



## Livable Neighborhoods, Inc.

www.livable-neighborhoods.org

To improve and promote the livability  
of all neighborhoods in the La Crosse area

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### 2013 La Crosse Mayor/Council Candidate Survey

Livable Neighborhoods is a non-profit citizens group established in 1996. Our purpose is to improve and promote the livability of all neighborhoods in the La Crosse area. As part of our mission we encourage citizens to research and discuss important issues facing our community. Certainly one of the most important of those issues is who we should choose to represent us in local government.

The following questions have been developed to help La Crosse residents learn more about the candidates for Mayor and city council prior to the spring election. We are inviting each candidate to answer these questions with a 3- to 5-sentence response. The responses of all candidates will be collated and made available at <http://livable-neighborhoods.org> and in the local media. Your answers will be quoted without summary, editing or editorializing.

Please complete the survey by typing in your best answers to the **highlighted questions** in the row below. As you type, the row will expand, so you should not need to do any formatting. Or if you prefer, you may hand write your answers (please number) on a separate piece(s) of paper. Your response will be posted online and shared with the media exactly as you return it.

Please return your survey by Monday, March 18 to [president@livable-neighborhoods.org](mailto:president@livable-neighborhoods.org). Or you may mail it to **Charley Weeth**, 122 17<sup>th</sup> St S, La Crosse, WI 54601-4208.

Questions? Please contact **Charley Weeth** at 784-3212 or **Charles Clemence** at 738-1736 or [vp@livable-neighborhoods.org](mailto:vp@livable-neighborhoods.org).

Thank you for your willingness to serve. And good luck in the upcoming elections.

Name: Tim Kabat

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Candidate for Mayor  Candidate for Council  Council District Number \_\_\_\_\_

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## Questions

1. Political experience is helpful in governing a city, but effective leadership skills may be gained in many different ways. Please list the work, business, civic, or charitable experience that best demonstrates your ability to manage city operations

For the past three years I have served as Executive Director of Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. – which is the non-profit business group that works to grow and revitalize downtown La Crosse. This position involves preparing and balancing budgets, managing staff and volunteers and carrying out programs and projects that range from clean-up and beautification to redevelopment plans. Before that I served as the manager of the city’s economic development programs including industrial parks, small business loans and neighborhood planning and service. In all I have over 20 years experience at the local government level striving to make communities better places to live and work.

2. The City of La Crosse is facing budgetary problems stemming from increasing costs and stable or decreasing revenue. Assume the city is facing a situation where budgeted expenses are expected to exceed revenue by a significant amount. How would you address this shortfall?

There are a number of factors that should be reviewed including freezing or reducing staff and reducing programs and services. All factors should include open discussions with citizens, employees, department heads and staff to develop the service and staffing priorities so that effective reductions can be made. Additional sources of revenue should also be addressed by looking at grant and foundation funding, sharing resources with other jurisdictions and collaborating with our neighbors to provide services.

3. What do you feel are the greatest problems facing La Crosse neighborhoods? How should the City focus its revitalization resources? Specifically, please discuss and rate the importance of the following factors:

- Aging and dilapidated housing stock.

The age and condition of some of our housing stock is a critical issue facing the city and a very important. We must remember that most of our neighborhoods are doing well; however, there are certain areas of the city that need attention and action.

- Attracting middle class residents to La Crosse neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods are their strongest and most successful when they are most diverse including different types of housing and different income levels of people. Attracting more middle-income families is very important and will help to improve the overall health and vitality of our city.

- Developing job and business opportunities for residents.

Working with our business community so that they can create good paying jobs is very important for the future health of our neighborhoods. If people have good paying jobs, they can invest in their homes and schools and this in turn helps to grow and improve the entire city.

- Neighborhood institutions (parks, schools, libraries, civic organizations, etc.).

These institutions help to make our neighborhoods and our city great. As mayor I will work hard to support our schools, libraries and non-profit groups.

- Licensing landlords, limiting the conversion of owner occupied homes to rentals, etc.

Again I feel strongly that our housing stock needs to be improved and one of the tools to insure safe and quality housing is through code enforcement and inspections. As mayor I will work to make sure we have adequate inspection staff and that the Inspection Department works proactively to address housing conditions and other related zoning issues.

- Please sum up your approach to stabilizing and improving La Crosse’s neighborhoods.

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1. Rebuild neighborhood housing stock and grow the city's tax base.
  - Expand the city's successful housing replacement and housing rehabilitation programs.
  - Partner with institutions, neighborhood associations and non-profit groups to build more new housing. Support Coulee Cap, Habitat for Humanity, Western Technical College and others in building more new homes in our neighborhoods.
  - Encourage institutions and large employers to invest in the neighborhoods that surround them.
  - Create program with large employers to match new families and residents moving to La Crosse with new housing.
  
2. Create incentives and remove barriers for residents to upgrade and improve their homes.
  - Grow and expand paint & fix-up grants to provide matching funds for homeowners in critical neighborhoods.
  - Review fees and costs for homeowners who want to make repairs and upgrades to their properties to ensure that fees are not a disincentive.
  - Invest in maintaining and upgrading our infrastructures including neighborhood parks, trails, streets, utilities and transit.
  
3. Improve neighborhood safety and enhance La Crosse's high quality of life.
  - Address neighborhood crime and drug issues through community policing including partnering with our institutions and large employers.
  - Reduce poverty by supporting non-profit groups and demanding action from state and federal governments.
  - Work with our economic development groups to help La Crosse develop and maintain a highly trained and educated workforce.
  - Market and communicate La Crosse's high quality of life, schools, the arts, natural beauty and resources and tell our story to attract visitors, tourists, businesses and future residents.

4. La Crosse is blessed with a unique and varied natural environment. While this is a great benefit, it can also pose challenges to expanding the tax base.

- Should the city strictly apply its development standards within three miles of its border as allowed by law and laid out in the comprehensive plan?

Yes I believe the city should carefully review all requests to develop new residential lots within the three-mile extra-territorial area. The county currently has an over-supply of residential lots in the towns surrounding the city – approximately a 20 year supply by some measures – so I would be very concerned about creating more residential lots just outside of the city's boundaries.

- Should the City create development strategies or growth plans for surrounding towns?

The city should work cooperatively with the county and surrounding towns to develop future land use and growth plans to reduce suburban sprawl and to encourage reinvestment in our neighborhoods.

- Should the City consider extending sewer or water services without requiring annexation?

I do not believe the city should extend city services without annexation; however, current annexation laws make it very difficult for the city to consider annexation. Again as mayor I would work with the

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	towns and county to develop joint land use plans and boundary agreements so that the city could share in some of the benefits of new residential growth just outside of our borders.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you support continued funding of the bluffland acquisition program?</li> </ul>
	Yes. The Blufflands Protection Program is one of our most successful programs and highlights a great public-private partnership. As mayor I would work to re-build these relationships so that the program could resume doing what it does best – protecting our wonderful bluffs.
5.	The north-south corridor remains part of the La Crosse Area Planning Commission and the Department of Transportation’s long-range transportation plan for the La Crosse area. This despite the 1998 referendum turning down the 5B-1 proposal.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you believe there is a need for new north-south road through the city of La Crosse?</li> </ul>
	No. I am opposed to constructing new roads though the La Crosse River marsh. I do believe our transportation system needs improvements and as mayor I would work to improve our street network, transit system and pedestrian and bike trails. I would work to implement many of the goals of the LAPC’s “Coulee Vision 2050” long-range transportation study.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you believe other projects, such as the proposed extension of 12th Avenue S in Onalaska to State Hwy 16 or the proposed traffic roundabout at 7th &amp; Cass, should be developed as alternatives to a new corridor?</li> </ul>
	Yes I believe these types of projects are acceptable ways of improving our existing transportation network. But as mayor I would work to make sure that the public was included in the decision-making for each of these projects and at the earliest planning stages.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you believe the city should pursue measures to curb use of single occupancy vehicles as alternatives to a new road? For example, regulation of neighborhood parking, special fees and assessments for parking, and encouraging alternatives (walking, biking, car pools, mass transit etc.).</li> </ul>
	I believe the city should be encouraging alternatives to single occupancy vehicles. The best and most sustainable solution is to make our neighborhoods and downtown more attractive places so that people live closer to where they work and the need for new roads will decrease.
6.	How would you promote the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the City?
	The city recently created a pedestrian and bicycle plan with a number of recommendations and goals for improving safety. As mayor I would make implementing many of these recommendations a high priority.
7.	Recently La Crosse has seen a disturbing increase of accidental deaths and other serious problems related to alcohol abuse. What do you think the city’s role is in stopping and reversing this trend?
	The city should be a strong partner and support the efforts of groups like the “Changing the Culture” coalition; the La Crosse County Tavern League and the river watch volunteers. These groups work to reduce binge drinking in our area and provide safe rides, bartender training, etc. Through these collective efforts we can make our community safer.
8.	There has also been a recent series of violent deaths, assaults, and drug related crimes in the city. Does La Crosse have a problem with the growth of serious crime? What measures would you take to improve public safety in this area?
	La Crosse is still a very safe community. However, there are several areas of the city where serious crime has increased recently. I am a strong supporter of the community policing model and believe that our Police Department, neighborhood groups and citizens can work together to address these crime issues effectively. Community policing encourages the police to get out of their squad cars more often and improves interaction and cooperation between the police and neighbors.

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9. Historic preservation has become a popular method for neighborhood revitalization in La Crosse. The city currently has several historic districts and dozens of designated properties. However, all requests to demolish historic buildings have been approved by the city council.

- Should the historic status of a building have an impact on whether it is demolished?

Yes.

- What criteria should the city use to evaluate the impact of a development on historic properties?

The city should follow the recommendations and process as described in the various historic preservation plans when it comes to whether to demolish a structure. The criteria includes the age, condition, repair, costs and impacts to surrounding properties.

- Should the city provide funding and/or technical help for property owners to maintain and renovate historic buildings?

Yes – the city does that now and should continue.

- Should the city’s ordinance be changed to give the Heritage Preservation Commission more than just advisory authority over designated properties?

I believe the current system works; however, I am open to giving more authority to the HPC in some cases.

10. Do you think the City has assisted or thwarted attempts at regional cooperation? What direction would you give department heads to encourage such cooperation?

I believe the city has tried to work more regionally on issues such as transportation, economic development and public safety; however, there is still a long way to go. As mayor I would invite the other mayors, town chairs and village presidents to meet regularly to discuss opportunities and challenges and find more ways to share resources and work regionally.

11. Public opinion polls show that most people want to cut the size and cost of government, but there is no consensus on where to cut and how much. What is your approach to spending and taxes? Would your goal be to decrease taxes, hold them steady, or allow for some increase?

We must hold the line on taxes and fees. My approach is to work directly with citizens, departments and the Common Council to develop the overall vision for the city. We must develop priorities and work together to fund these priorities by growing our tax base, collaborating with other units of government and sharing resources with our neighbors.

12. A large part of the cost for providing city services is currently borne by property taxpayers. The city has the ability under state statutes to establish utility districts and user fees so all property owners pay for the services provided and received.

- Would you support creation of a utility for fire protection? A fire protection utility would charge to all property owners based on the level of fire protection needed.

As mayor I would be willing to review and discuss all innovative ideas for improving our services and fund them at the levels our taxpayers can afford.

- Should the city look to fees and fines as a source of revenue or as a cost recovery device only?

One example is that the city should be more aggressive in collecting fines such as parking fines. The city should hire a collection agency to get the thousands of dollars of outstanding fines.

- Currently there is a controversial plan to raise fees relating for all types of city services. Do you think current fees are adequate or should they be raised?

We need to review our fees to make sure they are not a disincentive to homeowners for making repairs or upgrades to their properties. As mayor I will work hard to review all fees to make sure they

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are fair and effective.

13. La Crosse voters soundly defeated a proposal to hire a city administrator. However we are in a shrinking group of cities without professional administrative expertise. Do you think the referendum settled the issue of a city administrator or should the discussion continue?

The voters of La Crosse have spoken on the issue of a city administrator and I support their decision.

14. The Joint City-County Housing Task Force identified a number of actions aimed at that it felt would help the revitalize neighborhoods and expand the tax base. The number one recommendation was "Better education and enforcement of existing codes and standards". Do you agree? If so, how what changes would you suggest be made at City Hall?

Yes. I believe that all housing in La Crosse should be safe and of high quality. Again I feel strongly that our housing stock needs to be improved and one of the tools to insure safe and quality housing is through code enforcement and inspections. As mayor I will work to make sure we have adequate inspection staff and that the Inspection Department works proactively to address housing conditions and other related zoning issues.

15. Finally, what do you want voters to know that haven't been brought out by our questions? What experience, ideas, qualities, etc. do you have that make you the better choice?

I have over 20 years experience at the local government level managing programs, projects and plans including preparing and balancing budgets, managing staff and volunteers, implementing projects and making the difficult choices to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government operations. I love La Crosse and want to be the next mayor because La Crosse is a great city with tremendous opportunities. I was born and raised here, graduated from UW-La Crosse and the Kabat family has deep roots here having worked in the factories, schools and taverns. I will be a leader with a vision and will communicate that vision and bring people together to solve the serious issues facing our city.