



Candidates,

Thank you for helping us inform our viewers about your positions on the issues. Please return the completed questionnaire as an email attachment to Todd Faulkner at [Tfaulkner@wpsdlocal6.com](mailto:Tfaulkner@wpsdlocal6.com). Your form will be scanned and posted as is, without editing, to our digital platforms. The deadline for return of the completed questionnaire is 5pm Friday, May 22, 2020. Questionnaires returned by the deadline will be posted, simultaneously, no later than 5pm on Wednesday, May 27, 2020. This document was created in Word. The questions should be answered in the space below each question. The enter key will create additional space as you write.

Name: Mayor Brandi Harless

1. What should be the top priority for the City of Paducah and what specific action(s) will YOU take to address it?

Helping our community recover from the impact of COVID19 is, and will be, my priority.

2. What do you specifically propose to deal with the likely revenue shortfall?

We are being extra careful, so we are overestimating the shortfall and have immediately decreased expenses. The reality is, we spend less than we take in every year in order to create a "savings" account for situations just like this. But we are going beyond this and taking even more precautions.

For FY21 we have taken a very conservative approach to revenue projections in order to try to "overshoot" what might happen. We have applied a 10% reduction to the revenue in the projections. We must have a balanced budget, so the team worked very hard to match expenditures with that reduced revenue. Each Department Leader identified ways to make adjustments to expenses in an effort to balance the budget to the new revenue projections. One approach will be to not hire the current 21 unfilled positions. Though positions that become vacant during the fiscal year will be filled so there will not be a reduction in the current force.

The projected revenue shortfall for Q4 of FY20 is \$2.8 million. We've taken immediate action to reduce expenses and have narrowed the gap between expenses and the revenue shortfall to \$853,000, which will be covered with our "savings account."

3. (a) Please identify specific programs and expenditures you believe may need to be reduced or eliminated if cuts become necessary. (b) Estimate the approximate savings for each item. (c) Estimate the total reduction amount you believe is prudent.

The good news about the city's financial situation is that we have several significant reserve funds. Last year I advocated to increase the amount we save every year from 10% to 12% in order to ensure our "savings" were strong for times like these.

That “savings account” is created by ordinance and cannot be touched except for emergencies. The goal is to leave those funds alone unless absolutely necessary. Another “savings account” is the cash balance reserve, which is created each year that we spend less than we bring in. This has happened each year that I’ve been in office. This fund has built up significantly. We have \$1.5 million currently. And the Debt Service Fund will provide an additional \$500,000 to the shortfall as well. This \$2 million will be utilized to balance the budget with the projected revenue shortfall and will keep us from having to do drastic cuts to the budget. Expenditures will be reduced by freezing the hiring of the current 21 unfilled positions. However, positions that become vacant during the fiscal year will be filled so there will not be a reduction in the current force.

As we move into the new fiscal year, we will monitor revenue and expenses monthly and quarterly so we can make adjustments as needed to ensure the financial strength of the city government. At six months, we will do an in-depth review to see how the revenue projections are playing out. If things look good at that point, it will be my suggestion that any merit increase freezes or other personnel related freezes be lifted so we can take care of the team.

4. Is a reduction in force something you would consider? Please be as specific as possible.

During the 2008 recession, the city of Paducah took dramatic steps to reduce staff and save money. This is not necessary to do again. Because what we don’t want to do is reduce services to the point that restricts citizens and businesses getting back on their feet. We want to make sure everyone has what they need to get back up and running.

In fact, there are some grant opportunities that are available for us to add to the force utilizing federal funds and not local taxpayer funds. The specific program we will be applying for is the SAFER program to add three firefighters to the force. The IAFF recently brought us a study showing we needed more staff on their team to ensure safety and reduce burnout. We learned this grant now does not require a match and we will be applying immediately.

We have a strong plan to balance this next year’s budget without reducing the current force. We will continue to leverage grant funding to add additional force if possible. And by maintaining our 12% reserve fund, we have a safety net to fall back on if times get harder than anticipated.

5. Will you support, propose or vote for an increase in taxes or fees during your term?

Now that the pension situation seems to be settling down, this will be unnecessary. The recent action by the general assembly has changed the amount of money that will be required from local government for the pension. We do not know the exact amounts yet but preliminary projections show it will be significantly reduced.

6. Do you believe there should be a reduction or elimination of any current taxes or fees which are set by city ordinance?

Our current tax rates are competitive when compared to other cities across Kentucky. For example, our property taxes (which have been lowered significantly over the last 20 years), are lower than these cities in Kentucky. Our challenge will be to work with the school board to see if they would be willing to hold on any increases. The school board has the authority to raise their rate without the City's Board of Commissioners' approval. And their rate gets added on to ours because the City collects their taxes for them.

<b>Real Estate Property Tax Rates (levy) of Other KY Cities</b>				
<b>CY2018-2020</b>				
<u>City</u>		<u>RE Prop Tax Levy</u>	<u>Per \$100K AV</u>	<u>Amount Above Paducah</u>
Henderson		\$0.4900	\$490	\$229
Covington		\$0.3270	\$327	\$66
Erlanger		\$0.3230	\$323	\$62
Murray		\$0.3100	\$310	\$49
Newport		\$0.2900	\$290	\$29
Ashland		\$0.2853	\$285	\$24
Independence		\$0.2710	\$271	\$10
Owensboro		\$0.2660	\$266	\$5
<b>Paducah</b>		<b>\$0.2610</b>	<b>\$261</b>	

Additionally, the insurance premium tax is also significantly lower than other cities across Kentucky.

- Owensboro 10%
- Hopkinsville 8.5%
- Elizabethtown 8%
- Murray 8.5%
- Bardwell 9%
- Bowling Green 7%
- Paducah 7%

7. What is your position on the city use of “no bid” professional services contracts as permitted by the Kentucky Model Procurement Act?

The Kentucky Model Procurement code is modeled after policies across the nation. There’s a reason nationally that most procurement policies for government, including state government, exclude professional services. This is from years of realizing how risky it is to force a decision based on the lowest price. When identifying and choosing services for things like attorneys, auditors, and engineers, the lowest price does not always guarantee best value for taxpayers. For example, an attorney coming right out of college might be able to offer services cheaper, but do you want someone who hasn’t done government work making legal judgments for your city? The same can be said for an auditor who does audits but has never done one for a local government. They may be able to provide services cheaper, but will that be the best outcome for the taxpayer?

The City of Paducah does make some local decisions that add transparency and accountability to this model. First, the city chooses local as much as possible and is always looking for local professional services to help out. Second, the city continuously tracks the market costs and weighs the decision to bid out the service in order to check the market and make sure prices are consistent and not inflated. And third, the City does choose to go to bid on many of the professional services when there are large projects at stake or there is not expertise within city hall to create the scope of work needed for that project.

8. What is your specific proposal, including expense and timeline, for fixing the flooding and storm water problem?

The stormwater master plan was completed in May 2019. Since then, the City has launched two projects with funding from FEMA and will begin soon cleaning and televising lines in a partnership with JSA.

According to the stormwater master plan, the following areas are necessary to help with the stormwater project; policies and administration, operation and maintenance of system, and capitol improvements projects.

Fiscal Year 21

**1. Review the following policies and practices**

- Work with the County to modernize regulations for stormwater management that are consistent with both jurisdictions.
- Develop policies for future land use to mitigate flooding impact.
- Review and update ordinances concerning what’s allowed in flood plains to address loss of riparian habitat.

**2. Operations and Maintenance**

Launch cleaning and televising program- \$250,000. Televising and cleaning the lines will help us better understand what’s underground in the system and allow for us to clean out any debris we see while doing this. We are working on a partnership with JSA to save money and to make the process more efficient since they do this work regularly for their sewer system. As we move through the televising process, there will be opportunities to identify repairs and slip-lining that will help the system. I’m working on a way to secure an additional \$300,000 for this effort for this fiscal year 2021.

### **3. Capitol Projects**

#### Complete:

1. Buckner Bridge project
2. 24th St Bridge project

#### Prepare:

1. Review current FEMA funds from the 2019 flood to utilize for additional projects in FY22
2. Work on understanding the details of each capitol project as the televising is accomplished and we better understand the underground realities of the system in those locations.

### **4. Floodwall**

This often gets overlooked but this is the largest stormwater system we have. We have to maintain it. There is currently an ongoing \$35 million project going on to restore and repair the system. The Army Corps covers most of the cost, but the city matches 5%. For fiscal year 2021, this amount will be somewhere around \$300,000.

### **Fiscal Year 22 and Beyond**

1. Continue cleaning and televising program
2. Replace or slip-line portions identified in the cleaning and televising program
3. Identify funding sources both internally and externally to take on capitol projects as they are better understood through the cleaning and televising program.

### **Conclusion**

I raise extreme caution for the politicization of the stormwater program. It sounds nice to talk about throwing millions of dollars at a problem. But in order to utilize resources wisely, we must better understand the underground nature of our system. We can make a HUGE impact on the system by starting the cleaning and televising program immediately. This will be an ongoing program for decades and will help us systematically understand how to best tackle the issues. The stormwater master plan was an above-ground analysis.

9. What is your position on the use of “consent agendas” for commission business? Please be specific about parameters, if any, for their use.

The consent agenda was implemented with the goal of providing more adequate time for the commission and staff to discuss large projects, significant policy changes, and other substantial business. Items allowed on the consent agenda are only those that are routine business. For example, if we are applying or accepting a grant, approving the minutes from the previous meeting, or personnel changes. These items are posted to the public along with the rest of the agenda on the Friday before the Tuesday meetings.

10. What is your position on “public comments” at City Commission meetings? Please be specific.

I am a big supporter of public engagement. I believe it is every citizen’s right (and responsibility) to speak to their elected officials and participate in the local government process. Citizens should have multiple ways to voice their opinions to elected leaders. Currently, citizens can call, email or meet with me specifically. I created office hours when I first took office. Last year I had the privilege of hosting 145 meetings with citizens. They can also sign up to comment at the commission meetings when there is an item on the agenda they have an opinion about. We release the agenda 4 days in advance of the meeting so citizens can be aware of the business that will be conducted. Additionally, many of the items on the agenda must be read and heard at 2 different meetings so there are more opportunities for discussion.

11. Yes or No. Should the city continue with the recreation and aquatic center facility as originally proposed?

We suspended the recreation and aquatics center design in order to better understand how COVID19 is going to impact our local economy before deciding how to move forward with the project. This pushed the timeline back significantly. I will not be suggesting we break ground on the project in 2020. If the economy bounces back, a tenant for the facility is identified and funding is pledged to support the operations, these would be strong reasons for the facility to be built in 2021.

12. If you answered “yes” to question 11 please explain your position. If not skip to question 13.

13. If you answered “no” to question 11 please explain specifically what you believe should be done about the recreation and aquatic center facility proposal. If you answered “yes” skip to the next question.

14. Should the city continue with the proposal for downtown development including the development of a “Hotel” at the site of the parking lot at the end of Broadway as envisioned by the “City Block” project? Please elaborate.

Many Paducahans have invested in downtown, including me and my husband. We put a lot on the line to develop a property and start a business downtown. This wasn't easy. And it still isn't. Many others like us have done the same thing. Downtown has seen its share of ups and downs. I know so many Paducahans believe in its potential and its legacy.

Investment interest in any community is a signal that a community is growing. As we come out of the COVID19 situation, the proposed investment by a private developer with a credible reputation should be welcomed. New money invested into our downtown is a sign that the market is changing and confidence that our downtown has a bright future. The investment of millions of dollars will be a good shot in the arm for our local economy.

We can do this project with thoughtful consideration of the concerns of citizens. We are listening and have been listening. Many components of the proposed project have changed from public input. We will continue to do that.

15. Should the city continue with the proposal to create a downtown TIF district which has preliminary state approval? Please give specific reasons for your answer.

News articles dated back to 2007 discuss the need and desire for a TIF district in downtown Paducah. For nearly 15 years, this has been talked about but not implemented in Paducah. We are now months away from having our first TIF district approved by the state. Paducah's downtown TIF district has the potential to bring anywhere from \$10 million-\$50 million to Paducah over the next 20 years. The amount will depend on the final analysis and the recommendation of the KEDFA board in Frankfort. These taxpayer funds are typically shipped off to Frankfort in the form of sales and income taxes. With the TIF district established, we will see those funds come straight back to Paducah for use locally in the district.

Our city team learning how to implement TIF districts will help with our ability to implement other TIF districts in other parts of the city in the future. My vision is for the next focus to be on a Southside TIF. At a time when we are uncertain about the economic future, this will be a shot in the arm that we need.

16. How can the City most effectively develop the riverfront?

Newspaper articles that date back to 2002 talk about the need for riverfront development. There have been efforts made toward this project but never fulfilled. I was disappointed when the transient boat dock left the riverfront with pavement millings but not a completely developed site.

For years it had been said that the TIGER funding from DOT would not work for the riverfront development project. When I took office, we immediately went to work on identifying funding sources for the riverfront development completion. Around the same time, the TIGER grant turned into the BUILD grant and we applied. We were not successful on the first round, but I worked hard to push our team to consider taking a different approach to the application, and we partnered with HRD and BFW to make the application stronger. This led to our successful award of \$10.4 million from DOT. This project will not only complete the riverfront development that has been discussed for nearly 20 years, but will also add development to the “dry side” of the flood wall near the convention center. This became a priority for the chamber of commerce and we worked together as a community to be successful.

17. Please identify any specific plans or proposals you have for economic development, infrastructure improvement, housing rehabilitation or development for the Southside.

*Economic Development:*

Reworking GPED

Goal: Use the new structure and approach to get more aggressive

Over the last three years we have made significant changes to the way we do economic development in Paducah. Historically, we have been the catchers in economic development. Waiting for the deals to come from some other source. We are now the pitchers and working aggressively to attract and find leads on our own. It took some time, but we are now seeing the fruits of that work. Within six months of having a smaller GPED board and a new President, we have seen the closing and swift reopening of a new plastics company, expansion of technology-based jobs, re-opening and expansion of locomotive machine jobs and more. The goal is to continue to improve on this new structure and work to do more pitching than we do catching.

Impact Opportunity

Goal: Continue focusing on helping people out of poverty

Paducah’s poverty rate is nearly 25%. When we think about economic development, we cannot forget that one our goals and best bets on real economic growth is to help those in poverty climb out. After ten years of the impact poverty task force, we now have seen significant increase in support services for those who live in poverty. Things like expanded access to primary care, reading pals to support our kids, enhanced support systems in family court, and more. All of these were identified as needs during the 2010 Impact Poverty Task Force. There is one area that did not see much progress from the original task force. That was jobs. Over the last year, we have been working to launch the Impact Opportunity Task Force. The Board of Commissioners identified this as a high priority at the strategic planning retreat in January. The goal of the Impact Opportunity task force is to identify barriers to obtaining and keeping employment in Paducah/McCracken County. The first meeting of the task force took place early this year but was the following meetings were canceled due to COVID19. We are now reassessing when to proceed.

Business Friendly Practices at City Hall

Goal: Keep improving the way we do business

For years I've heard the complaints about how difficult it is to do business with the city of Paducah. Sometimes this complaint has merit, sometimes it didn't. Either way, there was and is still work to be done. Over the last three years, we have made significant changes to the way businesses and citizens do business with the City of Paducah. These changes include new Customer Experience Department, improve inspections process, kick start meetings for new projects, and online project planning and permit submittals.

### *Infrastructure Improvement:*

Stormwater- see above

#### Streets and Sidewalks

- Continue using the PAVR program to better identify streets that need repaving
- Continue working with the state high-water department to identify funding programs for improved sidewalks and intersections like the 25th street project to be complete this fiscal year.
- Continue working with the state on a street sweeping program on state highways so they are cleaned more than 2 times per year. I started this last year and we haven't completed the agreement yet.
- Continue working on the neighborhood walks report and improving areas identified that need improved sidewalk or pedestrian safety

#### Streetlights

- Continue upgrading streetlights with LEDs- I worked with Paducah Power to put together a program to install new LED streetlights. This provides enhanced lighting but also saves the city significantly in energy costs.

### *Housing Rehabilitation*

Historically, the approach in Paducah for neighborhood development has been for the city to take the lead on neighborhood revitalization. While this approach has been successful in Lowertown and Fountain Avenue, it took 20 years for those projects to be completed. These neighborhoods now provide lessons learned for future neighborhood development and what to do and what not to do.

The City has provided catalyst funding to the Midtown Alliance of Neighbors to become certified as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). Midtown Alliance was critical in the Fountain Avenue redevelopment project and a track record for helping people gain home ownership, take care of the homes they already own and for historic rehabilitation. Having a private non-profit in Paducah that is certified as a Community Housing Development Organization will help to make neighborhood and housing development quicker and less burdensome on local tax funding. The purpose of this organization is to create affordable NON-subsidized housing for the community. Midtown Alliance's primary mission is to help with home ownership.

### *Southside development*

Dilapidated structures- Last year we worked to help with the sale of the former Residential Care building. Unfortunately it did not happen. Through that process we provide support to gain information that could help to reduce the perceived risk of a buyer. We conducted an appraisal and an environmental study to determine the hazards present in the building.

### Infrastructure

Bridge Street between Broad St and Irvin Cobb will be getting a complete makeover this year. Street resurfacing, curbs, gutters and sidewalks will be improved. Recently Paducah Water redid underground infrastructure over there as well.



### Southside TIF district

The Southside was once known as the entertainment and jazz district. Once the downtown TIF district is final and underway, I would like to see us move towards imagining a Southside TIF district. We will already know how to successfully (and more swiftly) accomplish a TIF district and we will use that new knowledge to work towards a southside TIF district. This will keep Paducah taxpayer money home in Paducah instead of shipping it to Frankfort.

18. What do you propose to address the economic issues of the city and its residents? Including:

#### Attracting new industry

##### Current Work:

1. Get our ducks in a row. For example, the former GPED President allowed for the expiration of the wetlands mitigation report on the triple rail site. This has now been resolved. But things like this are being identified and cleared up now in order to make us more “ready” and attractive for businesses.
2. Clean up I-24 Logistics Park.
3. Improve signage and website presence for Commerce Park and I-24 Park.
4. Work with a professional economic development marketing company to create an online presence that attracts site selectors and businesses.

##### Proposed Work:

1. Partner with an industrial developer to identify opportunities and determine target businesses and how to attract them utilizing our current assets.
2. Partner with the region’s economic developers to hire a lead generation company to always be working on driving leads to the region.
3. Be strategic and intentional about generating leads for Paducah in key sectors and industries including: Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Health, Professional Services, and River Industries as identified in the Forward Paducah plan.
4. Continue to work towards the goals set out by the Forward Paducah Plan.

#### New living wage jobs creation

Economic developers say and research has shown that most job growth comes from local businesses that are already in business. In the last year, the city hired a business development specialist to focus on business retention and expansion. This position has been filled for less than a year and xxx businesses have been contact to discuss their needs and opportunities. This program in in partnership with GPED and will only get better over time.

Additional activities are the same as above

1. Partner with the region’s economic developers to hire a lead generation company to always be working on driving leads to the region.
2. Be strategic and intentional about generating leads for Paducah in key sectors and industries including: Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Health, Professional Services, and River Industries as identified in the Forward Paducah plan.
3. Continue to work towards the goals set out by the Forward Paducah Plan.

#### *Population decline*

This year’s census will give us a more accurate picture of our population in the City of Paducah. Regardless, we can’t let up on attracting businesses, investing in ourselves and working to grow our own businesses. All of the efforts mentioned above can and will help us grow our community. We can’t stop now.

### *Aging population*

Housing developments like HC Mathis will support our aging population. Continuing to support and ensure we have high quality healthcare will also help our aging population.

### *Disproportionate poverty and economic disadvantage*

We started the Impact Opportunity Task Force for this exact purpose. See above explanation.

### *Appropriately educated job force*

I recently had the opportunity to travel with Dr Reece from WKCTC to make a pitch about the Community Scholarship Program. This was absolutely amazing to see in action. The City of Paducah supports this program and should continue. This allows for every student in Paducah/McCracken County to have a free 2 year education.

Continued partnership with UK School of Engineering and MSU regional campus will provide education opportunities that most communities cannot offer without being home to a 4 year university. A lot of very dedicated leaders before me made these things happen. I want to keep supporting them.

## 19. What is your position on the role of GPED?

GPED has been the economic development agency for Paducah for more than 2 decades. There have been years of success and years of failure. We worked very hard over the last 2 years to re-imagine GPED and how it should operate in order to maximize economic development opportunities for Paducah/McCracken County. Things are starting to click. Within 6 months of having a smaller GPED board, a new President and a clearer focus, we have seen the closing of a former and the swift reopening of a new plastics company, expansion of technology-based jobs, re-opening and expansion of locomotive machine jobs and more. The goal is to continue to improve on this new structure to do more pitching than we do catching.

## 20. What is your position on a “Metro” form of local governance, consolidating City of Paducah and McCracken County governments?

When I ran in 2016, I was asked this question a lot. My response was that I believe we need to work on city/county relations before we jump back into the “merged” government conversation again. Since taking office, I’ve worked closely with Judge Leeper and now Judge Clymer on improving the relationship and partnership opportunities with the city and the county. Almost every week since I took office, I’ve met with the Judge Executive. This has helped to develop a relationship and I have become very fond of both Judges from that. We have built trust and a partnership to find the ways the city and county can partner to be smart with taxpayer funds, not duplicate services, and to work hard to identify opportunity for economic growth. We’ve accomplished a lot together. We got the ball rolling for enhanced sports and recreation in Paducah/McCracken County through our five-way inter-local agreement and the development of the McCracken County Sports Commission. That was eight months of brainstorming and negotiating, and it will result in facilities for attracting sports tournaments to our community. It also opened up the possibility for the city to take on indoor recreation by finding other ways to cover the cost of outdoor facilities. There is much more work to do to fully realize the opportunities for the city and the county to work together. We have started to work preliminarily on making planning/zoning more efficient, improving 911 emergency services, and much more.