

**Candidate's Name:** John Nephew  
**Date:** August 3, 2007  
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**1. What is your reason/purpose for wanting to serve on the Maplewood City Council?**

Maplewood is on the wrong track. We need competence and a basic respect for process at the top of city government. The majority that controls the city council has made it clear that they like the situation they have created. In order to effect positive change, we need new blood on the council, and I'm prepared to do the job.

On a personal level, I am at a point in my life where I feel drawn to public service. I welcome this as an opportunity to apply the skills I've already developed as a creative professional and businessman to new and different problems.

**2. What expertise do you have to offer in serving on the council?**

Creating and running my own business (Atlas Games, which I started in 1990) 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.

**3. What ideas do you have to increase the tax base and decrease taxes?**

I think government's role is to create an environment that is broadly supportive of business and entrepreneurialism. For example, smart investments in infrastructure and robust city services benefit all current and potential businesses, as well as residents. Strategic support of affordable housing in our community means a healthy pool of workers and consumers available to local businesses. Consistency in the application of city policies and ordinances provides the predictability and rule of law that allows businesses to plan with confidence.

I am leery of government choosing individual businesses to support, and I would not want to get ensnared in the kinds of bidding wars that we sometimes see communities engaging in to lure a business with offers of tax breaks and other special treatment. Similarly, I believe tools like tax increment financing need to be used sparingly and in situations where there is a clearly defined public good (for example, if TIF makes it possible to clean up and repurpose a brownfield; or if the money from the TIF district goes specifically toward maintaining a number of affordable units in a housing development).

Maplewood is inherently attractive, in its location and features, such as our proximity to the capital city, the quality of our police and fire protection, our infrastructure, and our natural resources (parks, open space, the views from south Maplewood, etc.). If the city takes care to maintain and enhance

these assets, and is simply well-managed, the free market will reward us with healthy property values and business investments.

Reducing taxes is important goal to me, but it must not be the #1 objective in the short term. I would compare this to corporate management philosophies. Some CEOs and corporate raiders want to take control of a company in order to liquidate assets, slash expenses, and boost reported profits (and share prices) in the short run — and cash in before the long-term effects are felt. We've seen the ruins of these companies littering the business landscape of America. Besides the spectacular failures, there are many more companies that are chronic underperformers because managers obsessed with their quarterly numbers don't make the smart investments that pay off over a span of years or generations. I would rather be inspired by business leaders such as Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway, who invest for the long run and have delivered extraordinary returns across decades.

4. What is your vision for Maplewood? (Consider relationships with citizens, with local and regional governments, environmental issues, development and diversity issues.)

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 the reorganization and its new layer of bureaucrats). 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.