

Peoria City Council and Mayoral Candidates Environmental Topics Questionnaire

Couri Thomas for Mayor

GLOBAL WARMING

GWSG: Do you believe in human-caused climate change?

Thomas: Yes

RENEWABLES

GWSG: In the past, Peoria has saved residents money and supported 100% green energy through its municipal electrical aggregation program. How should the city build on this success?

Thomas: If as a community we agree to maximize our efforts to go 100% green, then when it comes to new constructions, renovations, and community solar we can strive to lead the energy efficiency movement and focus on the smart city concept.

GWSG: State Senator Dave Koehler was a lead sponsor of legislation to reform Illinois energy policy. The final legislation passed in December in the General Assembly includes a funding stream for community solar development. How should Peoria position itself to seize its rightful share of funding and the associated green jobs?

Thomas: I am a huge fan of the idea of green energy, so when these type of legislations are being proposed Peoria cannot continue to allow these opportunities pass by our community. We must be proactive and keep up with the evolving conditions of our world and become amongst the leading cities in any program like this when it benefits the world and us as Peorians.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

GWSG: Should the city have policies for measuring the energy efficiency of municipal buildings and working to lower its utility bills?

Thomas: Absolutely, record all progress as a city and make real efforts as a community, so that when legislation is proposed we'll have those records to present. Energy efficiency should also be a focus with the renovations in the warehouse district and other projects. Green technologies and energy efficiency will benefit our world and it will pay for itself in many ways.

Peoria City Council and Mayoral Candidates Environmental Topics Questionnaire

Couri Thomas for Mayor

GWSG: Other cities use revolving loan funds and similar financial tools to incentivize energy efficiency improvements in older building stock. Should the city have a similar program? Should it be used as a tool to revitalize struggling neighborhoods?

Thomas: Absolutely, improving energy efficiency in residences is very important including changing light bulbs and windows and adding insulation. Our community has a major situation to pay attention to when it comes to addressing the struggles our neighbors are dealing with. Our community will serve ourselves well to utilize programs like this going forward especially in older buildings.

CLEAN AIR

GWSG: Burning coal for electricity generates climate-warming greenhouse gases and respiratory irritants like sulfur dioxide. The air quality in Peoria is among the worst in the state, per the Illinois and U.S. Environmental Protection Agencies due to high sulfur dioxide levels. A major source of emissions is the aging Edwards coal-fired power plant five miles south of Peoria. Edwards has no scrubbers to capture the pollution which disproportionately impacts Peoria's poorest zip codes. What action should the city take?

Thomas: The city should demand stringent air quality standards. Companies have a responsibility and obligation to the health of a community and environment.

TRASH AND RECYCLING

GWSG: Do you personally recycle at your home?

Thomas: I don't have much waste at all. All of my light bulbs are energy efficient, cut off lights and running water if not in use. I also wash my clothes like a single man does!

GWSG: Do we need improvements in residential and/or commercial recycling in Peoria?

Thomas: Yes, ideas like retro-fitting businesses, and residences to encourage recycling.

Peoria City Council and Mayoral Candidates Environmental Topics Questionnaire

Couri Thomas for Mayor

GWSG: The city currently has its most expensive contract with Peoria Disposal Company for hauling trash and recycling. Recycling can be a good source of entry-level green jobs. Yet the contract does not have a provision for minority hiring. Should there be one?

Thomas: Absolutely, hiring for city contracts should represent the diversity of the city as much as possible.

COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW

GWSG: The city is obligated to reduce its combined sanitary and storm sewer system's harmful discharges into the Illinois River. The current proposal uses water-absorbing landscaping such as bioswales, native plantings, innovative paving and other green solutions rather than constructing larger sewers and adding storage tanks. Do you support continuing to pursue a green solution to address combined sewage overflow?

Thomas: Yes, I think as we address this issue green ideas like water generators to produce energy or waste technologies to produce energy should also be in the conversation. Quick fixes should no longer be a part of the standards of Peoria. Health hazards is the top issue.

GWSG: How can we ensure these green jobs go to city residents most in need of employment?

Thomas: By focusing the interview and hiring process on those areas of the city with high unemployment which also happens to be the areas where the CSO work needs to be done.

RIVER TRAIL APARTMENTS

GWSG: In December 2016, council extended for the fourth time the contract deadline for the River Trails apartment complex in Constitution Park. After many months, a complicated land swap proposed by the city still has not been approved by the National Park Service. Council chambers were filled many times by people opposed to the project, and over 1000 petition signatures in opposition were presented. To date no ground has been broken.

Peoria City Council and Mayoral Candidates Environmental Topics Questionnaire

Couri Thomas for Mayor

Would you support council action, such as denying future contract extensions, to stop the building of apartments in Riverfront Park?

Thomas: I would never support this project in an area that is already under developed and underserved. Building luxury apartments and destroying a historic park which is one of the only beautiful parts of that neighborhood is like a smack in the face for those citizens.

GWSG: A major objection was the taking of public park land with no accounting for its natural and recreational value. How should loss of green space and other negative sustainability impacts be avoided in economic development?

Thomas: Update and modernizing our parks to make them more family friendly and inviting with ideas like providing free wifi in our community parks or making them a tourist attraction applying community input and digital artwork.