

## ***Chuck Bennett Questionnaire Candidate for Mayor of Salem***

- 1) Using a letter grade (A to F), how would you grade Salem's economic climate? What is done well in Salem, and what could improve?**

I would give the city a C+.

The city is doing a reasonably good job streamlining its development code, identifying and preparing industrial land, responding to market needs in terms of zoning and maintaining an active urban development program citywide. The city also has a full service transportation system with highways, airport and two railroads. There does not seem to be a fully realized integration of those factors into the city's economic development strategy. A good example would be how fast our site plan review program is responding in order to encourage development or redevelopment of property. I am concerned this aspect of our development process is not working as well as it should.

The city plays an important role in economic development particularly through our urban renewal districts. Its relationship with the business community is filtered through a series of renewal district advisory boards that may or may not have economic development as their primary goal. This dispersed responsibility and its impact on development - commercial, retail and industrial – needs a full review. The relationship is also a direct one with the council. Over the past several years the relationship between the city council, city staff and the business community has been very successful and one that needs to be maintained.

The city has successfully avoided any new business specific taxes or cost increases other than the growth of the property tax or costs that are worked out with all interested parties. We also have been fortunate to maintain a cooperative understanding of the impact livability issues have on economic growth particularly in the small retail sector. Salem is fortunate to have a vibrant core area with four big box retailers and a substantial retail, service and restaurant sector. These livability issues play a huge role in the success and future growth of this area. Issues like personal safety, vehicle/pedestrian integration, and housing availability play a real role in downtown's economic future.

**2) It has been indicated that West Salem will be the fastest growing portion of our community in the coming years. What is your vision of transportation connectivity to West Salem as growth occurs?**

In addition to its population growth, which is projected to be substantial, West Salem also is slated for major urban renewal investment aimed at revitalizing its retail, commercial and industrial areas. A big part of that activity will be to continue the progress that has been made over the past decade on local West Salem streets including Orchard Heights, Glen Creek, Eola, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and coming soon a major section of Marine Drive. Most of this was paid for out of the Streets and Bridges Bond worked on cooperatively by the chamber and city to seek voter support.

A major problem facing the area is its outmoded transportation infrastructure focused as it is on Wallace Road and the existing bridges connecting Marion/Center and Edgewater/Wallace and Highway 22. The result is ever increasing bottlenecks and traffic congestion that negatively impacts both sides of the river and that will clearly deteriorate as the community grows.

It's clear the city needs to continue to be a major driver in completing the EIS for the third river crossing. That process is near completion with land use decisions planned for this summer but it must be followed as quickly as possible with a design and cost planning program that allows the regional, state and federal partners an opportunity to engage the community on this issue.

**3) Salem's Police Department is currently serving the crime prevention needs of our community in an antiquated facility. A "Blue Ribbon Task Force", led by Mayor Anna Peterson, recently came to the conclusion that a new police facility is a community necessity. What is your vision for the location and community investment level of such a project?**

There are two properties the council has decided to look at. One is the so-called Leslie St. site that is just south of the Library Parking structure. It is the block bounded by Leslie, Mission, Commercial and Liberty. The second is the O'Brien site on Liberty and Commercial in north downtown. The O'Brien site is larger and the Leslie site is closer to City Hall and appears to have better street access. At this time I can support either site but tend to favor the O'Brien site because of its size and the associated cost factors.

The structure needs to be large enough to meet the city's needs over the next 30 to 40 years and that appears to be about 150,000 square feet if it also includes the 911

center. I am concerned that we not make the same mistakes made at City Hall where the Police Department was already looking for space eight years after it was built.

**4) The homeless in Salem – particularly in our downtown core – continue to be underserved. How does the City integrate into a better solution toward caring for those in need?**

The recently appointed regional homeless initiative appears to have substantial promise by bringing together city, county and state resources to address the complicated problems around homelessness. I continue to support the city's half million dollar line item for social service programs that focus on issues like homelessness, domestic abuse and hunger. Addiction and mental health services have been generally handled by the county and state. The county has also done an excellent job working on prison re-entry programs.

I have been convinced by the Chief of Police and Marion County Sheriff that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. That does not mean though that we should just tolerate anti-social behavior in our downtown area. I think that excluding repeat offenders from downtown and other neighborhoods can be a very effective tool and one we should continue to use. What I do not support are homeless villages or camps like we've seen in Portland and Eugene.

**5) City of Salem's retiree benefits create unfunded liabilities in future budget projections. As an elected City leader, what would be your approach within this reality?**

PERS is a complicated issue that is controlled by the state. I would need to explore this question further to understand the underlying assumptions about the PERS system and the unfunded liability. As you know there have been a number of legislative actions that have been thrown out by the courts. There are very few statutory actions left. I would support those that save the city from pending rate increases and be glad to discuss them with you.

**6) The North Campus of the Oregon State Hospital is currently for sale. What is your vision for this piece of real estate?**

I envision the campus being sold and developed into a mix of housing and neighborhood retail. At this point, I am interested in continuing to work with the state to do work that makes this site as attractive as possible to developers. I also advocate the city acquiring 7 acres at the northwest corner of the campus as a park. It has been used as an athletic field for many years in cooperation with the state.

**7) Would you support or oppose establishing a business license and where should the revenues generated from the fee be spent?**

I do not support a business license fee. I would be willing to work with the chamber if it has an idea for one that is dedicated to some aspect of the city's general fund services.

**8) Would you support an ordinance [similar to Corvallis'](#) requiring businesses inside the City of Salem to pay a living wage?**

No.

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Your answers to these questions will be shared with our members in attendance of our Public Policy Session which will take place on February 9<sup>th</sup> at the Salem Chamber office (1110 Commercial St NE) from 7:00 AM to 8:30 AM. Candidates for City Council and Mayor will be on a collective panel, and you are invited to attend. Please confirm your attendance of February 9<sup>th</sup> when you return your questionnaire. The format for the February 9<sup>th</sup> engagement will be as follows:

- 1) Coin toss to determine order of appearance within each seat, with Ward 1 going first, Mayor going last.
- 2) Each candidate will have three minutes to give an introduction and articulate their platform.
- 3) We will then enter into a Q&A with our members in attendance (moderated by a volunteer Public Policy Co-Chair). Responses limited to one minute.
- 4) Each candidate will be given two minutes to offer a concluding statement.

Following the Public Policy Session, your answers and a summary of your in person discussion will be forwarded on to the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of the Salem Chamber for consideration during our February deliberations.

Candidates receiving the endorsement of the Salem Area Chamber of Commerce will then be eligible to receive financial contributions from the Chamber's political action committee.

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I look forward to getting to know you and your vision of our community through this process. Should you have any questions, please use me as your resource.

Respectfully submitted,

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