

IVI-IPO 2007 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SUBURBAN MAYOR, PRESIDENT, ALDERMAN OR TRUSTEE

DATE **03-09-07** CANDIDATE FOR **Park Forest Village President (Mayor)**

NAME **John A. Ostenburg**

VOTING ADDRESS **11 Bigelow Road, Park Forest, IL 60466**

HOME PHONE **708-748-1265** BUSINESS PHONE **312-329-6251**

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS **Post Office Box 787, Park Forest, IL 60466**

CAMPAIGN PHONE NA FAX NA

CAMPAIGN MANAGER **S. Douglas Price**

NUMBER OF PETITION SIGNATURES FILED **400+** NUMBER REQUIRED **@170**

Please provide the following background information:

Elective or appointive public and/or party offices previously held including dates.

Park Forest Village President (Mayor) 1999-Present

Park Forest Village Trustee, 1985-1990, 1997-1999

Representative in the Illinois General Assembly, 1993-1995

Other elective offices for which you have been a candidate.

Above

Bloom Township Clerk, 2005

Principal business, educational, professional and civic activities of the past ten years.

Chicago Teachers Union, Chairperson, Communications Department 2005-Present; Editor, *Chicago Union Teacher* 1998-2001, 2003-Present; Communications Consultant, 1995-1998, 2001-2003

Governors State University, Director of University Relations, 1984-1995; Adjunct Faculty in Communications & English, 1984-1995

Prairie State College, Director of Community Relations & Executive Director of College Foundation, 1978-1984; Adjunct Faculty in Journalism & Graphic Arts, 1978-1994

Lewis University, Director of Alumni Affairs, 1974-1978; Adjunct Faculty in Journalism, 1973-1978

What subjects have you studied and what experience have you had which will be most helpful to you in the office you seek?

More than 20 years of direct experience in government

Activities for other candidates. Please be specific.

I have worked in campaigns of numerous individuals – at both state and federal levels – beginning with serving as 20th Congressional District Manager for the McCarthy for President campaign in 1968.

Please list all endorsements you have received so far.

NA

As concisely as possible, state why you feel you should be endorsed over the other candidate(s). What goals for the office you seek are most important to you personally?

I am a strong believer in consensus-building and believe that is a major strength for me. I work well with other elected officials at other levels of government and my relationship with them has resulted in positive benefits for the Village of Park Forest. I have more experience than my opponent and am more knowledgeable of issues affecting our community.

What is your campaign budget? How much have you raised to date?

Budget is approximately \$5,000 to \$7,000; have raised approximately \$14,000 to date

How many people are on your campaign staff? How many volunteers are on your list?

No paid staff; more than 70 individuals have volunteered to work in the campaign to date; I anticipate having a minimum of 150 active volunteers before the conclusion of the campaign.

PRIORITIES

1. How would you improve the delivery of services in your municipality?

During my term in office, the Village of Park Forest has initiated neighborhood meetings which take the elected officials and staff out into each of the neighborhoods of the community on a regular basis. At these meetings, which are very well attended, we receive feedback from the residents as to which municipal services need to be improved, which are working well, etc. As a result of input received from these meetings, the Village has undertaken such improvements of local services as adding a full-time police position, converting an unused tennis court to a skateboard park, repaired and improved fencing that separates residential yards from a major roadway, changed the times and days for garbage and recycling pickups, created an after-school program in which police department volunteers work with youngsters to improve social and behavioral skills, etc. I believe this is an excellent method for identifying community needs and for addressing them. Of course, the delivery of municipal services depends heavily on the amount of revenue available to undertake them. We constantly are looking for grant funds for such projects as street-lighting, water main and sewer repairs, roadway repairs, community health services, etc. For the current fiscal year, the Village has received more than \$1 million in grant monies for these purposes.

2. What are your top priorities?

As Mayor, my priorities have been: (1) reduction in property taxes: the Village has seen a 50 % reduction in the level of annual tax levy increases during my eight years in office compared to the eight years prior to that; (2) improving the racial and gender balance among those serving in governmental positions: since coming to office, I have appointed three women – including two African Americans – to serve on the Village Board, thus giving a balance of power consistent with the community population; also, I have appointed women and African Americans to positions as chairpersons or vice chairpersons of the various Village boards and commissions, whereas neither held any of those positions previously; (3) examining community services to assure cost-effectiveness and true value to the residents: the Park Forest Health Department has been given a new emphasis that is more consistent with the needs of our residents, a cooperative arrangement with Rich Township has allowed the municipal transportation service to continue to serve our residents but at half of the cost, and an underused golf course that was draining municipal tax

dollars was closed after a three-year review of its potential; (4) increasing economic development through attraction of more businesses and increased housing: since coming to office, a grocery store, a bank, a drug store chain, several medical facilities, a couple of food service facilities, and a number of retail outlets have been added to the community; meanwhile, two new housing developments are underway; (5) improving housing stock: the Village uses code enforcement as a means of assuring that all properties are held to a high standard; in addition, a special task force has been established to review housing problems and make recommendations for improvement.

My priorities for the future include: (1) efforts to reduce property taxes, especially as it relates to school funding; (2) continued economic development; (3) continued emphasis on high housing standards; (4) closer working relationships with local school districts; (5) more programs focused on youth.

3. How will you solicit and follow citizens' and community groups' recommendations on municipal matters? See answer to question #1 above for part of this answer. In addition, I will continue the current practice of holding two Saturday morning Board meetings that are intended solely for community input, and also continue all current practices as it relates to public participation sessions for all Village Board meetings. Finally, I will continue to utilize the Village's volunteer boards and commissions (e.g., Commission on Human Relations, Senior Commission, Youth Commission, Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, Environment Commission, etc.) as a means for gaining public input. In relation to this latter point, I will continue my practice of creating special "task forces" to address individual matters that come up and need more thorough investigation.

PLANNING, ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT

4. How should business and commercial development be balanced with residential development in your municipality?

Park Forest is basically a land-locked community, which has curtailed housing development over the last several years. Some tear-down of defunct commercial property currently is providing the opportunity for more residential development. In addition, the closing of a costly and under-used golf facility now is providing opportunity for an upscale housing development. Meanwhile, areas of the Village that already are zoned for commercial use are being revitalized with the hope of attracting new business. I do not anticipate that any zoning changes will be needed in the near future as a method for increasing either housing or commercial development.

5. How will you involve residents in planning?

Residents always are involved through public meetings and through work of the Plan Commission, which consists entirely of community volunteers. Park Forest has a tradition of involving citizens at every level along the process toward decision-making.

6. What is your long-range plan for the development of your municipality?

At present, the Plan Commission is formulating a program for a review that will lead to a recommendation for a renewed Comprehensive Plan.

HOUSING

7. a. Please comment on housing problems in your municipality.

The major housing problem in our community relates to absentee landlords. Too many of them skirt building codes, etc., and subsequently cause problems between the tenants and the Village. Because Park Forest has its own housing authority, we are able to handle subsidized housing needs in a manner that works very well for everyone involved. The community would be well served if there were greater variety in the housing stock.

b. What proposals do you have for dealing with these problems?

(1) Continued work with the housing task force; (2) increasing new housing development; (3) continued support for the Park Forest Housing Authority; (4) continuing such programs as the annual house tour

that shows ways housing can be improved at low costs, the annual home-improvement fair, and the new program of providing free architectural plans for persons seeking to remodel their homes.

8. What should be done to provide affordable housing for low-income individuals and families who are not served by existing programs?

The housing cooperatives in Park Forest provide excellent housing for individuals who might not be interested in the high costs of mortgages, etc. Additionally, four senior-citizen high rise apartment complexes offer housing support for seniors on fixed incomes.

9. Do you support adoption of an ordinance banning source-of-income discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders?

Yes.

EDUCATION

10. What proposals would you make to improve the quality of the public schools and their infrastructure?

From my perspective, the best way to improve the quality of local schools is to change the way the schools are funded. Park Forest – a community of 24,000 persons – is serviced by three elementary school districts, a high school district, and a unit district, and it is obvious that the schools that are better funded out-perform those with weaker levels of funding. A change from funding schools by the property tax to funding schools by the state income tax would allow for a more even distribution of funds and a more balanced level of educational quality for all the students.

ENVIRONMENT

11. What should your municipality do to improve the environment?

When I became mayor in 1999, I reinstated the park Forest Environment Conservation Commission (which now has been renamed the Park Forest Environment Commission), a long-standing quasi-governmental body that advises the Board on environmental matters and conducts community-awareness programs such as an annual “Earth Day,” speakers on environmental topics, etc. Additionally, the Village was one of three locales in the Chicagoland area (along with the city of Aurora and Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood) to participate in the experimental phase of the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Community Energy Cooperative. Through that program, hundreds of Park Forest residences were able to acquire high energy-efficient air conditioners at a reduced cost. Several members of the energy cooperative participate in a voluntary program whereby they are able to “dial-down” on energy usage at high-peak periods of usage. Finally, the Village currently is considering signing on to the National Conference of Mayors environmental statement. It is my goal to continue work toward community-wide environmental improvements.

REVENUE AND BUDGET

12. What changes if any would you propose to the current budget, both revenue and expenses?

The Park Forest budget is a very tight document at present. Our process for developing the budget is year-long, beginning with community focus groups, public review of previous expenditures in all-day Saturday sessions, a community-wide survey of matters of resident concern, and finally a series of public budget discussions. We carefully weigh input from residents in determining where expenditures will be made. In the past we have taken drastic measures to curtail unnecessary spending (e.g., deciding during the past year to close the Hidden Meadows Golf Course because of the lost of revenue it was experimenting). Over the last couple of years we have made an increased effort to obtain grants from outside bodies in order to reduce dependence on local tax dollars. This year we will receive more than \$1 million in such grants. Our greatest difficulty in developing our budget is meeting increasingly costly state mandates, especially as they relate to pensions. Our budget process has been nationally recognized for the last several years.

CIVIL RIGHTS

13. a. Do you support affirmative action based on race, gender and sexual orientation in establishing criteria for hiring and promoting public employees?

I fully support Affirmative Action. It continually is my goal to see that all employees of our Village truly reflect the composition of our community.

b. Do you support affirmative action as a criterion in letting municipal contracts?

Yes. And I also fully support payment of prevailing wage for all municipal contracts.

c. Please comment on current women and minority participation in municipal hiring and contracts. Be sure your comments include firefighter and police officer recruitment and promotion.

The Park Forest finance director is a woman; our current assistant Village Manager – a position through which all personnel matters are processed – is a woman (the immediately previous person in this post was an African American male who left the Village for a better-paying and more prestigious position in the west). When I became mayor, I appointed two African American women to the Board of Police & Fire Commissioners – the body responsible for hiring and promotions in our police department and our fire department; they serve on that board with one white male. The Village of Park Forest actively recruits for all positions, advertising in newspapers and journals whose audiences are widely diverse.

14. Do you favor restructuring the wage scale of municipal employees to institute gender-equal pay for jobs of comparable worth?

Yes. In fact, the Village engaged in a comprehensive salary review by an outside agency just a few years back and re-structured all our positions accordingly, making sure that salary and benefits were commensurate with the positions themselves and not based on the persons who held those positions.

ETHICS & CAMPAIGNING

15. Do you support patronage in hiring and promoting public employees?

No.

16. a. Do you support employing municipal staff who hold other public sector jobs concurrently?

No.

b. Do you support employing municipal staff who have either outside employment or contracts with entities which do business with the municipality?

No.

17. In what circumstances should the municipality contract for outside professional services and what criteria should exist for letting contracts? Please comment on any existing abuses and how you would correct them.

Outside services should be employed when individuals performing those services bring an expertise that is not present within local government or that would be extremely costly to maintain within regular employment ranks. For example, state codes require that some inspection of new construction be done by licensed electricians, or by licensed plumbers; in these cases, it is more advantageous to contract for outside services rather than keep such highly-skilled individuals on staff for only occasional job assignments. We also contract for certain professional services, such as engineering in areas where the tasks require expertise that is beyond that of the Village Engineer. I know of no abuses with our current system.

18. Will you or have you accepted campaign donations from current or potential suppliers or employees?

On occasion, I have received campaign donations from individuals who do or have done business with the Village of Park Forest; however, no such donations at any time ever have exceeded \$500. Any donations that exceed \$150 are reported in my campaign disclosure statements. I accept no donations from any individuals who currently are doing business with the Village, or who are being considered for doing business with the Village.

19. Who are your top 5 contributors and how much has each contributed to your campaign?

For the current campaign, the largest donation I have received has been \$100. Donations of this size have come from numerous individuals, none of whom do business with the Village.