

Candidate Questionnaire

In an effort to help inform voters for the upcoming City Council elections, the candidates for Walla Walla City Council were invited to provide answers to the following questions. We thank each of them for their participation. An asterisk signifies the incumbent.

Position 4 - *Jerry Cummins, Dick Swenson **Position 5** - *Barbara Clark, Brad Sandau
Position 6 - *Fred Mitchell, Chris Plucker **Position 7** - *Dominick Elia, Mary Lou Jenkins

1. What do you consider to be your primary reason for running for the City Council?

***Jerry Cummins** – I believe I bring a conservative voice to the council along with knowledge of how city government works. I enjoy being a member of council and especially take time to support transportation issues (Hwy 12) and both the retention and expansion of the VA Medical Facilities.

Dick Swensen – I believe that governments: federal, state, county, and city, need an occasional change in the personnel who are elected to represent the citizens. No elected position should be a career or hobby. I suppose I support 'informal term limits.'

***Barbara Clark** – I believe mine is a strong voice on the council for a variety of positions important to Walla Walla and its residents, and that I've demonstrated my fairness, dedication, and effectiveness.

Brad Sandau - I have seen many areas of Walla Walla changing but not for the better specifically our crime and gang problems. I am like many others I don't want to see the heart of Walla Walla change however if we do not adapt to the issues that are arising it will change on its own.

***Fred Mitchell** – The primary reason is I care about the people and the community and as a council member will do my best to support the will of the people.

Chris Plucker - I am running for council because I think it is time for a new generation of Walla Wallans to have a voice in our local government. I believe that I will act as a good representative of our community's young families and professionals. I also believe I have the qualities to take council leadership to a new level; engaging, connecting, and interacting with the community with energy and passion.

***Dominick Elia** – To continue working to make Walla Walla the best it can be. We have a great community but it requires people willing to give time and effort to keep it that way.

Mary Lou Jenkins – I believe a reasonable amount of turnover will be healthy for our City Council, and that a fresh perspective will introduce new ideas to the council.

2. What do you feel are your strongest characteristics that qualify you for this position?

***Jerry Cummins** – I am a conservative without single issues distracting me from serving on council. In the 20 years I have served, I have never been accused of being biased or representing special interest groups or concepts.

Dick Swensen – My experience as a consultant, project manager, teacher, and academic in many countries and with many organizations: business, government, engineering, and so on, have provided me with a skill at quick learning and quick thinking. I'm not afraid of my ignorance, and I'm not afraid to ask questions and listen to the answers.

***Barbara Clark** – Since folks are already online, I'd invite them to visit my website at www.barbaraclarkcitycouncil.blogspot.com

Brad Sandau - I am a no nonsense, take charge leader that is not afraid to confront issues. I am always willing to admit my shortcomings and will always research issues before making a decision or commitment.

***Fred Mitchell** – The I believe it is important to be a good listener and with the volume of issues that we encounter as council members it takes a lot of time to do the job right. I have missed very few meetings during the past twenty years as a member of the City council and see myself as a well informed listener.

Chris Plucker - First, and foremost, I am civic minded. I believe in making decisions that are in the interests of the greater good, not just based on the misgivings of a few. I have a strong ability to connect with people, listen, and clarify when needed. I think a successful councilmember needs to not only be able to know what decisions are in the best interest of the people, but they should also be able to go out and back up their decisions so that people understand why one voted in a particular way.

***Dominick Elia** – Experience. Leadership. Integrity. Business background. Hard worker and problem solver.

Mary Lou Jenkins – I am an excellent listener, I am a doer, I am very approachable and have exceptional customer service skills t work effectively with those I come in contact with.

3. What specific actions or programs that have been initiated by the city council do you support and feel should be continued or expanded?

***Jerry Cummins** – 1. IRRP (Infrastructure Repair and Replacement Program) to begin a long term commitment to replacing aging infrastructure like sewer and water lines. 2. Privatization of recycling and waste water treatment plant.

Dick Swensen – I strongly support the current infrastructure repair and replacement plan. I would like to make some minor additions to it in the matter of street safety.

***Barbara Clark** – Council minutes are archived and available through the city website, www.ci.walla-walla.wa.us

Brad Sandau - Small business expansion. I would like to see efforts continue for business growth plus the expanded of existing businesses.

***Fred Mitchell** – I support the infrastructure repair and replacement plan IRRP. This program is a good start toward replacing our infrastructure. Curbing gang activity, maintaining quality City services, and maintaining our City streets, Parks, and library are all things that are needed in order to have a community where people want to work and raise their families. An aquatic center would also be a valuable addition to Walla Walla.

Chris Plucker - Movement to create a transportation district that will provide a renewable source of income for repaving our streets is a great thing that has been recently put into motion. We are ready for this, and as a councilman, I will do everything I can to promote this within our community to make sure folks make an informed decision when voting for it.

***Dominick Elia** –The formation of the Walla Walla Joint Community Development Agency. This will save taxpayers approximately \$750,000 the first year. We need to continue to look at ways to consolidate services.

Mary Lou Jenkins – Partnering with community groups to leverage resources (such as Commitment to Community and Friends of the Aviary).

4. What specific actions or programs that have been initiated by the city council do you disagree with? What would you have done differently?

***Jerry Cummins** – Support of social service programs such as CCY and C2C. These should be supported and funded by other sources than taxpayer funds. They may be beneficial, but city funds should be used for services that citizens cannot necessarily provide adequately for themselves such as public safety, streets, infrastructure, etc.

Dick Swensen – I am regret that the city has not seen fit to make its Comprehensive Plan, updated in 2007, an important element in all its efforts – budgeting, in particular.

***Barbara Clark** – Council minutes are archived and available through the city website, www.ci.walla-walla.wa.us

Brad Sandau - I do not agree with all of the outside consultant fees the city continues to pay, the latest being the Malcolm Baldrige consultant. I believe the Baldrige award process would be beneficial to our city but I believe there are very successful people in our community that are well steeped in the Baldrige award process that would gladly volunteer their time to help.

***Fred Mitchell** – I have learned over time that if I take the time to listen to people and get informed, I typically do not regret the positions that I take.

Chris Plucker – N/A

***Dominick Elia** –The refusal to accept the \$200,000 offer from the Rural Library District. The will impact City of WW residents negatively. The library hours will be reduced up to 30%. I think we should have accepted the money and continued to work with the district.

Mary Lou Jenkins – No comment at this time.

5. Do you propose any specific actions or programs that have not yet been initiated by the city council? How would you fund them?

***Jerry Cummins** – It is important to look at both cause and effect of everything council does because it can affect citizens differently. There are never simple solutions to complex issues. Privatization of non-emergency services is an example. If this occurs, the city needs to make sure they have control to provide maximum services at the least costly process.

Dick Swensen – I need to become more familiar with the broad collection of actions and initiatives currently in place. There are only a few ways to fund any effort: grants, taxes and bonds, restricted IDs (Improvement Districts) and reallocation of existing money. The priority of any initiative together with the law will always guide us in choosing which method is best.

***Barbara Clark** – I have proposed that the Channel 17 council meeting broadcasts include picture as well as sound, in order to encourage everyone to understand and engage in more civic discussion. Much of the equipment would be provided by Charter under our franchise agreement, and the major cost would be for a reliable camera operator. I understand that some communities have been able to find local business sponsors to cover that expense. I've also proposed that the council adopt a practice of conducting an annual review of progress (or not) towards long-range goals. I've offered some draft indexes for consideration, though the comprehensive plan could also provide some more general goals. There would be no cost except time of council members once a year.

Brad Sandau - One way to help reduce our growing gang problem is to increase youth programs such as advocating for youth employment and community activities. If I know the people of Walla Walla I believe there are many people that would gladly donate funds or time to a worthy cause such as our youth. Actual funding from the city would be minimized due to these donations. If we invest in our youth and give them something productive to do, they will be less apt to get into trouble.

***Fred Mitchell** – I believe we should focus on building up and maintaining our City so that curb appeal is there that will draw in new businesses and families alike.

Chris Plucker - I do not have an agenda for new programs. I would like to see the council work to increase the amount of support we give our police department, as well as focus on road improvement.

***Dominick Elia** – I believe the city needs some kind of swimming pool/aquatic center. While aquatic center would be more expensive to build it has a better chance of generating enough revenue to cover the expenses. In order to be successful, it will require a public/private partnership to fund.

Mary Lou Jenkins – Issues need to be revisited. Just because solutions were dismissed as impossible to resolve in the past, it doesn't mean a fresh approach to funding isn't possible.

6. How familiar are you with the city budgeting process and budget history? Based on your familiarity with the budget/programs, are there any specific activities or programs that you would cut significantly or end?

***Jerry Cummins** – I chair the finance committee for the city so I would say that I have a fairly good working knowledge of the budget. The largest "elephant" in the room is binding arbitration that is strictly a spiral of wages paid to public safety employees because when you are required to raise salaries because of comparable jurisdictions, they in turn do the same. The second largest "elephant" is the cost of health care for being paid – up to approximately \$1700 per employee in some instances for a full family. Cost to city: \$4.6 million a year.

Dick Swensen – I am immersing myself in the process now, and won't comment until I see more details.

***Barbara Clark** – Activities and programs have already been significantly cut because of the recession.

Brad Sandau - I have printed out the city's budget and went through it line item by line item and I have to admit I do not know the specifics of all of them. Do to the mandatory format of the budget there are no specifics listed for where funding for certain expenditures come from. For instance: The City Council approved \$30,000 for the downtown foundations which caused me to raise an eyebrow but after further research I found out those funds come from the hotel tax which is obviously increased due to tourism. I cannot say if I would cut anything until I went through each line item with the City's accountants.

***Fred Mitchell** – I have twenty years of experience in dealing with the City and the Cities budget and am currently serving on the finance committee. We have trimmed services down to an all time low and I believe we should do our best to maintain what we have and hopefully make improvements in the area of greatest need.

Chris Plucker - I am learning the budgeting process and know enough to understand that it is complicated. There are certain monies designated for this or that. Some funds cannot transfer from one place to another. In respect to making cuts, I will prioritize public safety and infrastructure first. We must adequately fund these core services before providing the rest. Many services already have taken huge financial hits. I believe it would be wise to do a sort of cost-benefit analysis of the rest of the services to determine which are truly most valuable to our citizens, and what they could "live without" when push comes to shove.

***Dominick Elia** – I'm very familiar with the process. I was chair of the finance committee for 14 years. I have helped deliver 20 consecutive balanced budgets. We deliver a variety of services while trying to maintain a balance between needs and wants.

Mary Lou Jenkins – I have studied the budget but have no additional comment at this time.

7. A significant portion of the City budget is personnel costs. What is your opinion on recent city wage and salary actions? What would be your position toward future wage and salary actions if you were elected?

***Jerry Cummins** – Fire and police (public safety) were given raises last year because of comparables. This year they did not receive raises. Department heads were given raises by the city manager (not council) under the legal rights of a city manager. I was opposed to them on principal. The reason they were given was to balance what had been taken away from them (40k-K's, change of health care, individual retirement account matching funds that were stopped, etc.). Also, the city does a comparison of comparables in other cities and our department managers are below comparables.

Dick Swensen – Personnel costs are often subject to contract. Just as all businesses want their contracts honored, personnel should have their contracts honored. Of course, new contracts must be negotiated just as they always are in business.

***Barbara Clark** – In a service organization such as the city, personnel costs are always a major portion of the budget, in contrast to a manufacturing plant where materials costs may be high or a retail or wholesale operation where inventory is a major expense. In the last negotiations city employees made important concessions on wages and benefits because of the recession. In future negotiations I would continue to look for contracts that are fair to both employees and taxpayers. (Of course, all council members and most employees are taxpayers themselves.)

Brad Sandau - I am not a fan of lay offs or salary reductions even in hard economic time these should be our last resort. Unfortunately during hard economic times such as now all people have to make sacrifices and I am no exception. As a Dept of Corrections employee I recently took a 3% salary reduction. First I would research the City employee Union contract and make sure it compares equitably to other Government employee's salary and benefit packages. Second I would temporarily freeze salaries and if under contract explore renegotiations. Third, salary reductions in an attempt to avoid layoffs. The last resort would be lay off. All of these decisions have a dramatic impact on the persons involved and take this topic very seriously!

***Fred Mitchell** – The represented labor groups all took cuts in order to help the City get by during tough times. All employees deserve a fair and competitive wage. During tough times all employees should be willing to make sacrifices equally.

Chris Plucker - I believe the recent wage increases for some of the directors was poorly timed. Their work is certainly important, and it is of great value for us to retain the highest-caliber professionals in these positions. Yet, after lay-offs, and given the state of the economy for the last few years, and looking forward, I think the public raises an eyebrow at seeing people get pay raises while they are struggling. I think the city needs to be cautious in the next year with salaries, nobody wants to see lay-offs, but with the likelihood that there will be less money, I think pay increases should be avoided.

***Dominick Elia** – A majority of wage and salary actions are driven by labor contracts. We have had good support from most employees as they have agreed to givebacks and changes to their current pay and benefits. We need to hold the line on future increases while realizing that we also have to be competitive to secure quality employees.

Mary Lou Jenkins – I was not in favor of the large department head salary increase during a tight budget period. To work more closely with the City Manager to make sure there will be sufficient funds before taking such actions.

8. *How do you view your responsibility to communicate and work with the Walla Walla County Commissioners and the City of College Place? How would you communicate and work with the citizens of Walla Walla?*

***Jerry Cummins** – Jurisdictions need to work well together. I believe the Commissioners and the council in CP work fairly well together. Sometimes the local newspaper likes to make it appear that we don't, but look at projects such as Myra Road, the mutual City/County Jail, the intersection on Myra Road and 12th Avenue, Valley Transit, etc. With sales tax being the largest driver of new revenues for cities, it is understandable sometimes economic competition will need to apply but I think it normally works fairly well.

Dick Swensen – It is absolutely essential to have a cooperative and collaborative relationship with our neighboring governments, including the State. I want much more use made of the media: TV, radio, and the U-B; and want more town hall meetings to present work-in-progress for public input.

***Barbara Clark** – Walla Walla, College Place, and the County cooperate on many projects and programs. Through interlocal agreements all three entities are part of the dispatch system, the ambulance service, the emergency management office, county jail and juvenile justice center. The City works bilaterally with the County and College Place, and relations have generally been quite cordial for the last two years. The city currently uses several different means of communication with the public: city website; monthly update in the U-B's Walla Walla Valley Weekly, which is delivered to every city residence; town hall meetings at different locations throughout town to discuss particular projects; presentations at service club meetings; occasional letters or columns in the U-B; regular interviews on KUJ; general city information and announcements all day every day on Channel 17; and live audio of city council meetings on Channel 17 and KUJ. Residents can communicate with the city; electronically through the website; by telephone; by US mail; at city council meetings (where time is set aside for items not on the agenda, as well as an opportunity to comment on each agenda item as it is considered) and work sessions (where public comment is on the agenda items only); and in person to council members or staff. As indicated above, I'd like to see video as well as audio on TV broadcasts of council meetings.

Brad Sandau - The County Commissioners and City of College Place are in essence our next door neighbors and must maintain open and honest communications in order to keep our community thriving. The way I would communicate with the citizens of Walla Walla would be to quantify and expand the publication of the current state of the City in terms of finances, essential services, community events, volunteer programs etc.

***Fred Mitchell** – There are times when we are obligated as politicians to work with others in order to best serve the public. The newly initiated Walla Walla Joint Community Development Agency is an example of this process being successful. With the current state of the economy, the true savings has not yet been identified although we have made strides to streamline the permitting process.

Chris Plucker - I believe that the relationships between the cities of Walla Walla and College Place have gotten better over the years. I also believe that to be true with the county as well.

***Dominick Elia** –It is imperative that we continue to work with all partners. I have a very good working relationship with the commissioners. I am often asked to be the go between with the commissioners because of my excellent relationship. I would continue to work with citizens as I have for the last 20 years. We need to use various forms of communication to reach as many people as possible.

Mary Lou Jenkins – Working in a cooperative effort with County Commissioners and the City of College Place is vital to all involved in providing adequate services. Working with citizens of Walla Walla is also very important. I will want and need input from our community. I would like to see the Council do more outreach to engage our constituents.

9. How do you view the current gang situation in Walla Walla and what actions would you support to deal with it?

***Jerry Cummins** – I think our various law jurisdictions work well together on gang issues – especially if you compare our communities with the surrounding jurisdictions such as Milton-Freewater and the Yakima Valley. If an incident occurs, swift action for containment and county prosecution along with the courts giving maximum punishment is necessary to curtail future activities. We have much less gang issues than the surrounding jurisdictions I think because of our enforcement practices.

Dick Swensen – The gang problem is serious. We must not only insure increased public safety but must investigate all ideas regarding prevention. Solving this problem will not take a year; it may take a generation.

***Barbara Clark** – Police records show that incidents involving gang activity has been decreasing in the last few years, as a result of serious community-wide efforts which include schools, social service agencies, non-profits, civic groups, and law enforcement. We need to continue the cooperative work of prevention, intervention, and suppression. In addition to supporting our police and gang unit, the city needs to: continue with youth and family programs through our parks department and in partnership with other organizations, hopefully soon adding an aquatic facility, as is already in the planning stage, continued neighborhood outreach through our community-based policing programs and in partnership with other organizations, continue supporting education through our library and partnerships with the schools, continue working to create more employment options through community and economic development programs and partnerships, and continue participation in community coalitions working on the problems.

Brad Sandau - I view the current gang situation in Walla Walla a volatile. I have heard from law enforcement agencies local and outside that if we do not get a handle on it we are destined to be the next Yakima! I believe the #1 method for controlling and/or eliminating the gang problem is law enforcement boots on the ground. If there is any way to provide additional funding to our local law enforcement agencies I would support it 100%. I believe community support and youth programs are also key to reducing the problem. If we give our youth productive activities and jobs they are less apt to get into trouble.

***Fred Mitchell** – We presently have two full time officers assigned to the gang unit as well as one officer per shift who has assigned duties that aid in dealing with gang activity. I share in the decision of making high priority within our City and am open to the idea of hiring additional officers if the need is identified. We have no choice but to take this very seriously!

Chris Plucker – Not answered at this time.

***Dominick Elia** – The situation is getting worse. As more pressure is put on gangs in other areas (Yakima, Benton-Franklin County) they will move to places with less resistance. We need to make sure we work together to make WW and the valley as uncomfortable as possible for these people.

Mary Lou Jenkins – Our gang situation is of great concern to me. I would continue to support our local law enforcement gang task force and also support such programs as Commitment to Community, which was recently recognized by our Governor as an outstanding project.

10. Are you familiar with the City of Walla Walla's Committee on Sustainability? Do you support green or sustainability driven initiatives such as recycling and smart growth planning? What, if any, negative aspects do you see regarding the Committee or its initiatives?

***Jerry Cummins** – A balance needs to exist with green or sustainability issues. I believe recycling should cost the least amount possible to the ultimate consumer. Glass is not an effective recycling product. Rapid rail pickup saves customers fees. I think the city will need to look into the future of our current landfill or to haul to other centralized locations. We have to have a balance with being good stewards to the Earth and the costs of sustainability. I believe with construction of new buildings they are looking at payback costs, which is good stewardship. Some people don't realize with the city in the landfill business, cutting back waste going into the landfill has curtailed revenues in the landfill, which isn't necessarily a bad thing but it forces the city to look at methods of maintaining the landfill service to customers with less tipping fees.

Dick Swensen – The phrase 'Waste not, Want not,' comes to mind. Every private business seeks to reduce or eliminate the production of waste as it simply increases the cost of its products or services. Government should do the same and help its citizens to understand the true cost of waste. The concept of 'sustainability' includes the idea of reducing waste in time, money, production, and process.

***Barbara Clark** – The City needs to catch up to the private sector, including major national and multinational corporations, in the matter of sustainability. Operational efficiency improves the bottom line if those businesses and can do the same for the City. We often talk about eliminating waste, and that is a major part of any sustainability analysis.

Brad Sandau - Yes I am familiar with the Sustainability Committee. I think Sustainability is good in theory but in affect I do not believe it has lived up to realistic expectations. If you weigh all the factors that go into sustainability in terms of man hours, additional regulations, funding, publications, etc. I believe it has an adverse affect on our economy. I have also researched claims of cost saving to tax payers only to find some claims exaggerated. There are many good aspects of the sustainable theory but I believe it has been taken to the extreme.

***Fred Mitchell** – I believe that common sense needs to be applied in all situations. I also believe that we need to take care of our limited resources when it is reasonable to do so.

Chris Plucker – Not answered at this time.

***Dominick Elia** – One of the most important when we established the committee was to require that the economics of any situation must be considered. Economics is just as important as the other factors. We have a diverse mix of people on the committee including several business people. Any initiatives must include the economic effect as part of the analysis.

Mary Lou Jenkins – I am aware of the committee. I support the City's recycling efforts. A negative aspect could be if we are not assured of collaboration between departments to avoid roadblocks to economic development.