**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Jerry Quandt

Ward: 43

Occupation: International marketing consultant and Chicago community activist

Education:

Attended St. Jude the Apostle grade school in South Holland. Attended Mt. Carmel High School for freshman year and graduated from Thornwood High School. Earned an Associate of Arts Degree from Holy Cross College, where I was named to the Executive Board of the National Association of Students at Catholic Colleges and University. Earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Marketing from DePaul University, where I partook in the IME Honors Marketing Program.

Previous political and civic experience:

I am very active in my Lincoln Park community. In 2012, I was elected to serve as a member of the Lincoln Elementary Local School Council, where I worked with my fellow Council Members to secure a new school annex to resolve the school’s overcrowding issue. I spearheaded a team of over a dozen school parents to develop and design the new Lincoln Elementary School website, and am serving as a 5th Grade Room Parent for the school.

I am a Member of the Lincoln Central Association, an organization dedicated to preserving and improving the neighborhood. I served on the DePaul Alumni Board and was recently invited to join the DePaul Marketing Alumni Committee to enhance the marketing department at the University which sits within our neighborhood. I also volunteer on both the marketing team and as a head coach for the Oz Park Baseball Association and am an active supporter of Bike Walk Lincoln Park.

While at college at DePaul, I was a Member of the Student Government Association and was selected as the student speaker for the College of Commerce Graduation Ceremony. During my senior year I studied and worked abroad, attending the Institute for Public Administration in Dublin, Ireland, while running the parliament office for Hugh Byrne, a member of the Irish Parliament.

**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:

There is no easy solution to the pension crisis, nor is there a fair solution. Those who worked hard for their pensions deserve to receive what they were promised, even if they were promised much more than they should have been and much more than we can afford. Residents are already struggling under the weight of government taxes and fees. Politicians in Springfield and Chicago overpromised and under budgeted, and now after years of kicking the can down the road our current elected officials are faced with this crisis.

Changes for future retirees are easier to make, in that we need to bring their pensions to a level that is more in line with the private sector, and steps have already been made in this direction as mentioned in your next question. However, that doesn’t solve today’s crisis.

The “easiest” solution for politicians would be to blame Springfield’s inaction for the crisis and then increase taxes, mostly in the form of a property tax hike, but I do not support that. Taxpayers are already paying enough, and our economy is already lagging behind that of surrounding regions.

While we need to continue to urge the State to take substantive, constitutional action, there are steps we can take here at home beyond simply raising taxes. We must bring all sides together to agree on the necessary compromises that will allow us to withstand this crisis. Everyone has skin in the game, and it’s time that everyone sat down and had an honest conversation about where we are and where we are headed. If no concessions are given, pension spending will swallow the rest of our budget whole, leaving us even less to spend on education and public safety. I believe that if such an honest and open dialog were to occur, we could balance concessions with consideration for current and soon-to-be retirees and find a path forward.

The key is to ensure that all “share in the pain” of resolving this crisis. Right now, it is taxpayers that are feeling the pain most, by having to give more and more to plug budget holes and pay for benefits that are far out of line with any benefits they might receive in the private sector. I do not support increasing taxpayers’ pain as part of this solution.

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?

Please see my full answer above.

**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?

I believe in our schools, our children and our teachers. I had the opportunity to serve as a member of the Lincoln Elementary Local School Council, where I worked with my fellow Council Members to secure a new school annex to resolve the school’s overcrowding issue. I spearheaded a team of over a dozen school parents to develop and design the new Lincoln Elementary School website, increasing communication and transparency for our school community. I am also serving as a 5th Grade Room Parent for the school.

I believe we need to continue to invest in our public schools, specifically to expand access to and integration with technology in the education experience. Not only will this further enhance the real world education our children receive, but it can also serve to increase efficiency in our schools and reduce costs, something that is sorely needed as we address budgetary constraints.

In that light, I believe that we can implement reforms at our schools that help address CPS’ budgetary constraints. We cannot continue to hope that something or someone else will come in and rescue us, because with taxpayers and governments still trying to dig out from under the recession that is highly unlikely for the foreseeable future. As a result, as difficult as it will be, we need to look inwards for the solution and identify ways that we can maximize what we accomplish with the limited funds that are available to us.

**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: Not at this time

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

Yes or No: Not at this time

\* 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.

I am not in favor of tax increases to solve our budgetary problems. I believe we first need to make substantive, structural changes to put our finances in a better, stable long-term position. To increase revenues prior to making such changes would simply be throwing more money into a hole while we’re still digging the hole deeper.

After we have made the necessary fiscal reforms, I believe we can begin to have the conversation about more revenues. I believe the issue of expanding the sales tax base is one that deserves some dialogue because it levels the playing field for businesses, making it more an issue of fairness than of revenue. I would also consider the option of bringing in more revenue from individuals who do not live in our city but enjoy the many benefits Chicago provides, especially our world class transportation for which those of us who live in the city pay to build and maintain.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

I do support the need for more police on our streets, however I am not sure it is immediately feasible due to budgetary constraints. As a result, I believe we need to be more creative as to our approach to this problem to identify ways we can address this issue without requiring additional officers in the short run.

We must work to make our community safer. We should be doing everything possible to ensure our children can safely walk and bike to school. While I recognize we live in an urban environment, we should not accept as a way of life any crime and violence that makes our children and their parents feel unsafe.

In my Ward, we face several unique challenges. Because the crime rate in our community is lower than in other areas of the city, we have seen drastic reductions in police staffing levels. While it is understandable that certain areas need a heavier police presence than others, this has resulted in a noticeable increase in crime in our neighborhood. Violence has increased, evidenced by a shooting that occurred on the incumbent Alderman’s block just a month ago. We’ve even seen an uptick in drugs in the community, though it’s not clear if that is an increase or simply that those who partake in the drug trade feel less of a need to conduct their trade in private.

Since we are unlikely to see an increase in police presence, despite our need to at least go back to previous staffing levels, it falls on the members of the community to take more of a role in improving public safety in our community. I have already been part of this effort, as I and many of my fellow community members have taken it upon ourselves to keep our Alderman and police informed of things that are happening in the Ward.

As Alderman, I will work to encourage increased community policing efforts in this effort. I will continue to be with my residents and our police officers, on the street, dealing with the needs and concerns in an active and engaged way. Our Ward needs a visible and accessible Alderman who will put the needs of their residents above those of their political bosses and special interests.

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

Unfortunately there isn’t any current legislation to support that would accomplish this. I appreciate the work that some of our legislators have put into this issue, notably Representative Mike Zalewski, and hope that this work bears fruit soon. I understand that there are protracted legal battles over gun rights and gun control, but people need to understand that in the meantime guns are getting into the hands of those that wish to use those weapons to do harm. No matter where anyone stands on the issue of guns, that is not acceptable and needs to be addressed without any further delay.

**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

Please explain:

I am in favor of making members of the Board of Education publically elected so that they are accountable to the people that they serve, rather than a political process.

**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?

The problem with TIF districts is that they have been abused in Chicago, and by all accounts overused, as an end-all be-all solution to spurring development that in many cases did not need or warrant the investment of taxpayer dollars.

Especially at a time where we need to be reevaluating the way we approach development. Chicago has a wonderful tradition of evolution and progress, one which we must embrace. At the same time, it is important that we respect our rich history and protect our way of life.

The city needs to provide a level playing field for businesses and entrepreneurs, and get out of the business of picking winners and losers. We need to reduce the regulatory burden that is stifling innovation, and allow our local communities to take the lead on determining the proper level and type of development that is best for them.

In my community, our focus is on retaining our unique urban feel as we define our neighborhood for the years to come. We are working towards commercial districts that are built around the idea of community and neighborhood businesses. Our criteria for development is in attracting resident and non-resident young professionals to the neighborhood so that we can continue to create a rich and dynamic urban life based on diversity and balance. Meanwhile, we are working to preserve our parks and public green space while increasing accessibility to our neighborhood’s many relevant cultural experiences.

However, to assume that our approach works for every other community would be a mistake. Development and job opportunities are desperately needed in some areas or the city. In others, development has far outpaced infrastructure investments and improvements, leading to clogged thoroughfares (an issue my neighborhood faces thanks to development in the surrounding areas).

As a result, I do support alternative development incentives in limited instances. They can be a powerful tool to help spur development in areas where developers need additional incentives in order to invest, but we need to be much more judicious in their use. In addition, I believe that any surpluses that result from current TIF districts either accomplishing their objectives early or not spending the allotted amount of money should be used to stabilize our budgets in the short term.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

The key in my Ward is not necessarily attracting more employers, but rather the right employers. As we develop areas like Webster Square and the old Children’s Memorial Hospital site, we need to focus on development that attracts both resident and non-resident young professionals to the neighborhood. Recently, we have seen this demographic move out of the neighborhood, further amplified by the loss of patrons, employees and visitors of the two hospitals we have lost in the last several years. An increased effort should be placed on attracting young professionals as they tend to use more alternative/public transportation and invest in our neighborhood businesses.

**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 would want to do more research on this topic before committing to a change in the makeup of the City Council. I am always in favor of increasing efficiency and reducing costs, and on its face reducing the number of aldermen in Chicago seems like it would accomplish this. However, it would also consolidate power among even fewer individuals while making our Alderman that much more inaccessible to the people they serve. As a result, I cannot commit to supporting this just yet, but I can commit to being an ally of proven government reforms and the reduction of the number of government bodies in our city and state.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

With the right safeguards in place to avoid opportunities for corruption, I am in favor of a casino in Chicago. I believe the casino could and would be a destination, bringing individuals with disposable income into the city rather than sending them to Gary or Des Plaines.

**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:

I do not support Chicago’s traffic light camera program. While I have the benefit of hindsight to inform my decision, it was clear from the beginning that this was more about revenue than public safety. Since then, we have seen the rampant corruption that resulted from the program, which really should not have been a surprise to anyone. I believe we need to abolish the traffic light camera program.

**11) Ward issues**

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

-Preserve Our History As We Continue to Move Our Community Forward

-Continue to Invest in and Improve Education in Our Neighborhood

-Tackle the Tough Issues and Return Chicago to Fiscal Responsibility