



## Response: Mayor Norton's Decision - Monday, March 2, 2026

Rochester, Minnesota

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Today, following the announcement from Kim Norton that she will not seek a third term, I want to begin with gratitude.

Mayor Norton's historic leadership as Rochester's first female mayor, and her nearly 26 years of public service, from the School Board to the Minnesota House to City Hall, have guided our community through a period of profound growth and transition. Her stewardship helped strengthen Rochester's national and international reputation as "America's City for Health," and her commitment to dignity, civility, and professionalism has set a standard for public service. On behalf of many residents, I thank her for her dedication and wish her and her family joy and happiness in the years ahead.

This moment also invites Rochester to look forward.

I am running for mayor because our city cannot afford to drift while growth outpaces leadership. Rochester stands at a crossroads, where opportunity and uncertainty arrive together. Across the world, people are sensing volatility, uncertainty, and rising costs of living. Here at home, we feel those pressures in our housing market, our small businesses, and in the growing distance many residents feel from their local government. Yet I believe this is not a time for fear. It is a time for renewal.

My campaign is grounded in three commitments.

First, we must restore housing affordability. Growth should expand opportunity, not push families out. We will pursue practical solutions that increase supply responsibly, protect neighborhood character, and ensure that Rochester remains a place where working families, young people, and seniors alike can build their lives with dignity.

Second, we must strengthen our small businesses. As a small business owner, I know firsthand that local entrepreneurs are not just economic drivers, they are the heartbeat of our community. City Hall must become a partner in their success by streamlining processes, supporting innovation, and ensuring that local investment benefits the people who live and work here.

Third, we must rebuild trust through clear, consistent communication with residents. Strong cities are built block by block, not top-down. Government must listen first, communicate openly, and act with accountability. Rochester's future depends on residents knowing their voices shape the decisions that affect their daily lives.

My work in the community reflects these principles. As President of the Lowertown Neighborhood Association, I helped lead a post-pandemic rebuilding effort that restored engagement and turned resident concerns into action. Through service on the Heritage Preservation Commission, I have worked to balance rapid development with thoughtful planning that strengthens neighborhoods rather than erasing them. These experiences have reinforced a simple belief: leadership must honor both progress and the people who give a place its soul.

Today, I also acknowledge my acceptance of a statement of endorsement from the Forward-Independence party. While the office of mayor is non-partisan, this endorsement reflects my pragmatic approach to local governance. It signals clearly that I will not allow Rochester to be pulled apart or overshadowed by the political conflicts dominating national and state-level discourse. Our city's future must never be collateral damage in someone else's ideological struggle.

This endorsement does not bind me to any party. Instead it affirms my unwavering commitment to represent people over politics, especially as we anticipate the growing influence of major-party dynamics in the coming election cycle. Rochester's success will not be determined by partisan labels, but by our willingness to work together in good faith for the common good.

I am not a career politician. My leadership was shaped in neighborhoods, small businesses, classrooms, and community spaces. I believe Rochester's strength lies not only in its growth, but in its character. To me, this is found in the relationships between neighbors, in the pride residents take in their community, and in the shared conviction that we rise or fall together.

In this period of rapid change, we have an opportunity not just to expand our city, but to reinvigorate its spirit and to ensure that progress deepens our sense of belonging rather than diluting it. With steady leadership, practical solutions, and a shared sense of purpose, Rochester can emerge stronger, more affordable, more connected, and more hopeful than ever before.

The future of our city will not be shaped by any one person. It will be built together, resident by resident, block by block.

“Take care of yourselves, love your families, and help your neighbors. Then join me in 2026.”

**Supporter to do list:**

1. Take our [community survey](#) to share your thoughts at any point.
2. Go view and share [Benjamin Zastrow's campaign website](#).
3. [Donate any amount today](#), to help your voice be heard in City Hall.
4. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
5. Tell a friend or neighbor.

Thank you!



Benjamin Zastrow



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