

EVANSTON PATCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Response of Melissa Wynne, 3rd Ward Alderman

The single most pressing issue facing the Evanston city government is _____, and this is what I intend to do about it.

There isn't one pressing issue, but rather Evanston is facing a web of interrelated challenges, including an affordability crisis deeply rooted in longstanding inequity and an economic recovery that will require a *'whole of government'* approach to succeed. Evanston must become a more livable city to effectively address these challenges, and cultivating Evanston as a livable city has been the focus of my tenure on the Council. *Here's how I will continue to lead the way:*

1. Rebuild Evanston: Business recovery is the springboard for a robust economic rebuilding of Evanston, starting with relocating City government buildings downtown in order to push consumer traffic to local restaurants and shops. In addition, we need a new recovery fund that will support workforce development, entrepreneurship, and minority businesses.

2. Affordable Evanston: My vision for a livable city also includes a family-focused affordable housing strategy that leverages underutilized properties for family-sized housing, and zoning that permits rental of accessory dwelling units to provide extra income for homeowners so they can also afford to stay in Evanston.

3. Walkable Evanston: We need a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape – not only in affluent communities, but throughout Evanston – that supports walkable communities where local amenities are abundantly accessible. That's why I facilitated the opening of local small businesses such as *Sketchbook Brewing, Few Spirits, Union/Space*, among others and leveraged funds from the Main-Chicago TIF to pay for new sidewalks and street lighting.

4. Climate Resilient Evanston: Lastly, a healthy, clean environment is critical to livability. I'm committed to preserving and protecting our beaches and parks, while increasing our waste diversion, reducing our building energy use and achieving 100% renewable electricity by 2030. We must also expand the City's Residential Rehab program, which provides funds to low-income residents to repair, retrofit and weatherize their homes for climate resiliency.

What are the critical differences between you and the other candidate(s) seeking this post?

The critical differences between me and my opponent are my extensive experience solving difficult public policy problems and my readiness for leadership in government. My strengths are well suited to the job of alderman because: (a) I'm a problem solver who enjoys bringing people together to find solutions; (b) I'm facile with the complexities of public policy thanks to my background as an environmental lawyer; and (c) I have a lifelong passion for public

service, starting early on with my work in Washington DC for Common Cause and on Capitol Hill, and my pro bono lawyering for low-income families at the Howard Area Community Center.

I've decided to seek one more term as alderman because the COVID pandemic has plunged our City into a crisis like no other I've seen, wreaking havoc on our business community, our City budget, our residents and our City staff. At this critical time, I strongly believe the combination of my experienced leadership, seasoned judgment and deep knowledge of our policy challenges are valuable to Evanston and the 3rd Ward as we navigate through the tumult of COVID and its aftermath.

What do you consider the official duties and powers of the City Council as a whole? How about individual aldermen?

I view myself and each alderman as a fiduciary sworn to equitably, responsibly and intelligently manage taxpayer dollars to achieve Evanston's goals as articulated in our comprehensive plans and according to our shared values. Our city manager-led form of government relies on professional expertise to effectively implement policies legislated by Council members duly elected by Evanston voters. In this government structure, I view the official duties of aldermen as: hear and heed residents' concerns and ideas, faithfully represent their interests on the City Council and envision a better future based on each alderman's judgment and experience.

What steps would you take to address the city's budget challenges?

I'd do what we did in 2020: pay down our pension liabilities and preserve and improve our bond rating to ensure we always have access to inexpensive financing for important large-scale projects like infrastructure and capital improvements. I would also improve our revenue-generating initiatives. For example, Evanston sells water services to a handful of municipalities, but we have the capacity to serve more communities. Lastly, the most sustainable and equitable path to financial stability is investing in local businesses and attracting new enterprises, particularly minority and women owned businesses, in order to grow our real estate and sales tax bases.

If you are a challenger, in what way has the current board or officeholder failed the community?

N/A

Describe the other issues that define your campaign platform

Re-envision public safety: we must ensure policing that both keeps us safe and honors the dignity of all Evanston residents. I will continue my strong advocacy for balanced policing strategies, including the City's Alternative 911 Response and Alternative to Arrest initiatives that avert police-community confrontations while keeping Evanston youth out of the criminal justice system.

What accomplishments in your past would you cite as evidence you can handle this job?

I'm especially proud of my record in smart development for the 3rd Ward:

- **Trader Joe's:** Fought for many years to bring *Trader Joe's* to Evanston, and succeeded in bringing the store to the 3rd Ward where it has significantly enriched Evanston's tax base.
- **Building at Main & Chicago:** Steered a high quality, \$34M multi-use building to the corner of Main St. and Chicago Ave., which has brought new businesses, office workers and residents to this critical commercial corner.
- **Unique Retail:** Facilitated the opening of a range of small businesses such as *Sketchbook Brewing*, *Few Spirits*, *Union/Space*, *Homestead Meats*, and *Frio Gelato*.
- **Modernized Infrastructure:** Spearheaded the funding effort to pay for badly needed infrastructure and building improvements in the Main and Chicago area, and rebuilt the unsightly CTA wall from South Blvd. to Washington St.
- **Livable Community Infrastructure:** Improved pedestrian crosswalks and other pedestrian safety measures, installed new street lighting and sidewalks, and repaved Chicago Ave. from South Blvd. to Main St.
- **"Complete Streets":** Created new bike lanes and bicycle and driver education programs, and helped secure Divvy Bike stations throughout Evanston.
- **Sustainable Development:** Facilitated the construction of the world's first net-zero emissions Walgreens at the corner of Chicago and Keeney.

Why should voters trust you?

Voters should trust me because I was the first alderman to hold ward meetings, long before it was expected, as a proactive way to hear feedback, including the opinions and views of those constituents with whom I disagree. Today, I continue to hold quarterly 3rd Ward Town Hall meetings at Lincoln School and regular monthly office hours at Brothers K (currently doing both via Zoom during the pandemic). In addition, I regularly meet with community groups, condo associations, and other neighborhood organizations on issues of particular interest as they arise. My most important and daily source of communication with residents is phone calls, texts/emails and one-on-one meetings over coffee. In all interactions with our residents, I strive to listen and engage thoughtfully, respectfully and transparently. I believe my voting record and advocacy on the council demonstrates I can be trusted to represent the 3rd Ward with ethical transparency and fidelity to our shared values.

If you win this position, what accomplishment would make your term in office a success?

Three critical accomplishments: (1) achieving a robust economic recovery; (2) stabilizing our City budget; and (3) providing a helping hand to those whose lives have been upended by COVID.

What are your views on fiscal policy, government spending and the handling of taxpayer dollars in the office you are seeking?

My views on government fiscal policy derive from my commitment to long-term, sustainable financial health defined by our readiness to pursue revenue-generating opportunities without raising taxes and our resiliency in the face of crises like the economic downturn caused by Covid. Our budget is a demonstration of our values: equity and justice for all, accountability to each other and our posterity. These values must be reflected in our City budget at a time when social and financial challenges demand that we do more with less. Evanston's budget is also an expression of our priorities. My fiscal priorities are improving quality of life for Evanston families and investing in the futures of Evanston youth.

Do you support Black Lives Matter and what are your thoughts on the demonstrations held since the death of George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake?

I support Black Lives Matter as well as Evanston's youth, activists and community leaders who have labored to raise awareness on racial justice and equity in Evanston. The 2020 protests against police violence was the wake-up call we needed to redouble our efforts against racism and refocus our scrutiny on inequities right here at home. For the past three years, I've had the honor of serving on the Equity and Empowerment Commission where we grapple with the granular details of addressing the systemic inequities facing Black

Evanstonians. My takeaway from these discussions is: we now have the momentum and the resolve to end racial injustice in our community. I'm eager to return to the City Council to continue this important work.

Do you think the current board has done enough to support racial equality, and if not, what specifically should be done to do so?

We have not done enough. We've begun exploring reparations for harm done by inequitable housing policies--and that's an important first step as soaring housing prices are disproportionately impacting our Black and Latino neighbors. However, historical records show that Black business owners were also severely disenfranchised. We must next extend the scope of the reparations fund to empower Evanston's Black business community in order to redress past wrongs as well as repair our local economy devastated by COVID.

What are your thoughts on the national and local coronavirus response? Do you favor measures such as limiting operation of non-essential businesses and restricting indoor/outdoor dining? And do you favor a local mask mandate?

A livable city means fighting COVID-19 with all we've got while protecting the most vulnerable people in our community. Locally, I believe we've done that. I am encouraged by Evanstonians working together to feed and house those in need during this difficult time, and by everyone wearing masks and social distancing. Nationally, the Biden Administration has demonstrated a commitment to vaccinate as many people as fast as possible, while the American Rescue Plan will support local communities in their effort to rebuild their neighborhoods and their economies. In light of these strides made locally and nationally, I support our current re-opening strategy, but mask mandates must remain in effect until more people are vaccinated.

What are your thoughts on the state and local coronavirus vaccine distribution, and how do you think local governments should work together to handle vaccine rollout?

The City of Evanston is working hard to vaccinate our residents, but the state of Illinois must provide more doses. Both are necessary to achieve widespread immunity. Of the nearly 15,500 doses we've received (as of this writing), the City of Evanston has directly distributed more than 8,000 to frontline workers and some of our most vulnerable residents, with the remaining doses distributed to our local healthcare partners. We must also continue tracking demographics on vaccine recipients to ensure distribution is equitable and targeted at meeting our public health and economic goals.

Is there any reason you would not serve your full term of office, other than those of health or family?

NO.

The best advice ever shared with me was:

Always be willing to listen.

What else would you like voters to know about yourself and your positions?

I believe this questionnaire does an excellent job of giving candidates a full opportunity to present themselves and their positions.