



CITY COUNCIL REPORT

November 29, 2006

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Phillip L. Nelson, City Manager

SUBJECT: Council Responses to City Manager's Questionnaire

Attached is a compilation of Council member replies to the annual questionnaire Council receives in advance of budget preparation.

City Council Interview Questions

1) What do you want the City of Troy to excel at 5, 10 and 20 years from now?

- 5 years—balanced tax base; high quality of life; high property values; updated Master Land Use Plan.
- 10 years—IT and invention capitol of Oakland County; Big Beaver beginning to show life as a world class boulevard; partnerships that keep service costs low to our taxpayers.
- 20 years—THE SE Michigan destination for businesses, visitors, and families; effective mass transit; service offerings match citizen demographics.

- Wants the Big Beaver and Maple Road corridor study plans implemented at the same time.
- Stadium - Maple Road area.
- Southeast corner - TIF - Corridor Improvement Act.

- Big Beaver redevelopment with additional PUDs.
- Maple and Stephenson redeveloped.
- Balance budget/lower or maintain millage rate.
- Master land use plan updated.
- Best place in Michigan to live, work and play.

- Frugal use of taxpayer dollars.
- Innovative local government.
- Government partnerships with nonprofits and the private sector.
- A safe community.
- A family community.
- A balanced and diverse economic base.

- 5 years - To continue to be the safest city; redevelopment that will offer a balanced tax rate (no office vacancies); unemployment below 1%; a strict adherence to all ordinances which will equate to high quality of life; high level of services; high property values; wireless internet.
- 10 - 20 years - Major infrastructure improvements; a great lead into materialization of the Futures Report and Big Beaver (ring road to support a walkable downtown?). How about a coalition with other Oakland County communities to develop our own waste water treatment facility?
- Once the transit center is in place, we'll need ground transportation: buses, taxis, electric vehicles for transportation to and from hotels and businesses. Think of an ad that says, "Welcome to Troy! Troy offers transportation to whisk you from where and when you arrive to your choice of hotel or your business destination."
- Make us unique to southeast Michigan. Bring in electric vehicles. Check with Ovonics; they already have them.

City Council Interview Questions

2) Each year the State announces the consumer price index (CPI). Should the CPI become one of the guiding benchmarks for an annual overall budget increase?

- The state CPI *could* become one of several factors used as benchmarks for the growth, or decrease, of the overall budget. I would want to see it used with other factors (e.g., Troy population change, employment figures, expansion or compression of the City's AV).
- Keep taxes as low as possible.
- More core products.
- Strive for zero tax increase but never exceed the CPI.
- No. I would prefer another index that more accurately reflects costs that directly impact Troy City government.
- Not necessarily. We tighten our belts. Lose employees by attrition, have a better work ethic. Equate it more with the Michigan economy.

3) City Management believes that we should ideally maintain a fund balance of 17% but not drop below 10%. What is your opinion on this?

- I believe that we should not go below 12%, and should strive for the 17%.
- Agree, but prefer to not drop below 12%.
- I would prefer a fund balance of at least 10% and no more than 15%.
- I agree with City Management. Dropping our fund balance can have serious repercussions (lose ability to borrow, lose AAA rating, and bond investment and sales).

City Council Interview Questions

4) Is it more important to: a) Maintain the same level of service, even if it means a tax increase within our authorized limit; b) Reduce the level of service in order to maintain the overall rate of 9.43 mills; or c) Does your response differ for essential and non-essential services? If yes, define.

- For most service areas, I believe it is essential to maintain the level of service, even if it means a tax or fee increase. My answer is different for some non-essential services. For example, I believe that hours could be cut for the historical museum, nature center, and some community center functions, or fees raised, instead of raising taxes to maintain those levels of service. In all cases, I would expect staff to continue their aggressive pursuit of alternate funding and delivery mechanisms to reduce cost before requesting fee or tax increases.

- b) Reduce non-essential services and control cost. Always maintain excellent police and fire services, as well as the roads.

- We need to maintain the overall rate of 9.43 mills. However, we also need to focus on ways to partner with nonprofits and the private sector to help maintain a high level of service without resorting to tax increases.

- To guarantee that essential services protecting life, property, health and safety are maintained, my preference is to:

1. First, shift funding from non-essential services.
2. As a last resort, increase taxes.

- a) The level of service is why people come to Troy, not the lower tax rate. For me, all services are important, but certainly police, fire, streets, water and sewer have to take priority.

- We cannot allow slumming of residential or commercial neighborhoods. We must retain the character and attractions of neighborhoods in order to meet the expectations of the majority of residents. If it takes an increase in taxes to do that, so be it. Our residents do not find a half mill increase onerous - I've asked them. They were in total disbelief when Council lowered the rate by .02. What did that mean to the average homeowner? A couple of dollars.

- We must not commercialize our neighborhoods, i.e., day care centers, small business. They must be kept on the perimeters. Nor do commercial vehicles belong in residential neighborhoods. Business districts vs. residential.

City Council Interview Questions

5) In a general sense, please prioritize capital expenditures in terms of: a) Infrastructure; b) IT improvements; or c) Park development

1. Infrastructure—because of the “first impression” it gives and the ongoing frustration its disintegration can cause.
2. IT improvements—because of the efficiencies as well as education and “sense of community” such technology can foster.
3. Park development—because its quality of life improvement does not give the same “bang for the buck” as the other two.

1. Infrastructure.
2. IT improvements - only where we can demonstrate a good ROI.
3. Park development - take advantage of business donations and civic organizations to help maintain.

1. Infrastructure.
2. Park development.
3. IT improvements.

1. Infrastructure is most visible to residents. If infrastructure is well maintained, it will support capital outlay.
2. Park development - This is an environmental, ecological and recreational expectation of our residents.
3. IT improvements - Wireless and improvements to our web site. Ease of use is necessary for any users (business, residents, students, global industry, etc.) It should be our welcome mat to the world, a site we would want to visit.

City Council Interview Questions

6) What else would you like to discuss that pertains to the City of Troy as an organization, City Council, or the Council/Manager partnership?

- Council/Manager partnership—I would like to see even more emphasis on “policy” and less on mechanics from council. This could include some seminars/books/articles regarding different governance or decision-making methodology as well as case study materials.
- City Council—We need a better capability to discuss thorny issues without offending our colleagues or the public.
- City—As the community changes, there is a constant need to re-evaluate the “organizational chart.”

- Coordinating of department research.

- Streamline the processes for building and development and make more development friendly.

- How to improve and “routinize” the planning and budgeting process for City Council.
- How to enhance citizen input on City issues and long-range planning.

- I’m glad to see the word “partnership”. We need to be partners in the complete sense of the word.
- More timely response to our requests by staff.
- Better direction from our paid professionals to help us take the City to a higher level ... we must not stagnate; we must not become apathetic.
- More timely response to residents (They are not to get the feeling they are being ignored)
- We cannot afford to lose our small town flavor. Troy depends on volunteerism providing excellent service with little costs (firefighters, Library, FTPL, Historical Society, Parks and Rec., Outdoor Education Center, Troy Daze, Boards and Committees, etc.

City Council Interview Questions

7) Making the Big Beaver corridor more pedestrian-friendly is one of the key components of the corridor study. In light of this concept, should Troy invest in alternative modes of transit? Would you be willing to allocate funding?

- Absolutely. There is not a world-class city of any size without effective public transportation. Also, for a host of reasons, we need to provide the ability (as well as reasons) to walk along Big Beaver and to travel, easily, to other parts of the City.
- Yes, and we should seek sources for both private and public funding, possible private this transportation.
- With the understanding that taxes will not be increased, I believe that it would be beneficial to improve public transit in Troy. We should work with Medi-Go Plus and SMART to determine ways we can improve those partnerships.
- First of all, would it be utilized? It is dubious at best. I believe the question is premature. We need to determine alternate routes before we consider alternate modes. In the late 90s we attempted a shuttle service provided by SMART during the Christmas shopping season at noon hour for businesses mostly along 16 Mile. Never saw a report of success/failure so I don't know why it was discontinued. It was largely initiated by the Chamber of Commerce. We might want to contact them.

City Council Interview Questions

8) Please review ICMA survey results. How important is it that the City maintain its above-the-norm ratings?

• It is not important to maintain the above-the-norm ratings for ratings sake. It IS important to maintain that level of service and satisfaction to attract and retain families, jobs, and visitors.

• Survey is important.

• This is important, especially in the essential services areas.

• I would prefer that we prioritize those above-the-norm ratings that make this a safe community where people want to live and work. We should also look at our below-the-norm ratings to determine which are appropriate to address.

• Extremely important.

City Council Interview Questions

- 9) Listed below are the major areas of service the City of Troy provides to its residents. A scale is provided for you to indicate at what level of service you want each function to perform.

Staff will allocate budget funds based on the results of your answers. In other words, the level of importance to the Council as a group will be one of the guiding factors as to how available money is allocated.

	High	Medium	Low
Police	X		
Fire	X		
Streets, Water and Sewer	X		
Parks and Recreation	X		
Library	X		
Administration	X		

Parks and Recreation and Library are more non-essential services. However, they are part of our identity. It would be easy to say that those could operate at a “medium” level, but to attract and retain families and jobs, those services are essential to our “quality of life” rating. It is that quality of life that will be an even bigger draw than any tax rate we could establish.

	High	Medium	Low
Police	X		
Fire	X		
Streets, Water and Sewer	X		
Parks and Recreation		X	
Library		X	
Administration		X	

City Council Interview Questions

	High	Medium	Low
Police	XXX		
Fire	XXX		
Streets, Water and Sewer	XXX		
Parks and Recreation		XXX	
Library			XXX
Administration	XXX		

	High	Medium	Low
Police	X		
Fire	X		
Streets, Water and Sewer		X	
Parks and Recreation		X	
Library		X	
Administration		X	

	High	Medium	Low
Police	X		
Fire	X		
Streets, Water and Sewer	X		
Parks and Recreation		X	
Library		X	
Administration	X		

City Council Interview Questions

10) Additional Comments

- Suggest that private business and civic organizations be asked to help support the Parks and Recreation and Library budgets to help maintain and improve these areas. The Chamber of Commerce could be requested to participate.
- While I place Administration in the “medium” rank, I would add one qualifier - if Administration is used to enhance delivery of public services in ways that save tax dollars, I would move it up into a “high” rank (for example, the recent agreement with Clawson for police dispatching services).
- Actually, I want each function to perform at the highest level. If budgetary considerations prevent that, then the first 3 items must come first. I believe I have expressed by answers to #8 and #9 in the context of answers #1 - #7. Please review pages 6 and 9 of the Citizens Survey.