**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Caroline Vickrey

Ward: 43

Occupation: Attorney

Education:

Lane Technical High School, Class of 1985

BA, History, University of Illinois, Champaign, Class of 1989

JD, Loyola University of Chicago School of Law, 1992

Previous political and civic experience:

Member, Local School Council, elected four times

Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, 2006-2013

Member, Oz Park Advisory Council, 1993-present

Member, MidNorth Association, 2012-present

**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: Yes.

Please Explain:

Like the laborer’s and municipal funds, the current police and fire pension system is unsustainable, especially with no political will to maintain it at responsible levels, as has been the case for the past few decades. At risk of not being able to pay out the benefits if we continue forward and take no action, there is an inevitable need to be a combination of new revenue and adjustments to benefits in order to avoid insolvency of the fund in totality.

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 would support a property tax raise only after a forensic audit of all city expenditures takes place to make sure money is being spent in a fiscally prudent way across the spectrum. One of the factors that motivated me to run for local office was the expenditure of $20,000,000 for a controversial school annex over a playground in our ward that I did not see as a fiscally wise use of taxpayer funds in times of great fiscal instability in the city. I can explain that issue in more detail elsewhere, but use it as an example of what I see as unwise and incongruent fiscal moves by CPS and the State at a time when they could least afford it and when other far less costly options existed. (This plan was also announced by fiat to a private audience, without publicly vetting to allow for public input or comment) As another condition of a tax raise, I would favor segregating any new tax revenue from new taxes away from TIF districts. This would ensure that money that would otherwise go to TIF funds go instead to the city’s general treasury to pay down the pension debt and to public school operating budgets.

**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?

Again, I favor a combination of pinpointed and segregated revenue increases, --only after a very careful examination of expenditures within CPS to make sure that money is being invested wisely -- combined with adjustments to benefits going forward, and to current benefits agreed to in a bipartisan agreement. Although there is no simple formula for deciding schools eligible for new construction, investment in new schools should be made in accordance with the Educational Facilities Master Plan to ensure logical distribution of resources, and always with full transparency and public vetting.

**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: Yes, in keeping with other states

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

Yes or No: Yes if constitutional

\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”

Yes or No: Yes if combined with cuts in spending

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

The 43rd Ward is one of the least likely places that would embrace a tax increase, and I would not agree to one lightly, and not without complete confidence that other decisions were being made to ensure fiscal responsibility across the city. However, it is imperative that we take actions to raise revenue that are responsible to go forward in order to ensure the viability of our highly valued public professions going forward.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Of course!

Please explain:

All of our communities are suffering from heartbreaking crime. Though our murder rate might be down, it is still alarming and our police on the streets are down to very low levels. Crime in our ward, though it luckily does not involve murder, is on an uptick, with very high levels of property crimes and assaults. We have had several occasional lately where guns have been involved and murders just outside or ward. Everybody here misses our police beat cops, who seem to be nonexistent any longer, and more and more often 911 calls are met with no response -- Radio Assignments Pending. Many here wonder if our uptick in crime is related to redeployment, combined with the fact that retirements and transfers have not been met with replacements. Redeployment is understandable, but the loss of police protection in general angers many 43rd Ward residents; I cannot imagine the anger in higher crime areas. It is a growing problem that is being felt all over the city. The reliance on overtime for police officers gives the police force more flexibility during the summer hours but also creates fatigue and stress which may backfire with respect to the effectiveness of those police working extra hours. I’d like to see the scales tipped toward more police hired and further away from overtime paid to get more officers on the rolls and back on the beats.

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

I support the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence (and have for many years; my husband was once on the Board) and all of its efforts to reduce gun violence and constrict gun sales in the city, including background checks, waiting periods, restricting sales near schools, record keeping and videotaping of purchases. However, the problem is usually not the legal purchase of guns in Chicago, it is the gun purchases out side the city, across state borders and illegally smuggled into Chicago and Illinois. That is what worries me the most. I feel strongly that we need to improve employment and education for our young people to make violence obsolete.

**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 membersand the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: Yes, in part.

Please explain:

I support a hybrid school board, with some members elected and others appointed. I attended many Board of Education meetings this past year. I understand the frustration and anger with the school board membership; I was frustrated myself with a decision that they made in our neighborhood. However, I do not see a fully elected school board as the solution. I think it would solve some problems and create others. I think that wholly electing the school board would prevent it from making some really hard decisions that need to be made in the upcoming years, and I believe the Mayor has to have some “skin in the game.” (If we really don’t like what he’s doing, we should elect someone else) However, I do think that the board needs a few members to bring a “wake up” call to the board, to ask the hard questions, and to bring a sense of perspective and sensitivity to the board in the decisions that are being made. I believe that the chair position should be elected, since that person deals with the public most visibly, and I actually believe that the board and the mayor need to work more closely with the boots-on-the-ground employees at CPS who work in the schools on a daily basis, and avoid making complex educational decisions in a rash manner.

**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: Yes.

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

TIFs are valuable tools, agreed, but their management needs to be reformed, made completely transparent, and included in an annual review alongside the regular city budget that is approved by City Council each year, complete with previous balance, revenue that year and expenditures that year. TIFs are good economic tools, because they stimulate investment in blighted areas of the city that would not be developed “but for” the TIF money, but that standard has been expanded over time to include districts that might otherwise receive investment. I do not think that 23 years should apply to every TIF district. There are some TIF districts that should be discontinued once they have replenished the amount used from the TIF district to fund the project and the TIF goals have been met. I’d like to see TIFs be excluded from any future tax increases that are necessary to shore up our structural deficits.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

One of my primary goals as Alderman will be filling the empty storefronts in Lincoln Park. It is surprising and depressing to see so many in our affluent neighborhood. We have suffered immensely from the post-Internet age, and we suffer from the ironic problem of having an overwhelming amount of traffic and congestion from people visiting the lakefront museums, parks and beaches and not being able to capture those visitors to shop and dine in our neighborhoods.

I will set up a 43rd ward development corporation to study retail, dining and traffic flow in the neighborhood and come up with a comprehensive urban plan to attract businesses to our ward and rebalance the neighborhood for the post-internet age, while also beautifying the commercial strips and selling them to the public to attract visitors to the lakefront from the rest of the city and the world.

**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?

The budget for individual ward offices is amazingly high, but at the same time, I am running because I believe Aldermen need to be more responsive to the needs of individual citizens, and this goal would be compromised by reducing the number of Aldermen. Reducing the number of Aldermen would also make the City Council less independent and easier for large political “machines” to control. I would support decreasing the salaries of office, forcing Aldermen to take full time roles in their wards, and attracting Aldermen desiring to serve the city and their constituents rather than collecting a paycheck. I would also support an across the board reduction in the aldermanic menu money, combined with other cutsuntil our city crawls its way out of its structural deficits.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: No.

Please explain:

People hold conventions in Chicago because it is a city with a beautiful lakefront, beautiful parks, cool neighborhoods, great dining, amazing theater and world class museums, and last but not least, it is free from the distraction of casinos. Casinos are a regressive tax on our city, can cause great social damage to communities, and would fail to set us apart from other great cities of the world, turning our lakefront into a cheapened amusement park. Instead, it would suck casino business from Indiana, further crippling that market. I know that we are desperate for revenue, but I hope we can avoid casinos to solve that problem.

**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: No.

Please explain:

Red light cameras would make sense if they increased safety. However, it appears that they do not enhance safety as currently designed, with some of the shortest yellow lights in the country. Recent studies confirms that if anything, the red light cameras cause more accidents than they prevent. Because the red light cameras correlate to a decrease in the number of fatal accidents, and because they provide the city $7,000,000 of desperately needed revenue, I would be reluctant to completely disable them permanently, but they definitely should be reexamined and reconsidered, especially the yellow light times and the placement throughout the city. Yellow lights should be a standard minimum length across the country and all red light cameras should be disabled until this timing is standardized.

**11) Ward issues**

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

* Development – development decisions in the ward have been haphazard and not responsive to the valid concerns of residents about overdevelopment, density, lack of infrastructure and urban planning. I plan to establish a 43rd Ward Community Zoning Board to bring consistency, responsiveness and timeliness to development decisions in the ward.
* Schools – my goal will be to continue to improve the schools and their facilities in the 43rd ward, to look at them comprehensively and to get our financial ship in order in order to improve the overall CPS budget
* Restoring Vibrancy to our Retail Corridors – I am determined to bring vibrancy back to our retail corridors, by working together with Lincoln Park Local, the Lincoln park Merchants Association, the Chamber of Commerce and SSAs, and other local organizations determined to beautify our ward and retails corridors, attract more shoppers and sell the assets that we already have here.