

2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: **Margaret Laurino**

Ward: **39**

Occupation: **I am a full-time Alderman.**

Education: **St. Edward's Elementary School, Alvernia High School, Northeastern Illinois University (Bachelor's and Master's degrees)**

Previous political and civic experience: **I have proudly been involved in public service my entire adult life.**

1) City Pensions

Chicago's fire and police pensions are greatly underfunded, and the city is required by the state to make a \$550 million payment into the pension funds by the end of 2015. Do you support restructuring the pension systems, inevitably reducing benefits, to put the funds on sound financial footing?

Yes or No:

Please Explain: **If the City of Chicago allows its pension systems to function as they do now, it is possible that employees will not have any retirement income, whether it be a pension, social security, or individual retirement accounts in the future. That is why I support working with Springfield and labor unions to implement fair reforms that will protect and preserve the benefits promised to our employees.**

Ultimately, the General Assembly and the courts will dictate what those reforms are and how they will be implemented. Once the City receives guidance on the constitutionality of any proposed changes, such as restructuring the pension systems and/or reducing benefits, I will work within those guidelines to take a hard look at our finances and hopefully, put our pension systems on better financial footing.

Chicago's pension systems for municipal workers and laborers already have been restructured, reducing benefits, but the city has yet to identify where it will find the revenue to sufficiently fund those systems. Under what circumstances would you support a property tax increase to raise the needed revenue for the fire and police pensions and/or the municipal workers and laborers pensions?

I cannot support a property tax increase because I cannot support burdening our taxpayers any further. The City should explore all revenue enhancement options including eliminating structural deficits, refinancing debt, and working with

Springfield to evaluate the pension systems. By doing this, I believe Chicago can experience significant savings while meeting its debt obligations and funding the pension systems at increasingly secure levels.

One possible alternative to raising taxes could be Chicago's TIF districts. I have frequently recommended that each and every TIF be examined by an independent review body to determine if it has fulfilled its purpose. If it has, I would support dissolving the district and returning Chicago's portion of its funds to the City to help fulfill its debt obligations. I also support evaluating the city's budget with the intent of finding potential savings through the elimination of waste and redundancies in outside consulting contracts, printing, and city committees and departments.

2) Chicago Public Schools pensions

Large and growing payments required to keep the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund solvent are squeezing CPS' budget, forcing cuts elsewhere and limiting investment. The Chicago Board of Education has increased property taxes, but it is not enough to keep up with the high annual costs. What measures do you support to ensure a solvent retirement system and to improve the district's finances?

First, I would like to commend our teachers and administrators for patiently working to improve our education system despite the Chicago Public School system's fiscal challenges. Our recent school ratings show that the education reforms that have been implemented in the past decade are showing results. Our high school graduation rate is at the highest level it has been in years. In 2003, the high school graduation rate was at 44%. In 2013, it jumped to 64%. In the 39th Ward, nearly all of our schools received a 1 or 1+ rating. I believe this is testament to our strong teachers, principals, and parents as well as the hard work of our students. Despite these accomplishments, there is still much work to be done.

Because CPS operates and sets its policies independent of the City Council, Aldermen do not have the jurisdictional authority to overhaul its finances or retirement system. Despite that fact, I have done everything in my power to encourage CPS to keep our children's interests a priority while honoring the promises it made to its retirees when making funding decisions. Going forward, I would like CPS to think more strategically about its budget by carefully reviewing all expenditures and identifying any and all opportunities for savings without sacrificing the quality of education provided to students. The reality is that all sides will have to make sacrifices in order to repair the effects of years of mismanagement. However, if all sides work together, they can work towards creating a more balanced solution to improve our school system's finances.

3) Revenue

In light of the financial issues discussed above, do you support any or all of the following

measures, each of which would require, at a minimum, approval by the Illinois Legislature?

* A statewide expansion of the sales tax base to include more consumer services

Yes or No: **The question of expanding the sales tax base is an issue that would be best answered by the Illinois General Assembly.**

* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No: **I think this would create a number of unintended consequences, such as the taxation of Chicago residents who work in the suburbs, but I am open to discussing this proposal.**

* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago's trading exchanges, known as the "LaSalle Street tax"

Yes or No: **No.**

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

4) Crime

Do you support hiring more police officers to combat crime and gun violence in Chicago?

Yes or No: **Yes, if the budget allows.**

Please explain: **Police officers are an essential component in our efforts to combat crime and gun violence and our police force has been well below full strength in recent years. As Alderman of the 39th Ward, I have always supported hiring more officers and keeping our fair share of police in the ward to ensure residents' safety. I have also supported efforts to speed up the hiring process to get officers on the streets quicker, to shift officers from desks to beats, and to civilianize desk jobs that do not require police expertise.**

What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago?

I believe implementing a constitutionally correct, mandatory minimum sentence for individuals caught using a weapon unlawfully and closing the gun show loophole can help stem the flow of illegal firearms into Chicago.

5) Elected school board

An advisory referendum on switching Chicago to an elected school board, rather than an appointed board, is expected to be on the ballot in more than 30 wards on Feb. 24. Currently, the mayor appoints all seven board members and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: **Yes and no.**

Please explain: **My recommendation regarding school boards is that we have a hybrid board with some members elected by the public and some members appointed by the mayor. The reason I would support a hybrid board over an elected one is because I am concerned that these elections could turn into a costly fight and into a popularity contest among special interest groups. I am also concerned about how the locally elected school councils would function under an elected school board. By having both elected and appointed members, we could avoid the perception that only one person or group appoints, and therefore, controls the entire board. Details such as would members be elected by district and should we expand the number of members would have to be refined. However, I believe a hybrid board is a reasonable compromise, allowing the public, special interests, and elected officials to all have a voice in the future of education in Chicago.**

6) Tax-increment financing districts

TIFs are the primary economic development tool of the city. In a TIF district, taxes from the growth in property values are set aside for 23 years to be used for public projects and private development. Do you support increasing the annual TIF surplus that the mayor and the City Council have declared in each of the last few years, money that goes to the schools and other city agencies?

Yes or No:

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?

As mentioned in question #1, I have been a strong proponent of having an independent review body examine each and every TIF in order to determine if it has fulfilled its purpose. If it has, I would like to dissolve the district and return the Chicago's portion of the funds to the City to be used towards fulfilling its debt obligations and funding education and public safety.

I am also a strong proponent of transparency when it comes to TIF districts. My aldermanic website has a section giving updates on all the TIFs in my ward. I also sponsored the TIF Sunshine Ordinance which requires that the City of Chicago post detailed information about each of the city's TIF district.

TIFs are a valuable tool and it would be a mistake to condemn them simply because they have sometimes been misused. When used correctly, TIFs can be a necessary

incentive to attract businesses, jobs, and tax dollars to a community and can also be used to fund a variety of projects that benefit the community as a whole.

I am proud of the TIF projects I have championed in the 39th Ward. The Albany Park Community had an outdated, yet well-used library. I used TIF funds to construct the new Albany Park Library, which brings state-of-the art learning tools to a diverse multi-ethnic, lower income community. If not for the Lawrence-Kedzie TIF, we would not have been able to construct this new library for Albany Park residents. I also used funds from the Lawrence-Kedzie TIF to build a new public school. The Albany Park Multicultural Academy (APMA) was an outstanding middle school that was housed in Von Steuben High School. By constructing a new building, APMA was able to move out of Von Steuben and free up space for the high school. The APMA building also houses the Edison Regional Gifted Center, an accelerated program for students from kindergarten to 8th grade. Without TIF funds, we would not have been able to build a new facility for these two public schools.

In addition to constructing schools, I have used TIF funds to rehab 250 units of affordable owner-occupied and rental housing and to streetscape business corridors throughout the ward. I also used TIF funds to save 400 jobs in the Pulaski Peterson industrial corridor.

7) Neighborhood economic development

What would you do as alderman to boost economic development in your ward, and bring jobs to your community?

As Alderman, I work tirelessly to bring quality developments, new businesses, and good jobs to the 39th Ward. I accomplish this by being sensitive to the specific needs of the community and by connecting neighborhood groups and local chambers of commerce with property and business owners, ensuring they have meaningful input and dialogue with respect to new businesses and development proposals. I work with brokers and property owners to market our community to the kinds of businesses we want and need in the 39th Ward.

One way I help boost economic development in the 39th Ward is by serving as a liaison between businesses, city departments, and other quasi-governmental agencies, helping employers cut through red tape and to access resources that can help them start, keep, and expand their businesses. For example, at one time businesses in the Peterson Pulaski Industrial Corridor suffered from unreliable electric service and limited internet bandwidth. It was such a problem that one of the corridor's largest employers threatened to leave Chicago and the 39th Ward because of it. I connected the company with top executives and engineers from

Commonwealth Edison and internet service providers in the area to identify and correct the issue. Today, that corridor is thriving, existing companies are expanding and new companies are joining them, including a restaurant supply store and a brewery.

I also serve as a liaison between businesses and community groups in the 39th Ward. I regularly invite new businesses to attend community meetings and share their proposals with the neighbors. I host annual events, like the 39th Ward Home Improvement Fair, to bring residents and local businesses together. This fosters good relations, builds trust and provides residents with an opportunity to have meaningful input. For example, last year Restaurant Depot, a national wholesale food supplier, wanted to locate in the 39th Ward but the location they wanted had already been approved by community groups as a residential development. Rather than lose a business and potential employer within the area, I worked to find them a more suitable, alternate location. We recently broke ground on their new \$18.9 million, 60,000 square foot facility in our Peterson Pulaski Industrial Corridor. When construction is completed, this business will bring 50 full-time and 20 part-time jobs to the community.

I encourage the use of financial incentives such as the Small Business Improvement Fund and tax incentives to provide support for building improvements and renovations. In the last 4 years, we've been successful in marketing the SBIF program to over 80 local businesses for funds to improve their storefronts and make investments that will help them stay and grow in the 39th Ward. A few years ago, I employed TIF funds to retain Wolters Kluwer (formerly CCH) in the 39th Ward. The highlight of the agreement with Wolters Kluwer was that the company and their 400 jobs remain in the Ward and that 45 new jobs be set aside for local hires.

I also advocate infrastructure investments to improve shopping districts and make retail areas more inviting to local residents. In the last few years I've secured funds for Streetscape projects on main thoroughfares throughout the 39th Ward to improve the look of our retail business areas. I also work closely with local Chambers of Commerce and business associations. I co-founded the Peterson-Pulaski Business and Industrial Council, the Sauganash Chamber of Commerce, and the Pulaski Elston Business Association, and work closely with them to attract and retain businesses in the 39th Ward. I've already begun working with the Edgebrook and Gladstone Park Chambers of Commerce who represent businesses in the newly drawn 39th Ward.

If re-elected, I hope to continue our success in making the 39th Ward business friendly and an attractive place to live and work.

8) Size of the Chicago City Council

The City Council has 50 members, but civic groups and other regularly argue for reducing the size of the Council. What should the size of the Council be? Please provide a specific number. And why?

I do not support reducing the number of Alderman in the City Council for a number of reasons. Unlike City Council members in many other large metropolitan areas, Chicago Aldermen are deeply involved in the day-to-day operations of ensuring ward and city services are being delivered. They serve as intermediaries between the residents of their ward and the various city departments, providing access to services that maintain our quality of life, and guidance and resources for those who are unsure of where to turn for assistance. Alderman and their staff also provide customer service and follow up on residents' issues to ensure that requests and inquiries are fulfilled in a timely manner.

If we were to reduce the number of Alderman in Chicago, it would be extremely difficult to provide the highest quality of personalized service to residents in the third largest city in the nation. Reducing the number of Alderman would entail the creation of larger wards which would encompass larger geographic areas of Chicago. This consolidation would create challenges in addressing the unique issues our varied communities face and would probably not bring the cost savings proponents anticipate. Chances are, each ward would have to have two offices to provide residents with the same level of service they have become accustomed to receiving. This would, in turn, require expenditures for staffing, rent, and supplies at two locations.

If you ask a Chicago resident who their Alderman is, they are likely to know the answer. If you ask who their County Commissioner or State Senator is, chances are they will not know. Chicago Aldermen have a unique role in not only providing essential services to their constituents, but also serving as the elected official closest to the public. People can see their Aldermen in their office, at the grocery, or at houses of worship. Aldermen serve as the face of government in their communities and, in many cases, the only elected officials the public ever meets. Reducing the number of Aldermen in the city council would remove the one constant contact the public has with the government.

9) A Chicago casino

Do you support, in general concept, establishing a gambling casino in Chicago?

Yes or No: **I am open to discussing this issue.**

Please explain: **I would need to see the specifics on where the casino would be located, how it would be governed, who would be responsible for its operations, and**

what kind of revenue would be generated by establishing a casino in Chicago before supporting or opposing such a measure. I could only support a casino in Chicago if it ensured significant economic development and job creation for our residents.

10) Red light and speed cameras

Does the city have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras currently, and are they properly employed?

Yes or No:

Please explain: **I supported the traffic light camera program in order to improve traffic safety for pedestrians and motorists throughout Chicago and especially around our schools and parks. Recently released camera footage from CDOT of accidents at red light intersections illustrate the danger posted by motorists who run red lights. Data from CDOT shows an 11% decrease in accidents at intersections with red light cameras. I believe the program has been successful in slowly changing dangerous habits behind the wheel and making drivers more aware of their surroundings while driving. This has certainly held true for me as I have become more aware behind the wheel after the program was implemented.**

I won't deny that there have been issues with the cameras. Going forward, I would support careful and regular review of the camera contracts and locations in order to ensure that there is fair enforcement of the law and regular maintenance of the equipment.

11) Ward issues

What are the top three issues in your ward — the ones you talk about most on the campaign trail?

My top priorities for improving the 39th Ward are addressing community issues like O'Hare noise, public safety, and providing infrastructure improvements and quality city services in the face of shrinking budgets.

Residents across the ward have expressed their concerns over these issues and I have worked diligently to address them. When the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) made changes to landing and takeoff patterns, redirecting air traffic over neighborhoods in the 39th Ward and dramatically increasing the level of jet noise in the area, I implemented a multi-tier approach to combat the effects of airplane noise. By partnering with Congressman Mike Quigley and community groups such as FAIR (Fair Allocation in Runways), I have pushed to make the FAA and Chicago

Department of Aviation answer the tough questions and present real plans for fair flight allocation and sound proofing assistance.

Because public safety is one of the most important quality of life issues, I have dedicated myself to ensuring that the 39th Ward gets its fair share of police officers and that our emergency personnel have the tools and resources they need to serve our communities. I have done this by working closely with the Commanders and officers of the ward, sending a liaison to all CAPS meetings, and regularly communicating with the 16th and 17th District police regarding all reports we receive on criminal activity. My staff and I also work hard to make sure that vacant buildings are identified and secured, that graffiti is removed promptly, and that we support our youth with positive alternatives and programming in our schools, parks, and community organizations.

Infrastructure improvements and service delivery are also essential components to our quality of life. That is why I am committed to funding infrastructure improvements that invest in our communities and enhance our business corridors. Throughout my years as Alderman, I have fought to bring millions of dollars of infrastructure improvements to the 39th Ward and I am constantly working with various city departments to improve the delivery of services to the our residents. For example, in 2014 alone I spent over \$1 million dollars on street resurfacing throughout the ward.

I represent one of the City's most diverse wards with a population that is 54% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 18% Asian. My staff and I work hard to address and balance the concerns and hopes of these different racial and ethnic groups. My campaign slogan is, "Bringing It All Together" because my overriding goal in my years as Alderman is to ensure whatever I do for the ward is not done to the detriment of any one group.

If re-elected, I will continue to fight for the interests of the 39th Ward and continue to work with residents and businesses to keep our neighborhoods the wonderful places they have always been to live and raise our families in.