

**Tycee Bell**

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## **City of Joliet Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire for 2023**

### **1. Please list your top three priorities / initiatives of action once elected.**

1. Neighborhood improvement. For some parts of Joliet this will mean water, for some police, for some sidewalks and street lights, for some affordable access to after school services, and for many just business as usual, no disruptions.
2. Pride in and ownership of our city by those of us who live here - not just do business here. This is the first step in Resetting Joliet and building a brighter future for the kids here than we had growing up.
3. Transparency, and transparency means accountability. No one who lives here, should be able to be unaware of what is being done on their behalf. We police communities on their behalf, so it must be transparent. We tax communities on their behalf, so it must be transparent. We build water and sanitation and streets on their behalf, so it must be transparent.

### **2. Do you feel that TIF districts such as the Cass Street, former Silver Cross, and St. Joe's hospital areas have been fully utilized? Please explain why or why not and any plans you may have for these areas.**

I loved Cass St. growing up. My church Prayer Tower and favorite ice cream shop were next door to one another. I still frequent the area for food and fellowship. It's not the Cass St. we see now. My first job was at Strictly For You (hair salon) on Cass St. We've torn more down than we've built and abandoned businesses.

As Mayor of the City of Joliet I plan to meet with key stakeholders. Joliet City Center Partnership, Joliet Chamber of Commerce, African American Business Association, Joliet Latino Economic Development Association and our city colleges. We need to come together with each Councilman/Councilwoman to develop the business and property owners in these TIF districts. While I enjoy the downtown entertainment district, If we seek to grow business in these other areas we will need to identify what's needed. I'm ready to bring in a strategic planning team to assess our next steps. This will help us determine the needs for each area and tangibly address the underlined problems.

Having access to meat markets, fresh produce stores are more economical and practical. I will go above and beyond to ensure that communities are included in the planning process. After speaking with families and business owners, many want to believe Joliet is still a good place to live and raise their families. This is key to each district's success. If we compare cities ½ our size within 30 miles, we have a lot of opportunity if we indeed pledge to develop and redevelop these TIF districts.

### **3. Do you support further development on the south side of Joliet in and around the intermodal / Rt. 53 corridor?**

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Only if that development supports the community. Will it further isolate people in those neighborhoods and increase traffic and pollution? Will it provide a large number of diverse and stable and preferably union jobs? Will it grow other local small businesses? Right now, I don't see the benefits to the community outweighing the negatives.

**4. What are your thoughts on the Chicago Street development plan, including the Van Buren Street Plaza?**

It's very nice. Where's the why for Joliet residents and our current hybrid workforce? My concern is we will abandon it as a city and focus on the far west side developments within 10 years if there's not a sustainable plan in place for future residents. A few thoughts; Joliet purchases property in this area for businesses to compliment the needs of our residents. Pledge to keep it a safe, clean, and monitored area. There should always be affordable entertainment and public use incentives. Let's not turn this into a private concert venue to capitalize instead of cultivating the culture of Joliet as displayed throughout the plan.

**5. What are your thoughts on downtown Joliet parking options such as the parking deck and how do you see street parking being handled going forward in downtown Joliet?**

If we want to draw people to the downtown, if we want business to locate downtown, if we want it to be an economic engine, then parking needs to be plentiful, easy, and free.

**6. What type of working relationship do you plan to have with neighborhood groups?**

The same close and highly integrated and involved position I have always had. I am from here and have grown up in these neighborhood groups and churches. I am rooted to Joliet and nowhere else can be my home.

**7. Do you feel that east side economic development has kept pace with economic development on the west side of Joliet? Absolutely not.**

**8. Do you have any ideas for revitalization for the near west area of town, the Jefferson Street corridor, and the Larkin entryway into the city?**

Yes, like many other cities have done, I want to create business incubator sites in Joliet to encourage new small and start-up businesses, both retail and commercial, to not only locate in areas of Joliet that need them but also incentivise them to develop ties with other local businesses and keep them here. This keeps more dollars in our community. This will require a greater investment and "by in" from the community than we are used to, but the missed opportunities downtown and on Larkin and Jefferson could "Reset Joliet" using new and innovative businesses and start-ups to capture more of the disposable income available that usually goes West and North.

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9. **Do you feel there is adequate economic development on the far west side of Joliet (west of Rt. 59)?** Yes, probably too much.

10. **What type of impact do you believe the Cullinan Properties project and the Houbolt Bridge will have on the region?**

Rock Run Crossings is another extravagant plan for the Westside of Joliet. Actually, the far west side. This plan is happening simultaneously with several other projects. We have to bring subject matter experts from each chamber to the table to have a long term vision which includes succession planning to ensure these projects reach their full potential for business growth and development. When we decided to work on the downtown/eastside, we conveniently relocated and encouraged folks to abandon the entertainment district and travel further for entertainment? If this is something the current Joliet Chamber supports? If so, I would be interested in knowing how much support has been implied to date. Which chamber has been in conversation with Cullinan Properties if any. Where there is no plan, there is no pathway to success. A few processes will help develop a core base to build Joliet's economy in every district.

I will convene 2-3 partners to write a community benefit agreement with all necessary parties. At least 4 unions who have experience in retail, restaurants, entertainment, hospitality, and medical collective bargaining agreements. These meetings will include current leadership at all levels who will identify and foresee issues. As Mayor I will be at the table to ensure Joliet residents, and business owners in Will County directly benefit.

Small businesses in Joliet should be concerned. This development does not stimulate the Joliet economy where it is suffering the most structurally. There has to be at least 10 small businesses and even more tax payers creating a 10-20 year economic development plan. This development doesn't help our current Joliet Chamber of Commerce members.

11. **What would you do to improve the overall safety of citizens in the City of Joliet?**

To improve overall safety we need to spend more on community services and programs, and increase community integration of Police and other first responders. Accountability and transparency builds trust and pride of ownership in our city.

12. **Do you feel there are adequate affordable housing options in the city?**

"Affordable" has a direct correlation to structural quality and safety, access to food and education, neighborhood safety and sanitation, as well as the presence of services. What is affordable is not adequate for young parents or retirees.

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**13. Do you believe that there is a need / opportunity for additional SSA districts in the city?**

Yes.

**14. Do you believe there is a homeless and hunger issue in the city and if so, what can be done?**

Absolutely, and it is about access. In the US we destroy 40% of the calories we produce before it ever gets to the consumer. Being unhoused doesn't necessarily mean unemployed. Both of these issues are a matter of gatekeeping things that are available but because of lack of money, not character or humanity people go cold and hungry. These issues will always be with us, but a small investment in our community to "lower the gates" even just a little, pays off.

42.3 million people out of our 350 million population will receive SNAP benefits so they and their families can eat. With the onset of Covid a small expansion of SNAP was granted in 2021. This expansion resulted in an extra \$95 a month. This extra \$95 a month reduced poverty by about 10% in states that participated in this expansion. Effectively the top 300 million or so Americans paid out \$13.40 a month to raise an additional 4.2 million people out of poverty.

Since March 1, those families receive \$95 less dollars a month even though food prices have risen an additional 10% in 2022. Poverty for 1 out of 10 Americans has a dollar value for the rest of us and that is \$13.40 a month. That's it, \$13.40. Joliet can do that.

**15. Share with us your background and what unique qualities you believe you possess that stand out from the other candidates.**

I'm a Community Affairs professional with a career spanning over 20 years in non profit. My goal has always been to take my executive experience, board experience and become a world leader who works with large cities to implement new governance structures to ensure the betterment of humanity. I'm the Founder and Visionary Director of Seven Mountains, LLC and Community Cultivation Project, NFP. I work with leaders locally and across the county to ensure our voices are heard at the nation's capitol. Because Joliet is the largest inland port in North America, have the opportunity to leverage resources from IJIA, IRA, and the CHIPS Act to assist in improving the quality of life in Joliet. These are just a few landmark legislations that will help us cultivate a community where all of its citizens can thrive. \*Resume and bio available by request at [tyceebell@citizensfortyceebell.com](mailto:tyceebell@citizensfortyceebell.com)

**16. Have you previously or are you currently serving on a governing board such as a business, nonprofit, other government, or a religious or education organization?  
Community Cultivation Project, NFP**

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**Seven Mountains, LLC**

**Chicago Cannabis Chamber of Commerce**

**Equity and Transformation e.a.t.**

**Office of Firearm Prevention, Local Advisory Council RPSA IDHS**

**Joliet Chamber of Commerce Ambassador 2019**

**African American Business Association, Membership Chair 2019-2022**

**The Salvation Army Advisory Board Member 2019-2021**

**Executive Board Member | J.A.Y. - Joliet Alliance for Youth**

**District 86 Principal for A Day | October 2018**

**Will County Community Services Council | Member at Large 2005| Past Officer**

**Steering Board Member | Will County Take Back the Night | 2016 - 2021**

**Community Member | Will County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition |  
2016 - 2018**

**Catholic Charities Board of Young Professionals | 2014 - 2017**

**17. If so, how would this experience prepare you for this role and if not, do you believe this lack of experience would be a concern for voters?**

I have the skills, educational training and community support. I know what we need are solutions, sustainable programs, and inclusive city planning. I plan to leverage my current partnerships and relationships to build trust with the current city employees and focus on the pulse of the whole city. I have always been a visionary leader who knows that collective work has more impact when working with influential leaders. Managing over 10k volunteers is in my top 3 career highlights.

*Vision can be out of reach but never out of sight. This is why protecting citizens is about building human capital. We must require more of ourselves and become civically engaged. It's important to always remember that we have the capacity to connect and transform the world by our actions. I have high moral values and I am a decent human being who puts others first.*

**Pope Francis Mercy is the Way Award Recipient, May 2016**

**P.E.P.S. Awards 2021- Pastor Ethel Pearl Volunteer of the Year**

**Project Acclaim 2022 1st Quarter recipient of Reverend James E. Allen Award for Service to the Community**

**P.E.P.S. Awards 2022 Pastor Ethel Pearl Pioneer of the Year**

**18. What level of interaction do you plan to hold with constituents and do you feel that you have the ability to be continually accessible?**

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Give them my phone number and let them call or text me or my assistant so we can get them directed to whatever services or other state or federal authority they might need. This will also put my office in a position to know what constituents need as well as to advocate for them.

**19. What are your thoughts on the status of unfunded city pension and retiree healthcare liabilities?**

Easily covered if we simply live up to our economic potential and invest in Joliet and the people in it, rather than investing in more “intermodal transport” and the accompanying non-union warehouse jobs. Those pensions and retirees represent people that worked to make our neighborhoods better and teach our kids. They invested in Joliet. We have to use that investment to grow and pay it forward to the next generation, not pull up the economic ladder behind us. This is what so many young people in this community feel like we have done to them. My thoughts are we need to do better, not make excuses why we can't.

**20. Do you believe that our local transportation system is adequate?**

We have an opportunity to improve our transportation services. A number of services are spread out and our kids can't access them in their neighborhoods. In several districts people have to travel far to get to a grocery store or a decent paying job.

**21. Do you believe that the city is providing quality services such as water, garbage removal, sewer, snow removal, and infrastructure?**

If you live on the West side, sure they provide quality service. The East side is left dirtier and with less usable sidewalks and street lamps and out of date plumbing. The 6th and 15th precinct deserve sidewalks and street lamps and livable neighborhoods with services, just as much as everyone else.

**22. How would you work to improve communication with the citizens of Joliet?**

Give them my phone number and let them call or text me or my assistant so we can get them directed to whatever services or other state or federal authority they might need. This will also put my office in a position to know what constituents need as well as to advocate for them.

**23. What strategic alliances can be explored and/or better utilized? Do you feel the city has a solid relationship with county, state, and federal elected officials? Please explain why or why not and how that can be improved.**

We have a Culinary School Downtown, we have a desperate need for a grocery store downtown, we have multiple community food pantries downtown and we have a Casino

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with all of its attached food services. There is natural synergy there to create a food distribution hub that the city has consistently failed to capitalize on. Instead we rely on the Northern Illinois Food Bank on Larkin - on the West Side - to supply those in need. If we want restaurants and entertainment and venues downtown, the facilities that are training and employing those professionals should be our biggest partner and no one who lives around there should have to wonder where to get wholesome and affordable food. If we are going to be a distribution hub, let downtown by I80 be a food distribution hub. It can provide the much needed grocery availability as well as grow new food and food processing businesses. With the Culinary School, the Casino, the desire to revitalize downtown, a large, year round, city supported, indoor food wholesale/retail market could make a big impact.

Our downtown and east should be an economic engine, but because of “westward flight” we have let it become a place of run down and cheap housing. Let us be clear, just because the East side gives Joliet more “affordable” housing, what is the quality and condition of those homes and neighborhoods and what services are available? It is all Joliet taxes so why does it look so different depending on what number you are at on Jefferson St.? It shouldn't and I plan to change that.

**24. Do you have any conflicts of interest that would prevent you from participating in council business? No.**

**25. How do we maintain and enhance Joliet's position as a complete community with a thriving commercial and retail sector, highly ranked schools, diverse workforce, affordable housing, vibrant and walkable neighborhoods, and plenty of opportunities for recreation?**

In order to improve, we have to first admit where we have failed. We used to have businesses like Caterpillar and two busy shopping malls, so we have fallen behind in developing our commercial and retail sectors. Instead of making things for good, union-wage jobs, we have leaned into jobs that are moving around things that are made elsewhere with low paid warehouse jobs. The people living here in these neighborhoods never wanted to be the “docks” for this “inland port.” It was forced on them because they didn't have affluence or voice.

Our schools are good because we have previously prioritized funding for them, but just like when I was in high school in the mid 90's we are questioning a referendum for their funding. This is a recurring issue and everytime we question whether or not to invest in our schools, we shake the community and businesses' faith in us. If we want good schools, they need to be funded and embraced as the foundation of our community.

A “diverse workforce, affordable housing, vibrant and walkable neighborhoods, and plenty of opportunities for recreation” are all predicated on geography. If you are on the

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West Side, then yes those things are pretty good, but the further East we go, the less of those things that exist.

Sidewalks and street lights are not that common in districts 4 and 5. The grocery store is a couple mile walk if you live in the Forest Park area.. Most programs offered by the park district take place on Jefferson St. on the West side, yet there are large numbers of kids living around the Hartman Center on Collins St. that need safe things to do after school and on weekends.

Ask yourself, is the development that has been brought about in the last two decades up until this point going to make neighborhoods around it safer or services more accessible or bring better jobs? Or just more trucks, more pollution, and more low paying non union jobs? Geography has been used as a barrier, especially the younger and poorer you are.