

**City of Joliet Questionnaire
for 2023 District Candidates**

**Response Of William J. Ferguson
City Council District 4 Candidate**



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

My priorities on the council would be general quality of life improvements which include an emphasis on public safety, traffic safety (specifically semi-truck violation enforcement), and targeted economic development and infrastructure improvements for the oldest part of Joliet, which is District 4. I believe our city government can be operated efficiently under a balanced budget without raising taxes.

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

I am an active longtime member of my own neighborhood council, so I respect the role of neighbors banding together to improve their community and work collectively to solve local problems (or making enough noise so that our government officials help us solve them). I plan to have an open line of communication to local community groups and participate in their activities as much as possible.

3. Please share your thoughts on possible economic development opportunities within your district.

District 4 includes the North third of the downtown area in addition to all of the former U.S. Steel works and old Joliet prison sites, all of which are being redeveloped or have plans for redevelopment being proposed. The city recently announced that a new recycling facility is planned for the former U.S. Steel site, but there are dozens of acres of land on both sides of the river North of the downtown area which can still be part of a master development plan that has yet to be created for the next 100 years. I want to make sure this land is used for the best and highest use for creating businesses and living wage jobs that will actively solicit, recruit and hire Joliet residents.

For any development that occurs in Joliet, a key issue for me is that the use of economic incentives for economic growth be collateralized and tied to performance. If we build infrastructure for a specific company or development, they need to meet specific job creation goals, wage and benefit goals, and tax revenue generating goals or else they need to reimburse the taxpayers of the City of Joliet for the money we laid out to help them succeed. Banks require guarantees and collateral as a normal business practice and so should taxpayers. These new requirements would prevent the current trend of the recent past where our government and tax dollars helped create too many low-wage warehouse jobs and put a strain on the existing roadways and traffic safety.

4. What would you do to improve the overall safety of citizens in your district and in the City of Joliet?

The cops need to be where the crime is. I believe District 4 residents are entitled to more car patrols, foot patrols, bike patrols and semi-truck traffic enforcement units. I do not believe crime statistics in Joliet are broken down by district, but I believe it is safe to assume that the crime rate and gang-gun-violent crime offenses are higher in the 4th District than they are in the Kendall County portion of Joliet based on the crime scene addresses reported in the newspapers. Law enforcement resources need to be deployed to where they can do the most good in both prevention and in solving crimes once they occur to get those offenders off the street — especially the violent repeat offenders.

5. Do you feel there is adequate affordable housing options in your district and the city?

Upon reading this question I looked on Zillow to see how many houses are for sale and there are over 100 in Joliet plus another 52 listings for rentals. I assume there are more listings in the MLS. Not every Joliet resident works in Joliet and not every Joliet worker lives in Joliet, so I think we need to look at it from a regional perspective of Will County as a whole, which has been one of the fastest growing economies in the United States for decades. I would not favor current property taxpayers being burdened with higher taxes to allow for government subsidies of below market rate housing for purchase or rent. In the end, I believe this is a free-market issue where home builders and real estate developers should build the housing to meet demand, but their current problem is the inflationary cost of building materials and interest rates. There is no easy answer to this question.

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

From the biographies I have seen online from the other candidates, none of the other candidates have actually worked in government, which makes a big difference when trying to hit the ground running. In addition to my knowledge of general government operations and the interaction of various levels of government and their responsibilities, I have firsthand experience working on budgets, supervising government staff, finding innovative ways within the government to accomplish goals, and working across governmental jurisdictions to accomplish the goals for the collective good. In my previous governmental roles as Will County Emergency Management Agency Director and Crisis Management Team Member, as the Chief Deputy Coroner for the Will County Coroner's Office, and as a Member of the Board of Directors for the Midwest Homicide Investigators Association, I have worked closely with law enforcement and understand the challenges they face better than my opponents. Given that public safety is a major issue in 2023, I believe that is a crucial factor in deciding which candidate will be able to best assist in making Joliet a safer place to live, work, play and run a business.

7. 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?

In addition to my local neighborhood council, I have been a member of and/volunteered my time for the Joliet Exchange Club for over 25 years and have volunteered at every Light Up the Holidays parade in downtown Joliet. Previously I served on the Board of Directors of the Midwest Homicide Investigators Association and also served as Co-Chair of the Emergency Management Work Group as a member of the Illinois Terrorism Task Force.

8. 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 think my combined life experience along with my decades of leadership level experience in government and in the community listed above speaks for itself. In addition, I am a small business owner in that I am an owner-occupied landlord who understands the rights and responsibilities of both owners and renters in the housing market.

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

Since I am retiring from government service this year, I will have ample time to engage with the residents in District 4 informally and through the neighborhood organizations in the district. I will always be able to be contacted by email and phone.

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

Yes, although our more established areas of our city certainly need more attention as far as infrastructure is concerned.

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

I think we tend to think of Joliet as a smaller regional community when in fact we are one of the largest cities in Illinois in one of the fastest growing counties in the United States for the last 30 years. The communication outreach to residents needs to expand, but I am aware that efforts by the current administration to hire communications experts to bring us into the 21st Century have been scuttled by council members stating that it's not worth the cost. Older city council members need to change with the times and residents need to be connected with across all platforms, not just the ones that traditionally worked in 1990 when there was just WJOL and the Herald News. I think local government needs to reach out via traditional news outlets, but also through multiple social media platforms as well as direct text and email notifications. Whether that is accomplished by a full time

internal staff or an expert outside communications firm needs to be decided, but it needs to be one or the other.

12. 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.

Being a long time government employee and official who has successfully worked across jurisdictions in order to accomplish the best outcome, I understand the complexity and importance of excellent intergovernmental relationships. While politicians higher up the food chain are frequently planning and positioning themselves for higher office and there is the additional hurdle of partisan political party squabbling to score points against each other, there absolutely has to be a positive line of communication between the Federal, state, county, township, school districts and park districts so that we can coordinate what is best for our citizens at the lowest responsible cost. I think the recent track record of the construction of the new county courthouse, the planned reconstruction of I-80, and the Houbolt Road Bridge construction project indicate that there is a good intergovernmental cooperation effort being made by Joliet officials. If the council members could get along better with each other we'd be in better shape.

13. Do you have any conflicts of interest that would prevent you from participating in council business?

None. I can't imagine what it could be in the future, but if any conflicts ever do arise — or even the perception of a conflict — I would confer with the Joliet City Attorney to review the details and seek advice on whether I should vote or abstain from voting on a particular issue.

14. 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?

Hard work and attention to detail. I think the Joliet city employees from top to bottom know what to do, they just need to stay focused on the tasks at hand with firm oversight by administration department directors.