

# **Heart of the City**

**August 14, 2006 – Police Station Conference Room**

Present: John Landowski, Jenny Eschner, Michael Clish, Ann Engleman, Anders Yocom, Mary Linton, Kathy Kaufman, John Kleinschmidt, John Brower, Alex Brower, Kathy Zimmerman, Ron Zimmerman, Paul Hable, Leslie LaMuro, John Kleinschmidt, Stella Kleinschmidt, Lue Ehnger, Mary Gates, Janne Howard Moon, Beth Gehred, Joan Callen, John Faust, Steve Tesmer, Jill Kessenich, and many others in attendance for the Candidate forum.

Meeting called to order at 6:30 pm by President Beth Gehred.

Last month's minutes approved.

**Inspirational Moment: John Kleinschmidt read from the book "Natural Capitalism" by Paul Hawken**

**Recognition of past officers: Andy Yocom, Mary Linton**

**Election of new slate of officers – passed unanimously**

President: Beth Gehred

Vice-President: Kitty Welch

Co-Secretaries: Jill Kessenich & Steve Tesmer

Treasurer: Paul Hable

## **Announcements:**

Beth: Ad Hoc committee for Climate Protection will be meeting Monday, August 21 at 5:00. The first meeting of the committee was August 7.

Joe Nehmer called Beth to see if HOC would endorse preservation of 3 buildings on the old Elk farm, current site of Dorothy Carnes park. Mary L suggested referring to steering committee, Andy agrees that we need more information.

Tim Nystad, chair of Jefferson Co Republican party asked if Heart would consider hosting a forum for US Assembly race. Is AAUW planning a forum? Ann suggests referring to Govt Relations committee.

Beth got a call that Johnson Creek is voting today to decide if they might become an Eco Community. Beth got permission from the group to write a letter of congrats if it passes. Final Sustainability Superstore will be Sept 23. Projects committee will discuss next year's events.

**Treasurers Report:** None

**Committee reports:**

**Projects:** None

**Outreach/Education:**

Currently putting top priority on Speakers Bureau.

**Public Policy/Govt :**

Working toward registering high school seniors in the fall for voting.

**Candidate Forum:**

Welcome by Ann Engleman

Participants: Walt Christensen (D), Andy Jorgenson (D), Ivan Davis (I)

Forum moderated by Andy Yocom.

Introductions by each candidate:

Walt Christensen: Became interested in land use issues in the town of Koshkonong, Ran for town board in 1997 held post for 2 terms. Served as Park committee for past 2 years. Why he is running: You can get a lot of things done without knowing other board members party affiliation. Concerned that Partisan wrangling has stifled productivity in Madison. Walt believes he can work with other member of the Assembly to get real work done.

Ivan Davis: Born & raised in Fort. Currently works with inventors & entrepreneurs to nurture new businesses. Reason for running: Sees a need for change and strong leadership at the state level, and a need for representatives that work for the best interests of the people. Refuses to take any special interest money.

Andy Jorgenson: Has lived in Fort for 16 years. Active in union at GM in Janesville. Reason for running: Wants his kids to have same & more opportunities he has had, but has seen these opportunities dwindling. Has gotten several endorsements from unions and conservation groups.

*Question 1: The mission of Heart of the City is: "To advocate for sustainable change and promote the public good by working with government and other citizens in the visioning and planning of our communities." How can state government help us address our mission?*

Ivan Davis: State government can help meet mission of "you help yourself". Set yourself apart – gave examples of city (Davis California) that have adopted things like Green Building, alternative energy, etc.

Andy Jorgenson: Pledges to continue to participate with people in events like this. Opportunity for WI to be on the forefront of Ethanol production. Supports strong enforcement of existing laws on pollution. Supports Smart Growth legislation. State govt should help promote and support communities in their goals.

Walt Christensen: Issue of Sustainability covers wide range of things, jobs, transportation, economics, etc. Legislature should direct the UW to address these issues. Especially UW Extension, bring the resources of the University to bear on sustainability issues. We need to build on Smart Growth and other existing programs.

*Question 2: How can we help state government address our mission?*

Andy Jorgenson: Hold forums, attending events like this is a priority for Andy. Important to have frequent communication between candidates and people.

Walt Christensen: Recalls issue of annexation of land for big box retailer in Fort, which was the genesis for formation of HOC. Launching of HOC is an example of how citizen involvement can make a difference, it is important to have an ally in the legislature. Educate legislators, keep the people informed. Legislators notice when the people are energized.

Ivan Davis: Most important thing is to have a plan.

*Question 3: What can state government do to help meet the health care needs of its citizens, particularly its poorest citizens?*

Walt Christensen: Resources of UW can be used more effectively to address human needs. Supports Stem Cell research – Legislature should not be setting road blocks. Look at other states for examples of health care initiatives.

Ivan Davis: Health care is an example of how destructive Lobbying has become. Millions have been spent on maintaining the status quo. Special interest groups are winning. US does not have a good healthcare record, system needs to be changed fundamentally. Need to help the poorest citizens most.

Andy Jorgenson: Healthcare can be made a priority, so far it has not been. Several plans are in the legislature, but not being acted on. Supports Senate Healthcare Action Plan. Supports Governor's proposal. Must be made a priority in the Assembly.

*Question 4: The political objective of holding the line on taxes, or even reducing taxes, is advocated by powerful forces. What programs would you cut, if necessary to meet this objective? Please be specific.*

Ivan Davis: WI is a high-tax state. Unable to attract businesses, unable to retain financially-able citizens. Not looking at cutting taxes – should freeze taxes at this level. Needs to be a watchdog to look at non-productive projects that are currently being funded. National tax rates for business has dropped to about 4% - business spend money on Lobbyists to reduce their tax burdens. WI wages have been declining, businesses are not moving to WI. Graduates looking for good paying jobs are moving out of state. Need to make opportunities – make education a priority.

Andy Jorgenson: Would merge some state departments to gain efficiencies. Goal is to bring taxes down – do so by getting rid of corporate loopholes. For Example: setting up business addresses in other states, to avoid taxes. Homeowners Property Exemption (HOPE program).

Walt Christensen: Eliminate unneeded highway building projects: ex: hwy 12 bypass. Thompson administration decided to outsource highway engineering projects. DOT engineers left to form private companies & contract and end up charging the state more money. Do away with school voucher program, costs money and degrades public education. Increase tipping fees to reduce landfill imports to WI. Business do not look first for low tax states – they look for an educated population. UW and public school system attract business. Does not believe that WI is in that bad a position compared to other states, other states have many more fees, and often lower in services. We are approx 16<sup>th</sup>, not top 5. Better off improving the chances that citizens can make a good wage, than just lowering taxes and services. State legislature has been pointing at local govts for spending too much money – local governments are much more frugal than state level. Will take his local experience to the assembly.

*Question 5: What are your thoughts on Academic freedom at UW and other universities?*

Andy Jorgenson: UW system can police itself, state government does not need to get involved.

Walt Christensen: Kevin Barrett issue: part of his job in this course is to teach what the views of people in other countries are. UW is place for open discussion of ideas. This type of issues has come up often over the years. It is easy to instill fear in people, sometimes establishment must be challenged. Freedom of inquiry at UW is essential. Ideas don't hurt people.

Ivan Davis: Need academic freedom, but responsibility comes with that freedom. UW can work out these issues on its own without intervention by state government.

*Question 6: What are your thoughts on “Traditional” marriage?*

Walt: Marriage is a good thing for society. Encourages a natural human tendency. Does not see evidence that gay marriage is a threat to traditional marriage. Economics are a bigger threat, lack of healthcare, etc. That is a better place to look to strengthen the family. Sees this as legislators using personal beliefs to pick on minority population. Legislators should set aside personal biases.

Ivan: Believes in traditional marriage between man and a woman.

Andy Jorgenson: Sees marriage between man and woman. Gay marriage is already illegal in WI, so this is a waste of legislator. Legislature is avoiding real issues of healthcare, employment, etc. This is a wedge issue.

*Question 7: What are your thoughts on the issues surrounding Wal-Mart and other “big box” stores?*

Ivan: Not in favor of Wal-Mart coming to Jefferson, but pledged to do whatever the citizens decide to do. Sees money leaving the community when it is spent at Wal-Mart. Build and shop in local stores, money stays in community. Thinks Jefferson Wal-Mart decision was a mistake. Encourage local businesses, not chains. We need to look at every dollar earned and try to keep it here.

Andy: Would like to say he is glad to have Wal-Mart come, but he is not. Through Badger care, the taxpayers are paying for Wal-Mart's employee's healthcare. Unfair competition to local companies who pay for their employees healthcare. Would like to see Wal-Mart clean up their act and do the right thing.

Walt: Was on Town board when Wal-Mart approached town/city. Asked W-M official how pricing strategy is set. Answer: set by local economic conditions. Target price just below existing businesses to drive competition out. Then did more research online, found that Wal-Mart stood out from other chains in the number of complaints, lawsuits, etc. "Take No Prisoners" approach to business. Draining money out of the state. As an alternative, we should try to attract manufacturing, that is where wealth is created. Adding value to an item. Milwaukee Journal ran article on Ireland's economic turnaround. Ireland spent resources on education, specifically high-tech. Has been very successful in attracting business and retaining educated people. Walmart is the opposite.

*Question 8: What are your thoughts on the perceived “brain drain” of educated youth from Wisconsin?*

Andy: Has always been his dream that his kids can find good life here in WI. Have to stop gutting education, make it a priority. Corporations look for quality of life and educated workforce.

Walt: What attracts people to localities is energy and vitality of an area. Energetic culture, free to be who they want to be, good educational resources, good environmental values. Madison has done a good job of attracting people. One thing that drives people away is perception that WI is backward, pursues restrictions on things like stem cell research, concealed carry, anti-gay measures. These are not encouraging people to come here. Great Natural resources are an attraction, park system.

Ivan: Has seen brain drain in his own family – children moving away for job opportunities. WI has 5<sup>th</sup> worst water quality in US, top 5 most corrupt government, high taxes. People who stay are those who can't afford to leave. Need good education, IBM has made large investment in Ireland – because of educated citizens.

*Summary: Why are you running for the Assembly?*

Walt: Enjoys working in government and solving problems. Accomplishments: Wetlands protection, outdoor lighting ordinance, boost park development, groundwater protection, worked on highway expansion projects. Can put his local experience to work in Madison.

Ivan: Was an alderman in Jefferson. Decided not to run in one of the parties, once you become member of Democratic or Republican caucus, caucus tells you how to vote, you do what you are told. He does not want to have any part of that.

Andy: Wants to stick up for working people in WI. Good ideas will stand by themselves. He has never run for office, he is a working person and understands the issues of the working person. Bring down taxes, people are loosing houses because of taxes. Must close corporate tax loopholes.

Next Steering committee meeting: August 28

Next General meeting Sept 11.

Adjournment: 8:38

Respectfully Submitted,  
Steve Tesmer