



### *Mayoral Campaign Gleanings from a Half Century Lake Forest Resident* **Art Miller**

In the last few months of the unprecedented current mayoral election challenge Lake Forest has had more open discussion and listening about community issues, free of City Meeting time clocks, than in the last several years. The City across a few mayors has been unable to manage successfully developer intrusions into established historic districts, neighborhoods, ordinance limits, and appointed board and commission decisions. The perception has been that officials were not listening. Now two candidates, well intentioned established residents with broad experience, have invested their time in listening to what residents have to say. They also have endeavored to state for these interested members of the community their own perspectives.

The two candidates have complementary personalities and visions, first of all. The Caucus selection, an orthopedic surgeon, has an engineering and task-oriented approach. His opponent, an also successful volunteer non-profit leader and fund-raising consensus builder, is more process oriented, building to solutions all can accept. The Caucus has not seen this consensus building as of prime importance and has not spoken out effectively at all against negative campaigning in support of its candidate or opponent sign pulling, focused only on “Winning” or prevailing.

For those who have worried about City leadership effectiveness, this emphasis is troubling and reinforces concerns among many. Indeed, the bombardment of daily campaign emails by the Caucus may meet the criteria of what a recent Chicago Tribune article referred to in business as “Toxic Positivity.” Acknowledging that something is wrong and needs to be fixed by the Caucus and its City candidates might reassure voters that the Caucus and the City Council are listening, LISTENING, to a substantial share of the community.

Many too have expressed unease over City and school commitments to new property tax funded projects. The City is the gatekeeper on property tax assessed valuation with new construction, too. Since 2017 property tax federal income tax deductibility, though, has been capped at \$10,000, below the local base level. But no serious initiatives have taken shape to mobilize locals to donate for improvements, donations still deductible for income tax purposes. This sea change in incentives has sailed over the heads of local officials. Before income taxes and reductions in the 1910s, potential local investors in Market Square were told how much they should invest for a 4% return by the backer leaders for the project. When individuals pushed back, the volunteer backers reiterated their requests. Why could fundraising not work more for donations at least to help fund these major improvements, using deductible dollars? Why not a Guaranteed Rate Deerpath Field? New families wanting better facilities could or should step up with deductible donations or named sponsorships.

## Lake Forest for Transparency

We are fortunate to have two well respected members of the community devoting an unprecedented amount of energy and time to meet with citizens, both to share their visions and to hear their concerns. A resident who grew up here and lately has returned reminded me that ca. 1980 the City proposed demolition of City Hall. An anti-Caucus faction emerged to challenge this destruction. Now almost a half century later the challenge is similar, to assure residents that City Hall and other downtown landmarks will not “disappear” in a new four or five story redeveloped Central Business District (CBD), views of these works of art lost behind condo blocks. While all can embrace the value of CBD updating, the need for world-class design led streetscape evolution should be a platform that both mayoral candidates can embrace.

Negative campaigning complicated the original Caucus choice process and now clouds this important discussion of issues in the race for mayor. All supporters of both candidates should focus on the LOCAL issues and how best to improve civic oversight and channeling of developer and property owner ambitions and pursuits toward high quality and respectful outcomes. Creative fundraising should mitigate at least the need for non-deductible property tax increases. Negative ads are distractions to move the focus away from these and other legitimate local concerns. The more negative and personal the efforts, the more they reveal a strategy of keeping people from being concerned about local issues. A new balance downtown and in finances will best protect all local property values and Lake Foresters’ sense of their community.