

## **City Council Candidate Forum**

City Council Candidate Forum minutes from Monday, October 29, 2007

Hosted by WH Chamber of Commerce and WH Neighborhood Association

Location: Windsor Heights Lutheran Church, 1240 – 66<sup>th</sup> Street

Moderated by Pat Moran

Candidates attending: Diana Willits stood in for Donna Markley (who was out of town for her job), Steve Peterson, Charlene Butz, and Colleen Carlson.

David Lange, WHNA President, called the meeting to order. He then introduced the current WHNA Board members (David Lange, President; Dave Jenison, Vice President, Joan Wieder, Treasurer, Sandy Davidson, Secretary, Stacey Long and Pat Moran, Board Members At Large). He then announced that there is one member at-large position vacancy. We will be asking for nominations at the next meeting on Nov. 11, 2007 at the 3E Conference Center, 953 – 73<sup>rd</sup> Street. The next meeting will be a presentation by the WH Police Department on how to organize Neighborhood Watch groups.

Joan Wieder, WHNA Treasurer, gave the treasurer's report noting that there are currently 40 paid members and 141 total members (note: this does not include new sign-ups from this meeting). The treasury balance is currently at \$1,066.09 and total expenses have been \$159.91. Numerous members (and non-members, also) have been very generous donating time and materials for various events sponsored by WHNA this past year.

Each candidate was given five minutes to introduce himself or herself, discuss their qualifications and explain why they are running. Pat Moran then presented six questions that had been prepared in advance to each candidate who had five minutes to answer. The questions were mailed to each candidate one week in advance of tonight's meeting. The order of the candidates was alternated with each question so that everyone had an opportunity to be the first responder.

### **Colleen Carlson:**

Address: 6501 Lincoln Ave

Family: husband, Logan; son, Caleb

Contact: colleengordcarlson@gmail.com

Age: 29

Education: graduated from Eagle Grove High School, doctorate of pharmacy degree from Drake University in 2002

Public Service: Habitat for Humanity, collegiate board member

Career: Pharmacist at Hy-Vee on South 51<sup>st</sup> Street in WDM

Intro: I am running for city council because I feel that our city government needs to be more transparent, and I want to maintain excellent public services for the community.

### **Charlene Butz:**

Address: 7114 Washington Ave

Family: husband, Keith; daughter, Jennifer LeVier

Contact: [kab19@aol.com](mailto:kab19@aol.com)

Age: 59

Education: BA Mathematics from University of Northern Colorado  
Public Service: Treasurer of Polk County Master Gardeners, past president of WH Foundation, past president of Keep WH Beautiful  
Career: Actuary with Principal Financial  
Intro: After serving on two committees, I've learned more about Windsor Heights and the City Council and thought I could bring more insight. And with my math background, I felt I could add more to the city's fiscal responsibilities.

**Steve Peterson:**

Address: 1909 – 79<sup>th</sup> Street  
Family: wife, Jenny; daughter, Hanna, a senior at ISU; son, Ben, a sophomore at ISU  
Contact: [www.petersonsb@mchsi.com](http://www.petersonsb@mchsi.com)  
Age: 58  
Education: Drake University School of Journalism  
Public Service: WH City Council, 1-½ yrs.; Walnut Creek Little League, 9 yrs  
Career: Wells Fargo Home Mortgage Implementation Consultant  
Intro: My name is Steve Peterson and I live at 1909 – 79<sup>th</sup> Street. When I was six-years-old, I took my bike to the old fire station on University to get my first bike license. I have lived in almost the same zip code my whole life. I moved back to Windsor Heights in 1979. Janny and I have two children at Iowa Sate University. Hanna, a senior in advertising and Ben, a sophomore in mechanical engineering.

**Donna Markley:**

Address: 6407 University Ave.  
Family: husband, Rick; daughters, Katelyn, 16, Roosevelt High School; Kristina, 12, Merrill Middle School  
Contact: [Donna@markrick.com](mailto:Donna@markrick.com)  
Age: 48  
Education: Graduated Southeast Polk High School  
Public Service: Vice president, board of directors for the Iowa Dance Theatre; volunteer coordinator for the Iowa Dance Theatre; Merrill Middle School and Roosevelt High School Parent Teacher Associations; member WH Special Events committee; WH City Council member serving on the Public Safety, Policy, Administration and Finance and Parks and Recreation Committees; Co-sponsor of the WH Youth Council, chartered 2007  
Career: Vice President, Director of Operations and Customer Care, Wells Fargo Merchant Services  
Intro: My name is Donna Markley; I am 48-years-old and have lived in Windsor Heights for 18 years this December.  
My Husband Rick and I have been married for 23 years and have two daughters, 16 year-old Katelyn and 12 year-old Kristina. I am a Vice President, Director of Operations and Customer Care for Wells Fargo Merchant Services where I have been employed for 19 years. My husband is self-employed and we own a home building and home renovation contracting business. I am the eighth of nine children and grew up in rural Polk County where I graduated from Southeast Polk High School.  
I have proudly served as a Windsor Heights Council member for the past four years during which time I held positions on the Public Works Committee, Fire Committee,

Public Safety Committee, Policy, Administration and Finance Committee and the Parks Committee. I also serve on the Special Events Committee as an active volunteer acting as the Chairman of the Bill Riley Talent Show, Movies in the Park, 4<sup>th</sup> of July events, Oktoberfest and Tuesday evening's Music in the Park. I was also the co-sponsor of the launch of our own Windsor Heights Youth Council.

In addition to my family and my job, I am the Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Iowa Dance Theatre and the Volunteer and Backstage Coordinator for their annual Nutcracker production at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines. I am also a member of the Parent Teacher Associations of both Merrill Middle School and Roosevelt High School.

Throughout my tenure on the WH City Council, I served on the Fire Committee and later the new, combined Public Safety Committee where I actively participated in several professional searches for two new Fire Chief candidates. While serving on both the Public Works Committee and the Parks and Recreation Committee, I was heavily involved in the development of a strategic plan for the long term capital improvements and amenity enhancements for Colby Park.

My professional expertise lies in service delivery to customers, policy and procedural development and employee management. By utilizing these skills, I have assisted our City leaders in the development of annual performance appraisals for all employees based on pre-established performance metrics and objectives that are developed with all City employees. I have also contributed to the development of formalized employee hiring practices, a standard employee purchasing policy, a new employee handbook and policy changes to move all City employees to a Paid Time Off structure.

I have truly enjoyed the last four years and have learned so many things about how our government functions and how one person can make a difference in their community, all valuable lessons that lead me to seek a second term as a Windsor Heights Council member. There is still much work to be done and I look forward to the opportunity to continue serving the residents, businesses, employees and visitors of Windsor Heights.

**Question #1: How would you keep citizens informed of the council's actions?**

***Charlene Butz:***

I would set up my own website to encourage communication.

All committee meetings should be open to the public as well as membership on those committees.

I would back a single zip code.

***Steve Peterson:***

We have lots of ways to communicate:

- List Serve that sends announcements out as needed (today to announce the water main break).
- We post the agenda at Bankers Trust, Hy-Vee and at City Hall inside the front door that is open 24 hours a day.
- We have a monthly newsletter in the water bill.
- Our web site—you can go to and click on anyone's e-mail and send a message to us.

- We have a coffee once a month at the Grounds for Celebration at 9:00 am.
- I'm always at City Council 15 minutes before the meetings to talk
- We are all in the phone books and will take calls at home.

If you have some additional requests, I would like to hear them.

***Donna Markley:***

The City has made numerous strides in the past few years with its communication with citizens and businesses. We have implemented the monthly Community Coffee that is attended by a City Council member and the City Administrator, we established a List Serve where special events and notifications are sent out via e-mail to anyone who registers for the free service. We have enhanced the City's website to include a variety of features and online access to many City services. We have moved from a quarterly newsletter to a monthly newsletter that is now included in the monthly Des Moines Water Works bill. In addition, monthly Chamber of Commerce meetings help keep our businesses apprised of changes and upcoming city initiatives.

As a council, we have made a concerted effort to spend more time discussing issues and explaining agenda items during council meetings. In my first few months on the council, I proposed and gained support from the rest of the council to not hold all three required votes on most ordinance changes during the same meeting. This change was an attempt to allow citizens the opportunity to gain an awareness of the ordinance change and to have at least two opportunities to attend a meeting to comment or submit a written comment to the City Administration.

I feel it is also the responsibility of the citizenry to stay informed as well. I welcome an open dialogue with my neighbors and truly believe that an informed, involved, community is stronger and better equipped to handle daily challenges and help establish long term strategic goals for their city. I encourage you all to avail yourselves to these opportunities.

***Colleen Carlson:***

I would recommend the city council meetings be held later in the evening—6:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. I would make myself available 15-20 minutes prior to meetings so citizens can speak to me in person, and be available through e-mail and by phone.

**Question #2: What are the top three issues Windsor Heights is facing now or will face in the near future? How would you address those issues?**

***Steve Peterson:***

1. Aging infrastructure.
  - A. 73<sup>rd</sup> Street needs to be replaced.
  - B. Storm and sanitary sewers are OK today
2. Older demographic and rental properties.
  - A. How do we provide the services we need to for older citizens/
  - B. How to keep up rental properties code enforcements?
3. Increased cost of running government with zero population growth.

***Donna Markley:***

Number 1: Aging infrastructure. While the City has faced the problems of our aging commercial infrastructure head on and made significant strides with the University redevelopment we still have several other pockets of urban blight to address. We have taken steps these past two years to establish the required financing structure and building code enhancements along the Hickman corridor in preparation for the next area of redevelopment focus. We must continue to focus on improving this area in order to maximize the property tax values of our northern most border. We also have some serious work to be done on our City Hall. Our City services have outgrown this facility and the physical structure itself does not lend itself to our Public Safety needs or to our ability to serve the needs of the public. Even though we would all be well served by building a new facility, realistically this is not possible from either a financial or physical space standpoint in our current location. As a result, we have begun searching possible solutions that can be accomplished simply by the reorientation of some offices and internal walls. A comprehensive, long-term plan for all City services will need to be addressed in the coming year in order to begin the budgeting process and to identify potential grant opportunities.

Number 2: Increasing number of rental properties. The number of rental properties located within our community continues to increase at an alarming rate. This increase has brought with it a number of problems including an increase in nuisance complaints from neighbors, deterioration in the upkeep of housing stock, more crime and a lack of neighborhood involvement and sense of community. While WH has some very diligent and committee property owners who take good care of their rental properties, we also have a growing number of property management firms and non-local property owners. These firms or absent landlords do not seem to have the same interest in keeping their housing stock well maintained or completing a thorough due diligence of prospective renters. Living along University, I have experienced this trend first hand with the passing of several elderly neighbors whose homes were not sold to a new family but rather turned into rental properties whose occupants have been transients with no desire to keep their yards clean or to interact with their neighbors. To solve this problem, we need to make it easy and attractive for young families or empty nesters to relocate to Windsor Heights.

Number 3: Increasing property tax revenues. Since we are a landlocked community, the only real way we have of increasing our tax revenues is by increasing the value of both our residential and commercial properties. We have seen how effective an urban renewal plan can be along University with the Town Center redevelopment. We have taken an area that, while it had it's own unique charm, brought in very few tax dollars. Through careful planning, this area has changed into a beautiful, distinctive centerpiece of our community that generates hundreds of thousands of tax dollars each year. This same challenge will need to be undertaken along the Hickman corridor to not only improve the aesthetics of the area but to also increase our property tax base. The groundwork for this redevelopment has already been laid in the past year and efforts are well underway.

***Colleen Carlson:***

Number 1: The amount of money paid to debt service. I would work to make sure we have slow and steady growth, instead of always expanding TIF districts to develop, why not pay down the TIF and build up the general fund?

Number 2: Finish University Avenue projects and Colby Park. I would also work to get these projects completed in a more timely fashion.

Number 3: Increase government transparency. I would increase communication between council members and citizens. Friday night I learned the plans for the shelter house have been scaled down—these types of issues should be discussed in the open.

***Charlene Butz:***

Number 1: The aging infrastructure. Storm and sanitary sewers need to be evaluated by an outside source.

Number 2: Preserving the residential character of Windsor Heights.

Number 3: Managing green space and seek new spaces for pocket parks.

**Question #3: What is your ten-year vision for Windsor Heights:**

***Donna Markley:***

We need to finish the development along University. Establish, finalize and begin implementation of a Hickman redevelopment project. Complete all phases of work in Colby Park and the Community Center. Establish a plan for either a remodel or restructure of the physical space at City Hall.

***Colleen Carlson:***

Ten years from now I would like to see Windsor Heights gain its own zip code. I would like to have University Avenue and Hickman Road developed without increasing our debt. I would also like to see Windsor Heights continue and grow its strong reputation for being a safe and clean community. WH needs to update its facilities for City Hall and the fire and police departments. The reputation of our public services is our greatest asset, and we need to have those facilities reflect that.

***Charlene Butz:***

I'm concerned about the sewer and streets and properly maintaining those. There have been a number of concerns with the sewer system and I am concerned about both sanitary and storm sewers. Residents have told me they've had water back up in their basements. I'd like to work to avoid that.

***Steve Peterson:***

We need to maintain a safe and stable community by providing the high quality services of both police and fire. Fire/police/ambulance calls have all had response times of 4 to 7 minutes with 83% of all calls less than 8 minutes. We also need to maintain our public services, i.e.: plowing. We need to keep our identity as Windsor Heights.

**Question #4: What is the biggest mistake the city should avoid?**

***Colleen Carlson:***

I think the biggest mistake the city can make is to try to compete with larger cities such as West Des Moines. We cannot afford to develop at the fast pace that WDM does. We need to focus on what makes Windsor Heights great, its people and its public services.

***Charlene Butz:***

Ignore updating infrastructure for more visible developments.

***Steve Peterson:***

Not budgeting for a lack of franchise fees.  
Not redeveloping Hickman Road.  
Our library expense next year to be about \$180,000.

***Donna Markley:***

I think the biggest mistake we can make is to become complacent or stagnant about our community. We must continue to look to the future and make the tough decisions we will have to face if we are to maintain our identity and attract new families and businesses. Living in town for 18 years, I have frequently heard the statement made that “it was good enough for my kids when they were growing up”. Well, that attitude will unfortunately not move us forward to face all the difficult new challenges of the future. We have to protect our infrastructure, increase amenities, find cost effective ways to provide city services and deal with the mountains of new regulatory requirements that hit our desks every day. We have to grow and change with the times or we will most likely lose our identity and be swallowed up by one of our neighboring cities.

**Question #5: What can Windsor Heights do in conjunction with other local municipalities to improve quality of life?**

***Charlene Butz:***

We need to make our ordinances consistent with the other communities. Because of its age, Windsor Heights has no restrictive covenants, which makes it a more attractive place to live for residents considered a nuisance by other communities. We need to pass more ordinances to make WH blend with surrounding community’s ordinances and covenants.

***Steve Peterson:***

We need to work to strengthen 28E agreements. There are 60+ already enforced.

***Colleen Carlson:***

I think Windsor Heights should continue its agreements it has with other cities to share the cost for Homeland Security and the use of emergency personnel/equipment.

***Donna Markley:***

We already have a large number of 28E agreements that allow us to share vital city services with all of our neighbors and we should also commit to looking for more opportunities. Such as, we already share fire emergency back up services and paramedic coverage. We share specialized police services like bomb squads, hazardous waste response and homeland security contingency plans. The Metro Area Council allows us to work jointly with other metro cities to develop global city ordinances to make life easier for businesses and tradesmen to do business within our borders. We are currently working on a vicious animal ordinance that will prevent dangerous animals to be moved from one city to another. These reciprocal arrangements only make good fiscal sense and we should continue to look for ways to share the financial burden but also maintain our city identity.

**Question #6: How can we attract young families to Windsor Heights?**

***Steve Peterson:***

When Janny and I were looking for a different home in Windsor Heights we had as a priority for our young children, sidewalks, especially on our side of the street.

***Donna Markley:***

Young families demand leisure amenities like parks, trails, youth programs and aquatic centers. They want safe routes to school and knowing they can depend on their neighbors. They also want to be involved in making a difference in their community. We have made major investments in our trail system and our parks in the past couple of years and I am very proud to be the co-sponsor of the WH Youth program. I was thrilled when we drew hundreds of teenagers to the park this summer with our Battle of the Bands on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. I never thought I would see a mosh pit in Colby Park! I was also very glad to see the large number of children playing on our new playground equipment, the masses of kids on Tuesday night Music in the Park and the great turnouts we had for Movie nights this pas summer. All these activities are what draw families to our community and we need these new families to help us sustain our city into the future.

***Colleen Carlson:***

I think we attract young families by promoting Windsor Heights public services and I also think that having a younger person on the city council, such as myself, would send a message that the opinions of young people matter in Windsor Heights.

***Charlene Butz:***

Keep infrastructure in good condition.  
Encourage families to maintain property values.  
Maintain the quiet residential character of Windsor Heights.  
Strive to attract more than just young families, i.e.: empty nesters.

That concludes the list of prepared questions for the candidates. The floor was then opened to questions, which were submitted in the writing to the moderator. There was not enough time to address all questions, but the following questions were asked and answered by the three candidates in attendance. Since these questions were not given to

the candidates ahead of time, Diana Willits was not able to answer for Donna Markley. You are certainly encouraged to contact Donna Markley if you would like her perspective on any of the following questions. Please see page 1 for her contact information.

**Question: If I vote for you would you be willing to re-visit nuisance ordinances regarding inoperable vehicles in WH? Require all vehicles to operate on city streets every 30 days?**

*Charlene Butz:* Yes

*Steve Peterson:* Ordinances passed earlier this year covers that cars must mover every 30 days. If it starts, it can sit for 6 months without moving.

*Colleen Carlson:* Yes

**Question: Would you back an on-street parking ban from 2:00 am to 6:00 am?**

*Colleen Carlson:* Yes. It would be difficult to enforce but I would look into it.

*Charlene Butz:* I would support discussion. However, this could cause considerable inconvenience to residents with short driveways.

*Steve Peterson:* I would support discussion of no parking during school hours on city streets without sidewalks.

**Question: How would you keep Colby Park safe and maintained? Bigger kids with bicycles bully younger children and tear up the new surfacing with their bicycles.**

*Steve Peterson:* I would implement an ordinance for no bikes. However, I've been to the park recently and it looks great.

*Charlene Butz:* I would ask police to patrol the park more frequently and pass an ordinance.

*Colleen Carlson:* I agree with Charlene on this one.

**Question: What criteria should government use before forcing citizens to change their property for aesthetic reasons?**

*Colleen Carlson:* This is hard to legislate. I will use lawn mowing as an example. No junk cars should be allowed.

*Charlene Butz:* Better enforcement of ordinances. I'm not aware of government forcing changes for aesthetics.

*Steve Peterson:* This should be a public safety issue, i.e.: removal of dog waste.

**Question: Where do you stand on adding sidewalks?**

*Charlene Butz:* There are places in WH that need sidewalks—63<sup>rd</sup> Street from University to Hickman and all along Hickman. However, in residential neighborhoods we should listen to the residents more. Government should be for the people. Determine where they are needed by discussion.

*Steve Peterson:* Studies have been done for the placement of sidewalks. 73<sup>rd</sup> Street—1500 block on 73<sup>rd</sup> Street to connect University to Clive School; Hickman; 65<sup>th</sup> Street on the west side from School to University; 64<sup>th</sup> Street, etc.

*Colleen Carlson:* As a mother, it is a safety issue first. On every street—maybe not.

**Question: The current city council is often at odds with each other. How would you bring the council together?**

*Steve Peterson:* It's a good thing to have good solid conversation going.

*Colleen Carlson:* Open and honest communications.

*Charlene Butz:* Open discussion—a change in dynamics is needed.

**Question: Would you support a zoning ordinance similar to Ames limiting housing occupants to three unrelated residents per residence?**

*Charlene Butz:* Further research is needed on this.

*Steve Peterson:* I agree, further research is needed. How to enforce? A strong rental code is important.

**Question: Would you support a later time for city council meetings?**

*All candidates:* Yes

**Question: Regarding the new development on University between 65<sup>th</sup> Street and 66<sup>th</sup> Street—how much is already sold or leased?**

*All candidates:* Unknown

**Question addressed to Colleen Carlson: Would being the spouse of a city employee limit your ability to be a leader?**

*Colleen Carlson:* No, because I get to see another perspective on issues at home. My boss at work is someone I went to school with and am friends with—I am able to keep that professional and personal relationship separate. I can do the same thing here.

**Question: How would you control rental housing?**

*Charlene Butz:* Keep property values up by enforcing codes and nuisance issues. Put ordinances in place.

*Steve Peterson:* Rental units must meet codes. This will be a big issue in the future.

*Colleen Carlson:* Enforce codes. We must make every effort to keep housing affordable.

**Question: What plans should we take on closing of Cowles School in 2012?**

*Steve Peterson:* Work with Des Moines School Board. This property could be used for open green space, i.e.: parks, etc.

*Charlene Butz:* It's up to the Des Moines School District what happens. Keep abreast of their plans and take action as appropriate.

*Colleen Carlson:* More research is needed.