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office seeking:	Maplewood City Council
campaign committee:	John Nephew Election Committee
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background information...

- Provide a brief biography and explain your qualifications for this office.

Biography: I was born in 1969, grew up in Duluth, and graduated from Carleton College in 1991. I started writing professionally in high school, and used my freelance writing and editing career to pay my way through college. Before graduating college I began my publishing company, Atlas Games, which I still run today. Michelle and I were married in 2000, and moved to Maplewood in 2001.

After watching our present city council in action over the past year, I came to the conclusion that I could do a better job than some of our current elected representatives.

Creating and running my own business has given me a diverse range of skills. In particular, I would highlight my experience with communication, negotiation, customer service, and finance as being directly applicable to the responsibilities of a city councilperson.

Most importantly, running my company has honed my ability to acquire new skills, to absorb and analyze information quickly, and react to changing circumstances. I also understand the limits of knowledge: we can never have complete and perfect information (and have to remain open to facts that challenge our existing assumptions), yet we must make decisions — we can't allow the limits of knowledge to paralyze us, because failing to act can have dire consequences as well. This is as true for the city council as it is for the business.

- Why are you seeking AFSCME endorsement? Have you received it in the past?

I have never before run for office nor sought endorsements.

AFSCME members are in a position to be especially well informed about what's been going wrong in Maplewood, and motivated to help fix it, so it seems natural to look for your support in our common cause. Repairing the damage that has been done to Maplewood will require a strong and positive collaboration between the council and city employees, AFSCME members and otherwise. Even if AFSCME chooses not to endorse in the race, I see this as a valuable opportunity to make my case and to learn about the issues of concern to the union's members.

- What other endorsements do you have or are you seeking?

I am a member of the Progressive Majority “farm team,” and will be seeking their endorsement. I have an endorsement screening scheduled with St. Paul Trades & Labor next week. It appears that the DFL in Maplewood will endorse this year; if they do I will seek that endorsement. I will seek the endorsement of the Maplewood Voters' Coalition (www.maplewoodvoterscoalition.com). I will be looking for other endorsement opportunities from organizations in the community.

I will seek the endorsement of numerous individual leaders in our community, including elected officials. Some elected officials who have been particularly helpful and encouraging to me so far have been Senator Chuck Wiger, County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, Representative Leon Lillie, Representative Nora Slawik, and Councilpersons Will Roszbach and Kathy Juenemann. I intend to ask them all for endorsement.

- How will you win this election?

I offer voters a three-part message: fiscal responsibility, good government, and pride in Maplewood. Fiscal responsibility is not as simple as blindly cutting taxes; it is about making the right investment decisions for the long term. Right now we seem to be both raising taxes (second highest levy increase in the past decade) and making bad investment choices (such as the reorganization in general). Good government means mutual respect among council, staff, and citizens. It means valuing the professionalism and expertise of city employees. Above all, it means decisions motivated by the public good, not personal vendetta. Finally, while we are all embarrassed by the picture drawn of Maplewood in the papers recently, we can't fairly blame the media for reporting the news; we can, however, change the story itself through the ballot box.

I think this message resonates with the people of Maplewood, including many people who voted for the current bcouncil majority and really did not think they were voting for *this*.

I have developed a campaign plan to introduce myself and bring that message to voters. I have recruited Peter Fischer, a community leader (chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission) with experience managing other campaigns, to be my campaign manager. Based on recent elections, we believe we need 1100 votes to win in the primary and 2750 in the general election. We are using voter data from the Secretary of State to identify the Maplewood residents most likely to vote in the primary and general election, so that we can target our resources most effectively – door knocking, phone calls, and mailings. I expect the target list to expand as we find more people who have not been politically involved in the past but are motivated to be this year. I am convinced that my message of positive change is compelling, and I'm prepared to do the hard work necessary to bring it the voters.

AFSCME Questionnaire...

1. Our union is concerned about the direction of city government in Maplewood. Please explain how you would work to create a respectful tone between the city council and mayor, the city manager, citizens and city workers.

We can show respect for the city's staff first of all by giving them a city manager whose competence and professionalism at least matches their own. We must restart the search for a professional city manager with the appropriate qualifications and experience. This process needs the active participation of all stakeholders, including citizens, staff, other members of the community (such as local business owners who may not reside in Maplewood), as well as the council.

One of the things I will look for in a city manager is how she or he places him or herself in relation to the city employees and the council. A city manager is accountable to the council, and part of the job is to take flak directed at staff, and to defend the staff. Public scapegoating of subordinates is inappropriate.

The council also needs to lead by example when it comes to respecting staff. It is possible to ask questions and even disagree with the recommendations of city staff without putting them down or impugning their expertise or professionalism. I am outraged by the present council majority's behavior in this regard. I've seen them berate and criticize individual staff members in open council meetings and to the media; I've also seen them sit passively by or even encourage citizens to attack city staff during public meetings. The council majority and their city manager have encouraged citizen hostility in both overt and subtle ways.

Fostering an environment of mutual respect goes directly to my campaign theme of good government. When I speak to fellow Maplewood residents, I try to explain the cost we citizens pay for letting our council create an environment of hostility and disrespect. The city has lost too many experienced, gifted employees because of the toxic, demoralizing work environment that this council majority has created.

2. What role should the City play in influencing the policies and/or terms and conditions of employment for independent boards and commissions that serve the City? Would you attempt to influence items during the budget process?

Some of Maplewood's citizen boards and commissions have a strong statutory role (such as the Police Civil Service Commission); others are more advisory in nature. In both cases, I am concerned about how this council

has been relating to them. The council majority ignoring the rulings of the PCSC is one vivid example (and their choice not to reappoint Deb Birkholtz, even though she was the only eligible applicant for the opening at the time, obviously to punish her for not voting they way they wanted on the Banick matter). In another case, I wonder if the Environmental Committee was made into a "Commission" just in order for this council majority to remove members who had been their vocal critics. I am concerned that the city manager and council have not been involving the boards and commissions budgetary matters, such as the capital improvement plan, where we now see the city manager proposing a 72% reduction in planned capital spending on city parks. It used to be that a councilmember served as the liaison to each board or commission; this council majority eliminated that practice.

As a candidate, I plan to attend each of the boards and commissions at least once. (So far I've covered Planning, Parks & Rec., PCSC, Environmental, and Community Design Review Board.) I have observed that these boards include volunteer citizens of remarkable caliber — sometimes experts in their field at a national level. The council does itself and the city a disservice by failing to make full use of the incredible resource these volunteers offer the city.

3. What is your position on the contracting out or privatization of public services? Under what circumstances would you support the privatization, contracting out of services currently provided by the city or the long term leasing of city assets?

I do not see any current city function that would benefit from contracting out or privatization. On the contrary, I think we have gone too far by outsourcing Human Resources, for example.

While as an entrepreneur I am enthusiastically capitalist and recognize the value of the free market, I think it's just a practical fact that government is the most effective vehicle for the delivery of certain services, for both cost and quality. I think we run into trouble when we allow blind allegiance to an ideology (such as the belief in privatization as the cure for all ills) to dictate policy.

4. Our union worked to pass a Living Wage Ordinance in Minneapolis and St. Paul, assuring that jobs created through subsidy or contract would pay a living wage. Would you advocate for a Living Wage Ordinance in Maplewood?

I'd want to know more details about the specific ordinance being proposed. In general terms, I support the idea. If we are supporting a project with tax dollars, I think it is acceptable to attach conditions that serve the public good. Good paying jobs have a ripple effect throughout the community, from supporting property values (people with good jobs can afford to buy homes) to increasing the health of other businesses, whether through money spent or money saved/invested (thus increasing the pool of capital in the market).

5. What role have you played in either advocating for or against the privatization or managed competition of public services? What are you saying about privatization in your campaign to Maplewood voters, the media and other groups making endorsements in this race?

I don't think I've played a particular role for or against in the past. In terms of the Maplewood campaign, I have expressed concerns about privatization that I think is unwise, such as the former Human Resources department.

6. Do you agree with the City's decision to contract out the Human Resources functions within Maplewood? Please explain why or why not?

No, I disagree with the current city policy. I think it's a prime example of bad government and fiscal irresponsibility, as practiced by this council majority. The new arrangement is resulting in worse service for the city, and I suspect it is costing us more to boot. (I'll have to finish analyzing the Bethel law firm's billing records to back that theory up, though.)

7. When the City is making decisions related to development, what are your priorities (affordable housing, economic development, senior housing, or open spaces)? Are safety concerns, like adequate lighting and sidewalks important to development decisions? Please explain.

I think we need to seek a balance in development. The demographers tell us we need a lot more senior housing, but I think we should be wary of putting that housing far away from commerce and services, for example.

Attractive senior housing should allow an aging population to remain in or near their long-time neighborhoods, and will then free up housing stock there for younger families. I think affordable housing is very important, and the city should look favorably upon opportunities to expand it; in this regard, I spoke out in favor of the development proposed for St. Paul's Monastery at a recent city meeting.

Yes, safety concerns need to be considered in the approval process for development. I think Maplewood comes up short in the sidewalk department, in particular. Whenever my wife and I go for a walk around our neighborhood, it's something we're very aware of. (County Road B has a lot of foot traffic, no sidewalks, and often some fast drivers.) Besides pushing for sidewalks in new development projects, I think the council should more actively encourage the installation of sidewalks as the city-wide street improvement plan goes forward.

8. Do you believe that Maplewood workers should get a COLA increase each year? Please explain why or why not. If so, where will you find the needed funding for COLA increases?

I support the principle that wages of city employees need to increase to keep pace with inflation. I am concerned about doing it by means of an automatic, inflexible mechanism. There is more to compensation than wages, and part of inflation includes those rising benefit expenses. For example, the CPI includes health care costs, which has been rising much faster than inflation at large in recent years. I would not want to be in a position where the city has to lay off employees or slash benefits in order to keep up with rigidly prescribed wage adjustments.

In terms of the source of funding, the same inflationary pressures should generally apply to revenue sources, such as property values and fee income.

9. How would you work with our Union in establishing a city-wide policy of employee development?

I don't know, but I would like to hear the union's ideas on this topic. I think employee development is a smart investment.

10. Do you think additional property tax revenue is required to maintain Maplewood's quality public services?

My perception right now is that we don't need additional revenue so much as better use of our current revenue. Part of the problem is that it's June and we still don't have a final, published budget for 2007; and the vast reorganization changes in the draft budget approved in December make it really hard to figure out where all the new spending is that required a 10.2% levy increase.

11. Additional job responsibilities for current employees have led to a stressful environment for city employees, managers, elected officials and the public. How would you set priorities for employees and the public to alleviate some of the additional stress? How would you create a work environment that is healthy and respectful?

The reorganization is a mess. It creates confusion, forces people into duties and responsibilities outside their expertise; and of course the implementing of this reorganization robbed the city of a lot of very talented and experienced staff (fired, laid off, driven away). I don't know what the perfect organization for the city would be – but then, I'm not a professional city manager, and it would not be my job to be one if I am elected. It would be my job to help Maplewood find one, and that's my #1 priority.

As I've already written, I believe that fiscal responsibility involves making the right investments — one of those investments is in your employees. We can't offer well-below-average salaries and expect to attract the kind of talent we need to help fix this mess, and we can't overload our existing employees without seeing the quality of their work suffer sooner or later.

12. All too often, public officials gain political capital by attacking public employees and public services. If elected, how will you use your capital to promote public services and the workers who provide them?

Attacking public employees and public services is short-sighted and counter-productive. It undermines the staff — and hurts us citizens. We pay for the lost productivity of demoralized employees who are less effective in their

Maplewood 2007

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jobs when they feel unappreciated and under siege. We pay for the loss of talented individuals who leave, and take their talents and institutional memory with them.

I've gone to a lot of city meetings over the past year and had many opportunities to see city staff in action. I have been overwhelmingly impressed by the knowledge, patience, and professionalism of our city employees. In my interactions with city staff, I have found them uniformly helpful and respectful. As a councilmember, I would like to help the public gain the same appreciation of city staff and the services they provide our community.

13. What process would you use to encourage and facilitate communication between yourself and AFSCME?

As a citizen and prospective candidate, I have attended many city meetings and taken advantage of the opportunity to meet and interact with city employees, many of them AFSCME members. I hope to continue that during my campaign and beyond. As an elected councilperson, I would encourage city employees to be in contact with me with their general thoughts and specific concerns, since that will help me better do my job.

14. Would you accept a campaign contribution from AFSCME political committees?

Yes, proudly.