



## Lincoln Chamber City Council Questionnaire

### Sändra Washington

1. The city is a large and complex organization; tell us about your experience and how it has prepared you to successfully oversee city operations.

My career in the National Park Service gave me a lot of insight into the operational complexity of managing a variety of programs and large physical sites, from infrastructure needs to congressional affairs. My experience on the Lincoln City Council and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission has provided me great insight into the complexity of Lincoln and shown me how well the City works – with residents, the business community, LPS and the County. I have great appreciation for the expertise of each department to accomplish their mission and the commitment it takes to collaborate across departments. When collaboration happens, we all benefit.

2. Lincoln is a growing and vibrant community with citizens engaged in varied interests and pursuits; how will you bring disparate groups together to build consensus? How will you set a standard for civility?

Important issues often have many groups interested in the outcome, and as a representative, it's my responsibility to search out and listen to as many perspectives as I can. Sometimes that means bringing folks together in the same room, sometimes listening to individual stakeholders before bringing groups together. Ultimately, I think we are more creative problem solvers when we incorporate a variety of voices in civic conversations.

I do my best to model civility by showing respect to each person I interact with, listening with an open heart and welcoming opportunities to learn from every interaction.

3. In 2019, voters approved an increase in the local option sales tax to help finance Lincoln's streets infrastructure needs. Since then, the ¼ cent sales tax has raised over \$85 million. Do you support the renewal of the ¼ cent sales tax for street improvements?

Absolutely, yes! We've been able to make significant progress on building new streets and taking care of existing neighborhood streets. All of this activity is good for public safety and good for our economy.

4. The Chamber's position on affordable housing is that supply must be increased to maintain affordable housing in Lincoln. The Chamber believes investing in housing of all types (high density, single family, downtown, new growth, and an above all approach) will be most effective in keeping home prices affordable in Lincoln. As City Council members, how will you prioritize more supply of housing in Lincoln?

The cost of housing is one of our greatest challenges, both for would-be homeowners and renters. We need an approach that says "yes" before "no" and considers new housing types, including smaller houses and quality off-site builds, as a way to respond to differing market needs. I support streamlining the development permitting process, from planning through final inspection, and zoning flexibility that reconsiders lot size minimums.

5. How can the City Council more effectively exercise oversight and accountability related to development services in the City of Lincoln. How can we get a "yes" attitude?

We need a shift in culture that prioritizes finding solutions over identifying roadblocks and holds each department accountable for the permitting timeframe. This could be implementing a shared project management software that links planning, urban development, building & safety and LTU into one system.



6. Even if Lincoln on the Move is renewed, Lincoln's need for street and road infrastructure will grow. Some communities have utilized financing tools such as SIDs, while others have allocated a great portion of their general funds. As a City Council member, how would you support augmenting Lincoln's total street investment?

I think Lincoln has done a good job with the dollars we have right now for street investments (State and federal dollars, wheel tax, municipal highway bonding and ¼-cent sales tax). We will always have a need to repair the streets we have and build new streets for our growing City, so I welcome a community-wide conversation - a think tank of stakeholders from neighborhoods, business, development and public sectors, along with local, State and Federal government leaders to put their heads together. With the attention, expertise and perspectives of these stakeholders, we can find the solutions that will work for Lincoln.

7. One of the most important functions of the City Council is to review and approve the bi-annual budget and property tax rate. The Chamber recognizes the inherent difficulties of balancing needs and making smart investments, against funding available and concerns about property taxes collected from families and businesses. In the previous three fiscal years, the city budget increased 6 ½% at the 2024 midyear budget review. Year one of this budget cycle (2025-2027) will increase 8%, and then an additional 6% in the second year, according to the budget page on the city's website. **Do you consider this rate of growth to be sustainable and aligned with what Lincoln citizens and businesses support?** As a City Council member, how will you work with the business community and property owners to limit the growth of the budget, and more specifically, property tax?

Constructing a budget is our single greatest responsibility. I believe we should always begin the budget process with a goal of holding the line as close to current plus cost-of-living. The budget should reflect the community's values for public health and safety, economic development and the quality-of-life amenities that make Lincoln a wonderful place to live. My job as a councilwoman is to balance community needs for



services with the need to be mindful of how we use public tax dollars, including property taxes.