

2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Ronda Locke

Ward: 1

Occupation: Marketing Consultant and Community Activist

Education: Bachelors from Bowling Green State University, OH
Masters Program from Baldwin Wallace, OH

Previous political and civic experience:

2 years as Aldermanic Aide till fall of 2012

10 years advocating for parks as Park Advisory Council President; active in schools as PTO board member and elected to Local School Council. Additionally have volunteered for the peer jury program by the Chicago Police Department, served on board of the local community group and active in education advocacy groups.

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 AND No.

I believe there is an opportunity to restructure pension plans for new hires, but I do not support reducing benefits for retirees. I believe that taking away committed pensions is unconstitutional, something the IL Supreme Court just ruled. Importantly, there's a need to educate the citizenry that the legislatures pension 'holidays' have caused the financial difficulty we are experiencing and that our firemen and police officers have made their contributions.

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 am an advocate of cutting costs, and identifying new revenue streams, such as a modest transaction tax and reforming TIF and declaring a TIF surplus. I am not in favor of a property tax increase and if it ever became to being, it has to be coupled with meaningful TIF reform to ensure transparency.

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?

Similar to my points above for other public pensions, I first and foremost advocate we declare a TIF surplus and look at revenue opportunities such as LaSalle tree tax. This must be coupled with transparently enacted cost cutting. For example, eliminating practices that have brought us items such as SUPES principal training, cleaning out of schools (going from \$8million to \$30million), no bid AUSL contracts, toxic swap bond deals – would save tax payers significant dollars. We should be evaluating recouping dollars lost via the toxic swaps.

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 as our economy has shifted to more services, it is appropriate to align our tax system.

* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city
Yes, I am a proponent of local living economies and this would serve as incentive to hire local or employees to relocate to the City. Additionally, it is fair that non-City residents help to pay for the resources they employ; infrastructure, transportation, public spaces, etc.

* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago's trading exchanges, known as the "LaSalle Street tax"
Yes – if kept modest it will not deter businesses and can have a significant revenue benefit.

4) Crime

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

Yes

I believe we need to invest in full staffing (bare minimum 1000 more officers) and halt the reliance on overtime. In addition, we need to provide the resources needed to Officers to effectively do their job. This includes a real satellite office promised when the 13th district was closed in 2012. A recent Aldermanic announcement of a satellite office was disputed in the media, upon finding out that the claim was false and that in reality, it will eventually be a computer for officers, but not an office that residents can use.

Besides the hiring of officers, in order to combat crime, we need to focus on economic development – create JOBS! This coupled with more programs for youth to provide positive activities for ages 12-18.

In addition, I think that we can creatively identify ways to give hours back to officers to allow them to be officers instead of administrative duties. I believe we need to revamp CAPS to instill a new collaboration with City and Community; for example residents able to view camera footage, use of social media, virtual meetings, expansion of best practices, etc.

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

I am saddened by the amount of human life lost due to the use of illegal guns in Chicago. Chicago police confiscate more guns per year than both New York and Los Angeles combined, over 7,000. A major contributor of these illegal guns are people buying them in the suburbs and other parts of the state and then bringing them into the City to sell. Another major source of illegal guns are that many are purchased in other states, primarily Indiana, Wisconsin and Mississippi, and then brought into the City. I support increased enforcement of laws already on the books. And as for new legislation, I would support and advocate for efforts to promote tightened gun laws in adjoining states. And I would be supportive of efforts to tighten purchase regulations for suburban outlets and at gun shows; such as photo ID recording, multiple ID requirement to ensure no falsification, finger printing, etc.

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

I fully support an elected School board for the Board of Education (BOE) and would like to see half of the board be CPS parents. This is important regardless of children in CPS or not, because of the majority of property taxes that go to BOE. I have had first hand experience presenting to the board and having the board not even make eye contact.

There are so many policies and decisions made by this appointed board that is not in the interest of the success of our children. From the overuse of standardized tests, to the board members profiting from CPS contracts to the privatization of subpar charter schools. Independent studies all point to the single biggest factor of a child's success is the economic conditions of their home. So the single greatest thing we can do to help a student succeed is to provide the wrap around services and to create jobs.

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

I believe a TIF surplus should be declared and a significant percent given back to the taxing bodies. TIF's disbursements need to be transparent, with thorough vetting for projects, especially when a beneficiary is a private entity. I do not support the Marriott/DePaul initiative and feel this is a prime example of misuse of TIF funds and an example of how our City's priorities are misaligned. Especially in light of closed mental health clinics and 50 closed elementary schools.

There are two TIF's in the 1st ward (one that was recently reconstituted) and there are still needs in the ward, specifically needed improvements for schools, parks and other public resources. Due to a significant portion of 1st Ward having been gentrified, there is limited rationale for any new or expanded TIFs.

7) Neighborhood economic development

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

First and foremost, we need to halt the outsourcing of City services. We need to ensure the people working on our water, streets and other departments are City residents. We cannot be so short sighted to see only a lower bid, but need to factor in the economic multiplier effect of those worker's spending in our neighborhoods and the impact of their tax base. In addition, we need to craft policy that incents hiring local for even private employers.

I call for master plans by neighborhoods, crafted with collaboration between local businesses, local residents and neighborhood chambers. Then we need to ensure that we keep these plans 'living' in terms of guiding development, business attraction and hiring local.

Additionally, 95% of our food is imported into Illinois. By developing a local food system that harvests food from within approximately 150 miles, we would reap benefits including carbon reduction, local jobs, and help to keep more dollars in our communities. Urban agriculture, food hubs, farmers markets, and local food processing businesses would also contribute to our revenue through additional tax revenue.

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 believe that we could absolutely function with less alderman. I have read proposals by the Progressive Reform Caucus Alderman calling for a council made up of 36. As long as the City is equipped to deliver on services effectively, we can reduce the number of Alderman. But there has to be the corresponding support from City departments.

A logical time to re-access is with the next census remap.

I fear that cost saving measures have cut functional departments and correspondingly there has been too much reliance on Aldermanic intervention on basic service requests such as pot holes, forestry, street lights, etc. To reiterate, we can save dollars with reduction in number of Alderman, but only if coupled with proper staffing in other departments.

9) A Chicago casino

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

Yes AND No:

I am concerned that reality on gaming is that it becomes a tax on the poor. Also, I am concerned about earmarking dollars for a good cause, like lottery dollars, only to see the dollars get moved around with no net increase for the intended beneficiary. I recognize we are losing gaming revenue to IN and suburbs but would want to see details before supporting as I have significant reservations. The pro of course being the ability to attract large shows back to McCormick by being able to offer additional entertainment. I would want to see an independent review of proposals prior to making a determination.

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?

No - I would call for a complete re-examination of the City of Chicago's Red Light Camera Program that started out focusing on safety, has mushroomed into a program of little oversight, corruption in regards to placement, deception in traffic signal timings, and a lack transparency. The program should not function as a regressive-tax revenue generator, but a program to increase the safety for the driving public as part of a comprehensive plan for all modes of transportation.

Having said this, I do believe there are at least 190 cameras that should be removed due to low incidence of accident history. But would not call for a complete abolishment of the City of Chicago's Red Light Camera Program. The comprehensive study commissioned by a prominent Chicago newspaper acknowledges that "the number of injury-causing accidents decreased at intersections after red light cameras were added." A 2005 study by the Federal Highway Administration and other studies throughout the country have found similar results of those benefits. So again, we need to do a complete re-examination.

11) Ward issues

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

1. Making sure the communities interest are represented, not that of big donors
2. Consistently advocating for an elected school board, not just when politically convenient
3. Fully staffed and resourced police for safer communities

In addition, I will be a full time alderman with a responsive ward office.