

## **Bobby Burns Evanston Now Questionnaire Response**

**Please provide a brief biographical sketch and indicate how your background has prepared you for the office you're seeking. (Please limit to 250 words.)**

My mother, Martha Burns, taught me the importance of family and being of service to others through selfless acts. As a case worker at CEDA, she modeled the importance of helping people meet their basic needs, and through her work as a D202 school board member she gave my sister and me a mind for the systems change work necessary to better the outcomes in communities.

I began following in her footsteps in 2009, deepening my community involvement in Evanston. I organized community conversations, youth programs based on service gap research, and eventually founded a community group called Evanston Collective to further the work.

We made it our mission to educate Evanston residents around a range of issues. These efforts empowered people to find their own voice, and advocate for public services to better address their needs. I'm grateful to have collaborated with elected officials, city employees, youth development organizations, environmental advocates, and residents from all over the city.

As a political consultant, I've worked to improve our communities through direct policy advocacy and electing honest, reform minded leaders to local government. I've established a talent for identifying areas of common ground between people who are typically at opposite ends of an issue, which has moved the needle from discussion to action.

While serving as Evanston's Deputy City Clerk, I worked to improve access to public records, and as a board member of Open Communities fought against housing discrimination in all of its forms.

**Please summarize what you see as the key issues within the purview of the government body you hope to be elected to and how you propose to address them.**

### **Revenue**

Amongst the City's greatest challenges is identifying revenue to maintain the public services Evanston residents need and have come to expect, while meeting our debt service and unfunded pension obligation. Although property taxes are a reliable source of revenue for the city, continuing to increase the levy will lead to further instability among our working families and the continued displacement of longtime residents.

To bring in additional revenue, we should enter into a Payment In Lieu of Taxes agreement with nonprofits with property valued over an agreed upon threshold. These agreements will help offset losses on property taxes due to the existence of nontaxable lands within our city. To find opportunities to cut or restructure existing programs, the city should commit to a zero based budgeting process that requires each city department to justify its program funding based on measurable outcomes.

### **Equitable delivery of public services**

Prioritizing residents based primarily on 311 calls and survey responses has led to the inequitable delivery of public services in Evanston. A recent article by the Daily Northwestern revealed how Evanston's lead testing locations over the last two decades were concentrated in NW and NE Evanston, with less than 1% in the 5th ward. This means that over the last decade we haven't been keeping adequate track of the lead levels in the 5th ward. The city should work to identify and end all current systems and practices that are causing harm and perpetuating the inequitable delivery of public services throughout Evanston. Other public service concerns: Enforcing property standards; Complying with environmental regulations; Prioritizing urban planning in the 5th Ward; Increasing affordable housing opportunities; Meeting the need for translation services; Addressing pedestrian safety; and Improving garbage pickup.

### **Diversifying Community Voices**

Policies are too often developed without guidance from the people these measures will impact the most. For policing issues, we need to hear from our young black and brown residents who have been over-policed. For elderly care we need to bring in seniors. For rebuilding our local economy after COVID we need to speak with our small business owners. And for housing policies we need to consult those who are housing insecure.

I've begun to identify solutions to our housing affordability issue by simply asking 5th Ward residents to describe the details around the home they were able to purchase, or rent they were able to afford. I've discovered the tipping points are \$180,000 for most residents seeking to purchase a home and \$1,000 a month for tenants looking to rent a 2 bedroom unit. Imagine what else we will learn by centering the voices of people who are directly affected by the issues discussed on council. I will bring in those voices through engagement and intentional recruitment. By working to change the City's board/ commission application process to include not just education as a prerequisite, but lived experience, we can include stakeholders in the crucial decision making process. As the 5th Ward Alderman, I will continue to engage with the community, listen to residents and encourage participation as policies are debated that affect and impact Evanstonians.

**Have you ever served on one of the city boards, committees or commissions appointed by the mayor? If so, which one(s) and when?**

No

**Have you applied to serve on a city board, committee or commission and not been selected? If so, do you have a sense of why you weren't chosen?**

**If you're not an incumbent Evanston elected official, have you ever run for a government elective office before? If so, where and when, and what was the outcome?**

No

**When were you born? (We ask this to be able to calculate your age for mention in stories.)** 3/21/1986