

## MAPLEWOOD CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### 1. Describe your volunteer activities in/for the City of Maplewood.

Over the past fifteen months, I have attended dozens of city council meetings, commission meetings, and other city events. I began taking detailed notes on my laptop, and submitting them to Maplewood Voices ([www.maplewoodvoices.com](http://www.maplewoodvoices.com)), where they would be available to other interested citizens who wanted more detail than the official minutes provide, without having to view many hours of meetings. I have also volunteered for local political campaigns (see question 8 below).

### 2. Describe any issues that are of special concern to you within the City of Maplewood and how you might address them.

My campaign has three themes: *fiscal responsibility*, *good government*, and *pride in Maplewood*. Fiscal responsibility does not mean blindly cutting taxes; it's about making the right investment decisions for the long term. Right now we seem to be both raising taxes (with the second highest levy increase in the past decade) and making bad investment choices (such as cutting capital funding for our parks by 72%). Good government requires mutual respect among council, staff, and citizens. It means valuing the professionalism and expertise of city employees. Above all, it means making decisions motivated by the public good, not personal vendetta. And 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.

Our current city manager offers a clear example of what has gone wrong in Maplewood. Mr. Copeland appears to have been chosen not for his talents and qualifications, but for his personal loyalty to his friend the mayor, and her ruling majority. His salary is lower than his predecessor's; but he has cost us a great deal more just in terms of needless lawsuits. When he chose to do things like ignore the state's Police Civil Service Statute, I don't know if he was acting out of incompetence or because he puts loyalty to the mayor and her allies ahead of the law and the public good. Either way the result has been a fiscal mess, a travesty of governance, and embarrassment for Maplewood on a state-wide scale.

I fear that what we're seeing in Maplewood today is a "trickle-down" effect from national politics in the Bush era. The cynicism that leads an appointed official to elevate political loyalty above the rule of law — whether it's Mr. Copeland in Maplewood or Alberto Gonzales in the Department of Justice — is a threat to the core of our nation's political values and constitutional government.

As Maplewood residents and voters in a local election year, we now have the opportunity and the obligation to correct the course of our government. If I am elected to the seat occupied now by Rebecca Cave, we can begin by finding a genuinely qualified, professional city manager.

### 3. What makes you the best person for a seat on the Maplewood City Council?

I am the best prepared candidate, and I share the DFL philosophy.

I have spent hundreds of hours studying the present council and the government of Maplewood. Before committing to run, I felt I had to make sure that I knew what the job would entail. I now understand how demanding the job is (I was the only resident left in the audience after 2:00 AM when the present council voted to make the interim city manager permanent last fall), and I have the patience and interest to do it well. I have learned a great deal about how the city works, but I also am aware of the importance of listening to experts like the talented citizen volunteers on city commissions, as well as city staff.

I have had the opportunity to observe the members of the present council in action, and to converse with them individually, to better understand their motivations and personalities. Even though I have strong disagreements with some members who are not up for re-election this year, I am confident that I have the ability to work productively with the entire council.

### 4. What particular expertise do you bring to the City of Maplewood?

I started my publishing company, Atlas Games, when I was a senior at Carleton College in 1990. Creating and running my own business has given me a diverse range of skills. In particular, I would highlight my experience in 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 to react to changing circumstances.

**5. Briefly describe your campaign organization, including number of anticipated volunteers, fundraising, and expenditure priorities.**

My campaign manager is Peter Fischer, who is the chair of Maplewood's Parks & Recreation Commission and has in the past been campaign manager for Sen. Chuck Wiger and Councilperson Will Roszbach. My treasurer, Jeff Tidball, is a resident of Roseville, a former employee, and a trusted friend. My wife, Michelle Nephew, brings her professional skills in editing, graphic design, and production. She also designed my web site, [www.JohnNephew.com](http://www.JohnNephew.com). My volunteer e-mail list currently has 53 people on it. I have thus far raised about \$7,000, from more than 70 individual donors to date. My budget currently projects about \$10,200 in campaign spending, primarily on targeted direct mail.

I have already received the endorsements of AFSCME, the St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly, and Progressive Majority.

**6. Why are you seeking the DFL endorsement?**

I am an active member of the DFL party, so I would be honored to have my party's endorsement. I would like to put party resources, such as the VAN (the Voter Activation Network, the DFL's voter file), to productive use to identify potential voters and get them to turn out in force. As my weeks of door-knocking have already confirmed, Maplewood has a strong DFL leaning. The party's endorsement would help win support among voters who know that they oppose the current council majority, but are not familiar with the alternatives. It also may help motivate those who vote less frequently in city races.

**7. Why do you consider yourself to be a Democrat?**

I used to think of myself as an independent with Democratic leanings. In 2004 I attended caucuses for the first time. After long observing politics, but not doing much more than voting in general elections, my wife Michelle and I were fed up with the direction of the country — foreign policy, tax policy, the deficit, the politicization of science, the assaults on civil rights, the cynical fostering and manipulation of a culture of fear, and much more. We resolved to get involved. Before caucusing with the DFL we took time to read the party's platform and rules, and what we found made us realize that this is the party where we belong.

I think the Democratic philosophy is built around a fundamentally positive view of human nature and our capacity to work cooperatively for the common good. Within this basic framework — a belief that there is such a thing as “the common good,” and we can and should direct political action to serve it — there is plenty of room for diverse ideas and policy debates on defining and achieving our goals. In a time when the other national party has succumbed to a narrow ideology and rigid demands of personal loyalty, the Democrats are the party of America's future.

**8. Describe your volunteer activities in/for the DFL Party and/or DFL Candidates.**

In 2004 I was elected as a delegate to the state DFL convention (as well as SD55, Ramsey County, and CD4). I volunteered that year for the campaigns of State Rep. Scott Wasiluk, State Rep. Leon Lillie, County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, and the Kerry/Edwards campaign. Last year I also volunteered for State Sen. Chuck Wiger, and worked a day in the DFL donut booth at the State Fair.

When Michelle and I decided to become active in 2004, we were primarily motivated by national issues. However, we quickly realized that our volunteering could make a bigger difference for the campaigns of local candidates. That involvement led to my observations of and interest in Maplewood city government.

**9. Within the past 15 years have you ever supported a candidate who has run against a DFL-endorsed candidate? If so, why?**

Prior to 2004, I don't recall ever volunteering for a political campaign. I do remember donating to the senate campaign of Paul Wellstone, who had been one of my teachers at Carleton. Since 2004 my support has gone to DFLers or candidates in races without party endorsements.

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