

Questionnaire
Maplewood City Council

1. What are your reasons for seeking our endorsement?

Organized labor is a vital part of our economy and society, a force to balance the power of corporations and the narrow interests that often control them. A key dimension of unions' power is their willingness to get involved in politics — supporting candidates who will protect the interests of workers, and lobbying government to choose policies that help working families.

In Maplewood we currently have a council majority that is often hostile to unions. This council majority and their city manager have actively worked to undermine unions and workers' rights.

After city department heads and other managers petitioned to form a bargaining unit last year, the city manager announced a reorganization that effectively demoted everyone who was a member of a bargaining unit or union, by creating a new layer of managers above them. His original draft said the reorganization was needed, “given the action by department heads to vote to form a labor bargaining group in October 2006.” This language was quickly edited when observers noted that it appeared retaliatory on the face of it. Around the same time, the city manager rewrote the city employee handbook in order to reduce employee rights (for example, removing the “just cause” standard for dismissal, eliminating an employee's right to a hearing to respond to allegations used to justify dismissal, and adding “Reclassification or Elimination of Positions” to the list of actions that are *not* grievable).

The city's Human Resources director, who had led the formation of the Maplewood Confidential & Supervisory Association, was fired last August. In the report that was used to justify her firing, there were numerous comments criticizing her performance on the grounds that during her tenure, negotiations with city unions resulted in agreements without ever having to go to arbitration. In effect, her ability to help create a cooperative environment with city employee unions was seen by this council majority as a major flaw.

I would seek the endorsement of labor in any case, but this year I believe the anti-labor forces in city hall make it especially important that I win your help in shifting the balance on the Maplewood City Council so that we can begin repairing some of this damage that has been done.

2. Your position regarding prevailing wages on City funded jobs.

Maplewood has a prevailing wage ordinance (Maplewood City Code, section 2-8), which I support.

3. Do you support Project Labor Agreements on City funded projects?

Based on my current understanding of PLAs, they appear to me to be a valuable tool for establishing uniform standards and procedures for all the different unions and contractors who may be involved in a project, and for ensuring that a project does not have costly labor-related delays. I would be receptive to considering the use of PLAs on City-funded projects.

4. Your thoughts on future development opportunities in Maplewood.

I think we need to seek a balance in development and redevelopment (as Maplewood does not have much undeveloped land left, and our future issues may have more to do with redeveloping deteriorating neighborhoods). The demographers tell us we need much 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, freeing 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.

Looking to the future, it seems clear to me that our city needs to prioritize the environment in our approach to construction and development. We should incentivize green building techniques, to balance environmental concerns with the financial and market needs of development. For example, a builder today may run into difficulties satisfying both our tree ordinance (which discourages the removal of trees) and stormwater management requirements (which typically means infiltration ponds, which may necessitate the removal of trees). We could encourage the use of permeable asphalt with infiltration beneath it, by offering density bonuses or other incentives. At a city council retreat this past week, which I attended as an observer, the council discussed developing a "green ordinance" to codify some of these ideas. Such an ordinance will take a long time to take shape. If elected to the council, I will support its creation.

5. Your position regarding privatization of city services.

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.

As an entrepreneur I am enthusiastically capitalist and recognize the value of the free market, but 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.

6. Do you support and honor current collective bargaining agreements?

Yes.

Please provide your campaign information

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