

# City Council Candidate Questions

Jody Stutzman

**It's easy to campaign on "lower taxes," but, as costs increase, how would you accomplish a lower property tax rate? How do you prioritize realistic budget choices within each department to meet a goal of "lower taxes"?**

There are 3 ways to lower taxes which include expanding the tax base through economic growth, looking at other sources of revenue, and cutting spending.

**Economic Growth:** I am very passionate about bringing economic growth to our community and it's been one of my top priorities on the Hastings Planning & Zoning Commission. As a Planning Commissioner, I have reviewed rezoning requests to make it easier for housing to be developed, existing business to expand, and new business to come to Hastings. In Hastings, we work hard to bring new residents in and keep residents happy. A basic principle of tax policy is that expanding the tax base allows for a reduction of the tax rate on the individual. Economic growth is the main way to expand the tax base, and it also has the added benefit of bringing in more amenities to our community, more opportunities and making Hastings more vibrant.

**Other Sources of Revenue:** There is a lot of federal and state funding available to local governments to help finance health care, education, social services, infrastructure, and public safety. I would work to ensure we are capturing as many of those available dollars as possible. There are also private foundations interested in supporting these services. We should look for all appropriate funding opportunities to bring in revenue that would help offset the need to utilize taxes to fund the budget. This would help us reduce our tax needs.

**Spending:** I would evaluate our budget to ensure that every dollar is being spent wisely. Services provided by the city -- such as public safety and infrastructure -- are very important to our community. I would only look at cutting wasteful spending, not the important services that residents of Hastings rely on. We need to look at similar communities to see where and how we can best utilize our budget for the services we need. I would work with members of the community and partners for advice and insight into what, if any, spending is unwarranted for our community. We need to remember that our budget is funded by money from our neighbors, friends, and families.



**As an elected leader, how do you feel you can impact the talent availability in our community?**

Market Ourselves: We can't continue to be the best kept secret in Nebraska. It is imperative that we develop an effective and innovative way to market our residents, industries, and amenities. Targeting those who might have moved away to bring them back home is one way to do that. Using an integrated approach that includes social media, local media, and collaborating with the Adams County Visitors Bureau and other organizations is another marketing strategy.

Leverage Federal, State, and Regional Resources: I have spent the last 11+ years working in workforce and talent development. There is a skilled workforce gap that can be addressed with job training programs. The Community College Gap Assistance Program offers tuition assistance for income eligible individuals to obtain training in high skill, high wage, and high demand occupations. Some of these are degree programs, while others are short-term training programs. Elected leaders can take a proactive approach by working with business leaders and education institutions identifying workforce needs.

**Describe your thoughts about the relationship between the position of the Mayor and the City Council. Also, between the City Council and the position of City Administrator and Assistant City Administrator?**

In all cases, the relationship should be collaboration. In Hastings, the mayor is considered a weak mayor, so the city administrator runs the operations of the city. It is important that there is a collaborative approach taken by all parties so that Hastings progresses. This does not mean a lack of conflict, because conflict can be good and lead to innovative strategies. It is also important that each other's roles are clearly defined so that group thinking doesn't become the norm in meetings and decision-making processes. The city administrator and assistant city administrator were hired and approved to oversee the day-to-day functions of the city. It is important to understand those roles and not encroach on them. The city council are responsible for setting the vision and strategic priorities.

**What is your vision for the growth and development of Hasting's business and industry? What specific strategies do you have in mind to attain them?**



We need to look at strengths and areas that need improvement before targeting any industry or business. For example, we live in a rural agricultural community, so there are opportunities in the bioeconomy. Heartland Renewables was a great addition to our community, and we have several innovative agricultural industries around us. To be clear, we would need to identify what skills are currently missing in our workforce before we can attract any business or industry. If we want to target the technology industry, we need to make sure we have people who have the necessary skills. That is why partnering with our local training institutions to identify training gaps and opportunities is necessary. The Hastings Chamber of Commerce and Hastings Economic Development Corporation are critical partners in identifying and recruiting new businesses and industry.

**As an elected leader, how will you help to shape a positive, growth-oriented narrative for the Hastings community?**

I have been a senior leader in the organization where I currently work for over 6 years. I know that you don't shape a narrative by simply projecting your thoughts on people. It is important to listen to community members and give them several ways to share their ideas and opinions. I always ask the question "what would it take to make that work?" as a guide. After further analysis and discussion with stakeholders it may not work, or it may work after being modified with other's input. I firmly believe that it is important to first hold myself accountable to the standards of positivity and respect. I have been working in organizations and volunteering for organizations my entire life that work to bring people together for a mutual goal and would continue to bring the same philosophy to the city council.

