

Primary Candidates' Questions & Responses
Primary Election - May 5, 2015

CITY COUNCIL – At Large

Ron Carter

Ron Houck

Kevin Rider

1. Compared to other cities, development in Carmel is expensive, and sometimes very difficult, due to the demand for particular materials and the process itself. What are your ideas for streamlining the process and making it more cost-effective, so that Carmel is an easier place to do business?
2. Fishers, Noblesville and Greenwood have all become second-class cities in the last several years? Would you be in favor of second-class city status for Carmel? Why or why not?
3. One of the major reasons for Carmel's enviable tax rate is its business investment. What are your ideas for ensuring that continues? How can we make certain the business voice is respected at committee and council levels to the same extent homeowners' opinions are?

Ron Carter

1. First, I am not sure that I agree with your basic premise. In response I would ask, "To whom are you comparing us?" If you are comparing us to cities that are nearby, I don't believe that is especially appropriate either from cost or standards comparison standpoints. If you are comparing us to our peer cities around the country, we stack up very well. It is those cities with whom we are competing for business relocations. And in that arena we seem to be doing quite well.

However, I recognize there are some deficiencies leading to things that we can change. One of the most important things we could do is insure that projects don't get unduly delayed in the City Engineer's office. In this regard we must add staff and/or make more extensive use of consulting engineers.

In another area we are deficient right now. Projects need to get through the City Council faster. It appears that the length of time it takes to get through the legislative process has gotten much longer and, thus, more expensive for the development community as the specter of politics, rather than the merits of projects based on good planning, design and community benefit, has become more pervasive in the development process.

2. My thoughts on this matter are well documented. I have been a proponent of second-class city status for our community ever since we reached the 35,000 population level nearly two decades ago. I have been in favor of this move for many reasons, but primarily for the benefits we could get from having a professional financial person working cooperatively with the Mayor to manage the city's finances. I believe that your members understand this all too well. We are a business that has revenues of over \$100 million each year. Thus, we need a chief financial officer. No business person worth his or her salt would hire a CFO that has no experience in the field of financial management for a company this size. I believe that Indiana cities and towns would benefit from having a trained financial manager ... someone who could realistically and professionally look ahead at the future income and expenses.

This would allow city and town councils to make much better budgeting decisions. It really does little good for councils to have a clerk who concentrates almost entirely on what was spent rather than what will be coming in and possibly going out. We need more than a bookkeeping function. We owe that to our community.

As to the question of checks and balances. That is the job of the Council. As far as the thought that only an elected person should be in charge of bookkeeping, if the bookkeeper is not doing the job, the citizens have to wait four years or more to make a change. If the person is appointed, and is not doing the job in the best interests of the citizens, the Mayor can terminate that person rather rapidly.

Another important benefit we could get is better representation for our citizens by virtue of having a nine-person council.

3. In order to insure that business investment continues which, as you properly indicate, helps us keep an enviable tax rate; we must continue to add and maintain tangible quality of life assets. It is those assets, coupled with our low tax rate, that differentiates us from the other communities with whom we compete for new businesses. According to the Wall Street Journal, Alaska has the lowest tax burden. But, who wants to move their company there unless you are a salmon fishing operation? Who wants to move their company, and their employees to Mississippi or North Dakota? Carmel offers the entire package, not just low taxes. It is the amenities that Carmel offers, in spite of the fact that the State of Indiana continues to offer fewer and fewer quality of life amenities, that keeps us in the forefront of business attraction.

I have been watching the council and plan commission closely for the past five years. I am not sure that I agree that one group of stakeholders is respected over the others. As a council member I have always met with all sides of each issue. I believe I have shown respect to all stakeholders. I don't disagree that there have been times over the past two terms when stakeholders on both sides of issues have been disrespected by certain council members. The way to insure that this is no longer the case is to elect a majority of city council members who want to keep partisan politics out of our processes.

Ron Houck

1. I believe that Carmel is an inviting place for businesses to locate and the number of businesses that have chosen Carmel demonstrates this. Having higher standards is part of what makes Carmel desirable. While a business may have additional costs to locate here they also know that the return on their investment is greater and the standards for other businesses located nearby will be equally high so their investment will be protected. The US 31 corridor has been a great commercial asset for Carmel that provides jobs and property taxes that enables Carmel residents to enjoy low property tax rates. Maintaining the quality of the corridor will sustain its growth and desirability for attracting corporate entities.

Probably the most difficult part of the process may be the Carmel Plan Commission where proposals receive scrutiny and suggestions for improvement to align with planning goals and architectural standards. This review process ensures that projects are well planned, suitable to their location, and maintain high standards. What Carmel has created is recognized as special. The review and approval process is aligned with maintaining Carmel's reputation for quality. Businesses that do their homework in advance of their presentation usually find the process easier to navigate. If businesses bring suggestions for changing the process that doesn't compromise Carmel, then they should be considered. I would look forward to meeting with existing businesses to understand their issues and give them a forum to openly discuss problems and solutions.

2. There are two changes with becoming a second class city. The Carmel City Council would increase from seven to nine members and the Clerk-Treasurer duties would be divided among the Clerk and an appointed Controller. Making the change adds one council district and two representatives, one for the new district and an additional at-large representative. The major contention is rooted in concerns about a loss of transparency, not additional representation.

The Carmel City council has asked for the ability to approve the appointment of the controller, however it is not clear what controls city council would have moving forward beyond their initial approval, or if any further control is needed. With proper controls in place and a well-defined plan for transparency I would be in favor of becoming a second class city.

3. Maintaining a favorable business environment is essential for supporting Carmel's continued vision and growth. We need to increase our economic development marketing of Carmel at the local, county, state, and national level. Our focus should be on attracting businesses offering high-paying jobs that can employ local Carmel residents, as well as drawing from the region.

Kevin Rider

1. I don't believe the issue is the quality of materials Carmel requests; I think it is the process. The reason for added expense for developers in Carmel is we have allowed our DOCS and engineering staff to make the process more complicated than the ordinances allow. When we take staff opinion as suggestions instead of requirements, which I have put into practice as Chairman of the Plan Commission special studies committee, we simplify and shorten the process which cuts the expenses of the developer's support team of lawyers, engineers and architects required at each meeting.

I think development should be a teamwork process between the developers and the city. In my dealings with local developers and attorneys, I have asked them to meet with me prior to their initial meeting with DOCS and engineering. I provide insight and share experiences with them to allow them to take a discerning look at their development ideas prior to submitting their proposals which in turn streamlines their process.

2. Yes, I am in favor of a second-class city status for Carmel.

The City Council would increase to a 9-member council providing better citizen representation with 6 districts and 3 at-large representatives. An additional factor that would be valuable is the Mayor would be able to appoint an experienced CFO to manage the city's finances and handle Carmel's annual \$100 million plus budget. The current situation of an elected position that doesn't require financial experience is not the best situation for our city. The Mayor has agreed to allow the Council to approve the appointment which would still give the citizens a voice in the selection process.

3. As a local business owner and 16-year member for the Chamber, I have made it clear I am business-friendly. Our business community is the backbone for why our residential tax rate stays as low as it has. I give equal voice to businesses and homeowners at meetings.