.

How would you define your primary responsibilities as a member of the City Council?

MAYER:

Constituent services are my first priority — responding to citizen concerns and solving their problems. I work with all of our city departments, to maintain our city's infrastructure — reporting missing street signs, sidewalks in need of repair, sidewalks not cleared of snow, code violations, etc.

I support our police and fire departments, public transit, public works, city parks and city utilities through the annual budget process to make Bloomington a city that is safe and civil for all of our citizens. I focus my efforts to make Bloomington a livable community for all — through the efficient use of our city's resources.

MICKEL: The primary responsibility of a Council person is to be a full participant in understanding all the concerns; pros and cons of all the issues brought to vote in the council. To vote with as much input and agreement as possible with the Councilman's constituents.

RUFF: As the legislative body of the City, the Council is a direct, accessible link between Bloomington citizens and local government. The job of the Council is to work to pass legislation that fosters the health, safety, and welfare of the City while ensuring the efficient and cost-effective delivery of municipal services. City Council members work closely with each, with the City Administration, and with the public to develop social, environmental, and economic policy for the City collaboratively.

SANDBERG: Doing the homework required to analyze complex information and making fiscally sound legislative decisions are basic requirements for the City Council. The primary responsibility is to actively participate in all meetings and to be inclusive and responsive to individual or group constituents. While doing this I keep the bigger picture of the best interest of Bloomington as a whole in clear focus. It is not my job to be an expert in all facets of city management. It is my responsibility to listen to trusted experts, carefully evaluate current and future public needs, exercise judgment, and use financial resources effectively.

SCHWARTZMAN: To the best of my ability, be a humble and faithful servant to the great city of Bloomington. These past few months I have talked to thousands of our neighbors, and they've reminded me to be a great listener, to remember that government can't solve every problem (Sometimes government IS the problem!) and to be extremely conservative when spending the tax-payers dollars.

Also, I will strive to be a friend of business — the heart and soul of our city — so that our local businesses are inspired to invest, and others are inspired to move here.

How should the city develop the 12-acre tract north of the Showers Building?

MAYER:

City Council supported the Mayor's request for purchase of the 12 acres for the purpose of controlling the development in the best interest of the community. The concept is to develop the site as a technology center with the necessary infrastructure. Selection of a consultant is eminent and the goal is to create a master plan for the property, build the infrastructure and prepare sites for private developers. The land will be sold to developers who meet the goals and objects of the Plan. The goal is to create a 21st Century city center to encourage and foster high-tech employment.

MICKEL: Many things must be considered for the use of that property, and since I have not had a chance to hear my constituents and all the circumstances. I cannot tell you how I would vote at the moment.

RUFF: This acreage in the City's Certified Technology Park should integrate into our downtown through infrastructure investment that assists local business activities and that makes it walkable and bikable. Redevelopment and building reuse should focus on nurturing local tech-sector businesses and new jobs. Some of this land (and adjacent land) should be redeveloped by the private sector to add housing for seniors and for those who work downtown. It's important that the public join in the City's planning process beginning this winter. This is a critical opportunity to plan now to ensure the future strength of our local economy.

SANDBERG: We need to promote creative strategies to maintain and develop economic prosperity. This land gives us an amazing opportunity to incent new business ventures, housing developments for diverse age and income groups, and other innovative public benefits to meet community needs. The possibilities are endless, and we will incorporate public visioning and professional planning for the best use of this land in the downtown core. We encourage mixed-uses, commercial growth for job creation and expansion, and supportive infrastructure. We envision this tract as a lively, sustainable business incubator with economic and social benefits including recreational attractions and green building design.

SCHWARTZMAN: The tract the city recently purchased represents an amazing opportunity to engage our citizenry in ways that might not have been considered before. Town-hall style meetings should be held to gain input from all. Mixed-use is certainly the goal here — with senior housing, low-rent housing, condominiums, shopping, retail etc all having a place at the table.

Bloomington is the most vibrant city in the mid-west, and our citizens are what make us so unique — with their input we can ensure that this new development is something that we can all be proud of.

In light of recent state and federal budget cuts, what should be the city's priorities for support of social services?

MAYER:

Declining state and federal support for social services are being met at the local level through the city's Jack Hopkins Social Service Fund. Grants are allocated through an annual competitive process administered by a City Council/citizen committee. As a long-standing member, I look for meeting the greatest needs first and encourage collaboration amongst agencies to maximize the power of each dollar granted. During the city's annual budget process I advocate for maintaining and increasing the fund amount so we can help the needy. I am also the City Council's representative to the Community Development Block Grant physical improvements allocation process.

MICKEL: It has been proven over and over that charities are run more flexibly and efficiently by the private socially interested organization. This can be seen very easily in regards to charitable organizations in Bloomington. Here we do have the ability to run them without the heavy, and restrictive rules and regulations that come with government participation. We are a very generous, empathetic and creative county.

RUFF: I agree with Mayor Krusan's inclusion of a strong social services safety net as an integral part of the formula for the economic development success of our community. Part of the funding crisis resulting from federal and state cuts has been and should continue to be met by increasing commitment of resources from local government. This includes funding and active partnerships with organizations to forge relationships that maximize innovation, resources, talents, and dollars. The prioritization of funding emergency services (food, shelter, healthcare) currently used in distributing funds in the City's Hopkins Social Services Fund should continue as a guiding principle.

SANDBERG: I devote much of my time on City Council increasing support for Bloomington's social service agencies providing food, shelter, healthcare, recovery assistance, and youth programs for low-income individuals and families. More children are falling into poverty. Job opportunities and salaries are not keeping pace with the cost of living for a growing number of residents. A healthy business environment with good paying jobs is critical in helping us do more for nonprofit organizations providing social services. I will continue to work tirelessly on both ends of the spectrum — strengthening economic development and social safety nets to increase opportunity and prosperity.

SCHWARTZMAN: The need for social services is increasing, unfortunately, the tax-base to fund these services is dwindling. This places our council in the awkward position of having to select which of the services is the most deserving of the taxpayers dollars.

Our priority must be to create an environment that encourages businesses to invest and expand. When businesses grow, the tax base grows. When payrolls expand, more of our citizens become self-sufficient — thereby reducing the need for social services. Reducing unemployment is the fastest way to reduce the pressure on the city to provide more and more social services.

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KC Baker,* Republican

Chris Sturbaum,* Democrat

What are your qualifications for the office you are seeking?

BAKER:

Municipal development and planning experience; past director of a Chamber of Commerce; Master's Degree Candidate in Public Affairs at IU; no conflicts of interest.

STURBAUM: My experience in neighborhood activism, historic preservation, 32 years of business ownership and eight years on city council provides perspective for important community decisions.

How would you define your primary responsibilities as a member of the City Council?

BAKER:

My first responsibility is to represent the citizens and neighborhoods of Bloomington's west side. My decisions should be informed by what is best for the neighborhoods I represent, and I have an obligation to seek out the opinions and wisdom of my constituents on difficult issues. My second responsibility is to ensure that the decisions made by the City Council are consistent with a vision for our community that is fair, preserves quality of life, and ensures economic opportunity for everyone. Finally, I have an obligation to ensure transparent, effective government without seeking personal gain or benefit.

STURBAUM: The big picture for me is to enhance the quality of life for everyone in our city. Sustainability, Transportation, Affordable Housing and Recycling for Apartments are big issues . And I enjoy being a voice for neighbors in our district when something small needs to be fixed. I look forward to working on parks, traffic, B-line Trail issues, green yards, stop signs, over-occupancy of rentals, chickens, sidewalks, neighborhood preservation and future issues and ideas from your phone calls and emails. Together we can make the changes in our community that will make us a better, stronger and more compassionate Bloomington.

How should the city develop the 12-acre tract north of the Showers Building?

BAKER:

I agree with the Mayor that the city should not be in the real estate business. I support development of that space through responsible zoning decisions, not direct city development. This approach raises revenue, ensures perpetual revenue through tax collections, and removes a blight from that area of downtown while ensuring that development is consistent with a master plan for all of downtown while [retiring](#) debt and creating a broader tax base. I would personally like to see a mixed-use approach, with a focus on live/work options, and I absolutely support the "certified tech park" that has been discussed.

STURBAUM: The miracle of the revitalization of the west side and downtown, reflected in the B-Line and Farmers' Market, should give us both hope and vision for the Showers District. Respecting the history of the Showers Factory, once the vital economic center of Bloomington, we should lay the groundwork for a new section of downtown by putting in road and sidewalk infrastructure to encourage private [investment](#) in this newest section of downtown Bloomington. Work-live units, senior and affordable housing and quality architecture should all be part of this exciting future. With good planning, this area could return to its previous vitality.

In light of recent state and federal budget cuts, what should be the city's priorities for support of social services?

BAKER:

With tighter budgets, we must support those services which have a direct, positive, measurable and lasting impact on people's lives, and the last two (measurable and lasting) are easily the most important. This includes job training, support for those seeking work (child care, resume development skills, [job fairs](#), etc.) and educational programs while also supporting those who are unable to support themselves through no fault of their own. "Return on investment" is not the only metric for success, but we have to spend the money we do have where it will do the most good.

STURBAUM: The democratically controlled city council has increased spending on social services every year of my participation. I expect that to continue. Our social services do untold good for some of our less visible citizens. This

help can lead the recipients to productive self sustaining lives while employing a service sector which gives back to our community far more than we can afford to [invest](#) in their agencies. Private sector donations maintain our non-profits but government help can sometimes make the difference between staying in service or closing the doors. More often, with city support, the quality of service is improved and the agency strengthened.

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