

League of Women Voters of the Oberlin Area 2005 Voters Guide

Candidates for City Council and the Oberlin School Board were asked the following question:

What do you see as two or three of the greatest challenges facing your office and how do you propose to address them?

The responses are printed exactly as they were received from the candidates. The list is presented in alphabetical order of the candidates' last names.

City Council Candidates

David Ashenhurst

I believe the greatest challenge faced by Oberlin's City Council is how to use its governmental authority within the City limits to the greatest possible advantage in affecting the larger regional context in which our City and its citizens operate. Responsible stewardship demands that we make our tax revenues go as far as possible; effective leadership means also both creating the conditions for appropriate economic development inside Oberlin, and participating at every available opportunity in the activities of formal cross-jurisdictional authorities as well as less formal regional efforts and enterprises working to improve Lorain County and Northeast Ohio more broadly.

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Daniel Gardner

1) Preparing for Growth

I will continue to lead efforts to implement the recommendations of our new Comprehensive Land Use Plan. We need new zoning laws to maintain our community's distinctiveness, protect open spaces, and encourage growth in designated areas. Concluding negotiations with Pittsfield will also aid tremendously in shaping our future.

2) Efficient Government

In this era when declining tax revenue is coupled with reductions in state and federal aid, we must find ways to spend less while doing more. I will keep working with a citizen-based advisory committee to reduce expenses and enhance revenue.

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Tony Mealy

My main concerns remain adequate public services, facilities and maintenance by responsible spending, sensible economic development not (TIF) tax diversion, planned future growth and campaign finance reform. In brief: I am concerned how council

spends taxpayer moneys and how council sets priorities. Challenges confronting Oberlin are Water Utility improvements, Central Garage construction which should benefit our local Schools and the 1889 Gasholder restoration into an Underground Railroad Interpretive Center with a park-and-ride facility. As a councilman I will want to evaluate each proposal on its own merit with an open mind as to how they will affect the entire community.

Charles Peterson

No response received

Ron Rimbart

No response received

Eve Sandberg

Funding and Economic Development continue to top Oberlin's concerns. My comparative advantage on this council has been to find opportunities to work with others (Republicans and Democrats) from across the state, and at the national level to lobby for maintaining or developing important programs for funding cities. Also, I worked to bring Marcy Kaptur to Oberlin's city council to lay the groundwork for future collaboration, and investigated ways the Regional Port Authority can provide low interest loans we can offer new businesses when competing to attract them to Oberlin. I look forward to working with our new Economic Development Officer.

Everett Tyree

No response received

School Board Candidates

John Hieronymus

No response received

Stephanie C. Jones

The challenges I see are that the district continues to raise their standing on the “State Report Card” and addressing discipline within the schools. The discipline issues need to be handled so that the learning process can continue and in turn this will help to raise the grades in the classroom and for the district. All students, parents, teachers and administrators must be held accountable in the process so that everyone can succeed. With the resignation of Dr. Reep brings another challenge, I would work hard to make sure that the person hired would be committed to the community and students of Oberlin.

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Kathy Ladina

I believe the three greatest challenges facing the education board are financial; moral of staff and students, and district ratings. These three elements all intertwine to create the state of our district. Test scores are on the rise which means staff and students are working hard and showing results. The board must show that they are working even harder to provide a school economy and support that will allow continued growth of our young people. This along with the resulting improvements of district rating should produce a community that will have continued population growth that will produce increased tax revenue.

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Mary B. McKee

To continue the pattern and momentum the current school board and superintendent have set, we need board members who prize scholarship—meaning *the relationship between the teacher and the scholar*—above all else. Every financial and policy decision we make must reflect that goal. With the passage of the levies, we could attract a like-minded superintendent who values small class sizes. Whether it’s by way of school uniforms or just more uniformly high expectations of all the students at all four schools, we have to find ways to *reach, keep, and make good solid students right here in town.*

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Kevin Michael

No response received

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Beth Weiss

The two biggest challenges immediately facing the schools are the need to hire a superintendent and to pass the 5-mill levy. The district will be in peril without the continuation of strong leadership from the top and without the increase in funds to supplement the State of Ohio's steady reduction in support.

The schools will also need to strive for continued academic progress for all students of all

backgrounds. We need to address reaching students not only from diverse socio-economic backgrounds but also with diverse learning styles. We will look to the leadership of the administration and faculty to address this issue and will need to educate and enroll support of the parents and community regarding this challenge and its possible solutions.

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Bob Williams

My goal is customer service, which is achieved by providing parents and students what they want: effective discipline in our schools, a safe and drug-free environment, good staff morale, everyone teaching the core content, and high test scores. My job is to make sure that all those things are policy-driven in an effective manner. My schooling experience will give our children in Oberlin the kind of education that will allow them to compete not only in school sports but anywhere in the world, and I will support staff at every school to make sure that we do just that.

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Ian Yarber

We have many challenges facing our district, none more important than school funding. The district has two levies on ballot that must be passed. The schools deserve the community's support. The board has already made substantial cuts, but we must continue to monitor our spending, seek new ways to provide programs and activities for our students. The schools belong to the community and community members should be more than mere funders. Community involvement and partnerships should be sought.

Another important challenge will be to find a new leader for the district and develop a working partnership with him/her.

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LOCAL ISSUES

Issue #28

**Oberlin Public Library: replacement and increase
3.25 mills (current expenses)**

Explanation of Levy

The present 3 mill levy providing funding for the Oberlin Public Library is expiring and needs voter approval to be replaced. The .25 increase will replace funding lost through cuts in state contributions and through a change in the way county library funds are to be distributed. Previously, they were distributed according to circulation figures. Now they will be distributed based on population. Because OPL's circulation is high, it received considerably more money than it will now receive under the population formula.

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Issue #47
Oberlin City School District: replacement
2 mills (general permanent improvements)

Explanation of Levy

The current 2 mill levy is expiring and voter approval is needed to replace it.

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Issue #48
Oberlin City School District, additional
5 mills (current expenses)

Explanation of Levy

The Board of Education has put a 5 mill addition levy on the ballot because of shortfalls in tax revenue and cuts in state funding.

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Issue # 55

PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENT – NEW SECTION
Article XIX Section H – Living Wage Commission

Ballot Language:

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

To amend Article XIX of the Charter of the City of Oberlin by adding Section H as follows:

Establishing a Living Wage Commission and providing for its Power and duties

Shall Article XIX of the Charter of the City of Oberlin	YES
be amended by adding Section H?	NO

EXPLANATION OF PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENT

A select commission would be established to oversee the implementation of a Living Wage Law put into effect by the passage of the amendment. The law would

require employers in Oberlin who have *contracts* with the city of \$25,000.00 or more, or who receive *financial assistance* of \$75,000 or more to pay employees at least \$10.50 (plus health benefits) -12.00 (without health benefits) per hour. *Financial assistance* includes financing obtained by employers through bonds, tax increments (TIFs), tax abatements and other funds not regulated by the state or federal governments. Also included in the definition of financial assistance is ‘in-kind’ assistance and below-market purchase, rental or sale of city property by employers.

Exempted from the law would be Oberlin College, for-profit businesses with under 25 employees and non-profit businesses with under 50 employees. Also exempted are high school and college students, aged 23 and younger, who could continue to receive wages below those set by the Living Wage Law.

Passage of the amendment would be a permanent change to the City Charter and any changes to the amendment would require another ballot initiative. Five Ohio cities (Cleveland, Toledo, Cincinnati, Dayton, Lakewood) have passed such legislation through ordinances rather than by an amendment to the cities’ charters.

A charter is the equivalent of a city constitution. A charter can be changed only by a vote of the electorate. A charter amendment can be passed only by a vote of the electorate. An ordinance is enacted, repealed, or amended by a city council through the legislative process.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE “LIVING WAGE” CHARTER AMENDMENT

FOR:

- Requires businesses that receive substantial city contracts, (\$25,000 or more) to pay a fair living wage above the federally defined poverty level.
- Requires businesses that receive substantial city financial assistance (\$75,000 or more) to pay a fair living wage above the federally defined poverty level.
- Exempts small businesses, for profit employers with less than 25 employees, non-profit employers with less than 50 employees
- Encourages and stimulates development which pays a living wage
- Help reduces the downward trend of wages for low-wage earners. Inflation-adjusted wages for the lowest 10% of earners declined by 9.3% between 1979 and 1999

- Encourages sustainable development by preventing city government from subsidizing the creation of short-term poverty level jobs
- Encourages Oberlin businesses to provide affordable adequate medical health care benefits for their employees
- Protects part time student employment, high school and college, by providing an exemption from the living wage, assuring them a source of income to finance their education
- Would not encourage businesses to hire primarily students. Businesses that would be affected by the living wage already have incentives to hire students over older residents as students are less likely to request benefits and more likely to accept lower wages
- Citizens would vote on any future changes to the charter amendment in a referendum

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AGAINST:

- The City Charter is our local constitution. Amending it should require much more discussion and debate than the community has been able to undertake for this particular amendment.
- It would take another charter amendment to make any changes to this one.
- Other cities with such legislation have passed ordinances, not charter amendments, allowing modifications to be made without another vote.
- It would result in tax increases or cuts in services since increased labor costs in municipal contracts would be passed along to the City.
- Oberlin's efforts to lure companies to start-up, relocate or expand here would be hampered by this Living Wage amendment. We already have difficulty competing with communities like Avon and with townships that do not have income taxes.
- Wal-Mart would not automatically be required to comply, since the City has provided them with no economic development assistance and has no future plans to contract with them for goods or services.
- Oberlin College is exempted from compliance. Student employees under 23 are exempted. Employers would find it advantageous to hire student over others because students could be paid less.

- Under this proposal, two students – one aged 22 and one 24 – who work side by side doing the same job could legally have a \$7.75 per hour difference in pay based solely upon age. A costly legal challenge could ensue—one that the city would be compelled to litigate at taxpayer expense – based on the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution.
 - The proposed living wages are significantly above most other cities with such legislation. Most of these communities have much higher costs of living.
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COUNTY ISSUES

Issue # 6

**Lorain County Metropolitan Park District: replacement and increase
1.3 mills (for continued operation)**

The existing levy is expiring and needs to be replaced. The increase is needed to make up for a shortfall in revenue.

Issue # 7

**Lorain County Children's Services replacement
1.5 mills (provide for Children's Services of Lorain County)**

The existing levy is expiring and needs to be replaced.

STATE ISSUES

State Constitutional Amendments:

Issues 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

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