

Wichita Eagle
2021 District 6 Candidate Questionnaire
Cindy Claycomb

1. Why are you running for the District 6 City Council seat?

I am running for the District 6 City Council seat because we need informed, effective leaders who can work together to solve the complex issues the City faces. I ran for District 6 City Council seat four years ago, because I love Wichita and believe that my background and experience enables me to contribute to its growth and economic prosperity for all. I am running for District 6 City Council seat again, because I still love Wichita, and there's still more work to do for District 6 residents and the City as a whole.

I will continue the progress we've made in creating thriving neighborhoods, a business-friendly environment, a vibrant downtown, and a strong link with our local universities. Together, we can move Wichita forward.

Listening and intensely engaging with District 6 residents has led me to playing significant roles in:

- saving Minisa and Orchard Park pools and opening a new water playground at Evergreen
- securing funding for new playground equipment at Sherwood Glen Park
- saving the Evergreen Branch Library from closure
- creating a new community center in District 6
- founding the new non-profit Empower Evergreen to support District 6 residents
- working with District 6 neighborhoods to address their concerns about zoning, blight, streets and other issues of importance to them
- working to end homelessness by creating 54 permanent housing units (with supportive services) in collaboration with HumanKind Ministries
- supporting small business creation with new economic development policies
- ensuring safe drinking water for this generation and those to come with a new state-of-the-art water treatment facility
- creating an inviting city by incorporating art and design into City projects through dedicated funding
- working to return passenger rail to Wichita

I will continue working with neighbors on projects that: create thriving neighborhoods (e.g., fixing crumbling infrastructure, addressing blight and ensuring public safety); ensure a vibrant quality of life (e.g., maintaining and enhancing parks, recreation and cultural arts); and support a strong local economy (e.g., attracting and retaining talent, securing jobs, ensuring job training and providing ease of doing business for small business and entrepreneurs).

As a lifelong Wichita area resident, I have a genuine interest in the future of Wichita. It is imperative that we clearly articulate a shared vision that inspires large groups of residents to move forward. Our vision should embrace our tradition while being informed by new trends. I will continue to be a part of this work, building on the accomplishments of my first term.

My focus will be helping make Wichita a strong and vibrant place to live, work, learn and play. Like so many Wichitans, I, too, want to see my 18-year-old granddaughter intentionally choose to stay in Wichita as a young adult because of our employment opportunities, diverse and affordable neighborhoods and cultural liveliness.

2. What is the first goal you want to accomplish in your term if elected to this seat?

The immediate goal for my second term in office is to successfully open the new District 6 Community Center located at 25th Street North and Arkansas Avenue. Following the City's \$1.7 million investment in renovation, the new Community Center will house City facilities, including the current Community Services (currently operating the Evergreen Neighborhood Resource Center), Evergreen Library, Community Police Officers and Neighborhood Inspection.

In addition, organizations including the new non-profit Empower Evergreen, Kansas Hispanic Education and Development Foundation, Salud + Bienestar, Department of Children and Families and various other partners will office in the new community center or offer programs and services. The focus of the Center will be connecting residents to education, workforce readiness and small business development programs and resources.

It has been my honor to serve in the lead role of renovating the facility and founding of Empower Evergreen, alongside our many supporting partners. Empower Evergreen will facilitate programming in the new center that will connect local residents to a continuum of educational opportunities, work-readiness preparation and small business development resources.

Our partners are community-based organizations focused on revitalizing the areas in which they are located—typically low-income, underserved neighborhoods that have experienced significant disinvestment.

3. What are the longer term goals you want to accomplish in your term if elected to this seat?

My longer-term goals include to continue listening to neighbors and the greater community to improve credibility of City government with residents, create an environment that appeals to diverse groups in terms of diversity of thought, experience and culture and build on my integrity by listening to residents' concerns, delivering on my promises and spending taxpayers' money wisely. More specifically, I will continue to:

- work with neighbors to ensure their voices are heard, implement existing neighborhood plans and explore areas that need protection (e.g., river corridor, historic districts) or revitalization (e.g., North Broadway). In addition, I support the work of the newly authorized Land Bank that provides a tool to help eliminate blight in neighborhoods.
- work as a founding advisor to Empower Evergreen to create opportunities for small business development. This effort includes connecting small businesses to a range of resources assisting with business organization, startup basics, growing a business and business incubation (i.e., ability to test concepts before investing heavily in facilities).
- work as a board member of the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition to develop a sustainable, accessible and integrated system of care that serves people with mental health and substance abuse disorders who are in crisis, in order to efficiently and effectively deliver services that create positive outcomes. The efforts of the MHSAC are especially critical for people experiencing homelessness who are suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues. Our Coalition is (1) reducing barriers for patients to receive services they need when they need them, (2) improving communication, coordination and collaboration among service providers and (3) identifying programs to ensure there are enough employees to meet demand in behavioral health professions.
- work with the South Central Kansas Transportation Coalition, Regional Economic Area Partnership, as well as our government relations liaison in Washington, D.C. to return passenger rail to Wichita. My collaboration with Sedgwick County, state and federal legislative representatives, Amtrak and neighboring towns has resulted in the clear potential for return of passenger rail to Wichita. The return of passenger rail would provide a reliable, fast, relatively clean and sustainable transportation option for Wichita, and add to our economic vitality.
- support programs for business growth and new good paying jobs. I serve on the WSU Tech Industry Advisory Board. WSU Tech trains people for jobs that are in high demand by employers. They collaborate with industry partners to ensure that workers have the right skills for high-wage jobs. My work on this board supports these programs. I support business growth and jobs through the Wichita City Council's assistance to the Greater Wichita Partnership. The Partnership is focused on economic development for the greater Wichita region through attraction and retention of jobs and workers. I will continue to advocate for small businesses through the City's newly revised economic development guidelines.
- advocate for quality of life initiatives for all neighborhoods, including providing intentional and well maintained public spaces, such as parks, promoting the arts and their importance to the vitality of Wichita and supporting initiatives targeting affordability.

4. What about your background, work, political or life experience makes you qualified to serve on the City Council?

I have a strong work ethic and integrity, as well as the experience and willingness to work alongside neighbors on projects and initiatives. (See cindyclaycomb.com for more information.) I am the only candidate for District 6 with experience serving the public as President of the Board of Park Commissioners, District 6 District Advisory Board, and most recently, as District 6 City Council representative.

I have been involved in neighborhood advocacy and community initiatives for over 15 years, including representing my neighborhood, serving as the co-chair of Clean Air Wichita (that resulted in smoke-free workplaces, including restaurants and bars) and serving on various other committees for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and facilities.

My background in business (working for Boeing and Pizza Hut, formerly a division of PepsiCo) and higher education (as full professor, interim dean of the business school, founding director of WSU Ventures and assistant to the president for strategic planning) has made me a careful listener, a strategic thinker and a calm voice committed to understanding complex issues and bringing people together to solve problems.

I understand the need to invest in the future of Wichita while controlling the bottom line. I promise that I will listen to constituents, engage in research on issues and make the best decision for District 6 and the City of Wichita based on the information I possess.

5. What do you feel has been your biggest accomplishment since you've been in office?

We have had many accomplishments during my first term on City Council, including: intensely engaging with neighborhoods on zoning, street and other issues of importance to them; opening renovated pools and new water playgrounds; creating a new community center in District 6; founding of the new non-profit Empower Evergreen; saving the Evergreen Branch Library from closure; opening the Advanced Learning Library; assisting in securing City funding for parks and playground equipment in District 6; developing new economic development guidelines to encourage small business development; ensuring dedicated funding to make public art part of City projects; and assisting HumanKind Ministries in providing 54 permanent supportive housing units for people experiencing homelessness (including wrap around case management).

All of these are major accomplishments, however, my biggest accomplishment since I have been in office is to identify sustainable funding and begin construction of a badly needed new facility to ensure safe drinking water for this generation and generations to come. The current water treatment facility is over 80 years old.

While our Public Works Department does a great job of maintaining the current facility, its age and lack of redundant systems means it is in need of replacement. The new facility will be built to exceed current peak hourly demand for water each day. It will be built with treatment systems that are redundant to ensure water outages from operational problems will not happen. This project is being financed with low-interest federal and state loans. This ensures that water rates will remain relatively stable.

6. What has been the biggest challenge you've faced while in office, and how did you work to overcome it?

My biggest challenge in my first term in office was bringing together a team to purchase a hotel to convert to permanent supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. In 2020, the City of Wichita's Housing and Community Services Department received federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to be used to prevent, prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency related to homelessness assistance and prevention.

We brought together a team with representatives from Wichita City Council, Sedgwick County Board of Commissioners, Ascension Via Christi, HumanKind Ministries and City of Wichita Housing and Community Services Department. This team developed a complex funding and operational plan for Ascension Via Christi to provide a long-term ground lease agreement for HumanKind to use the land upon which the hotel sits.

Funding for acquisition, rehabilitation and operations was provided by the City of Wichita from the CARES Act funding. HumanKind Ministries purchased the hotel and is in the process of rehabilitation. The challenge was convincing each of the partners that this project was in the best interests of their organization, the neighborhood and the more general community, including people who will be tenants at the new Studios at HumanKind. It took numerous meetings and consultations to bring this complex project to fruition.

Ultimately, the partners decided that this project is the beginning of a long-term initiative to assist those experiencing homelessness tackle one of their greatest problems—housing insecurity. In addition, it will serve as a catalyst for revitalization of the North Broadway Corridor.

The hotel was operated as a women's shelter during 2020. It is being converted to 54 permanent supportive apartments that will open in 2021. This facility will be a long-term asset that expands housing resources for the homeless population in Sedgwick County. HumanKind will provide case management and other services for the tenants, and employ on-site property management. This new facility will provide immediate housing for 54 people who are currently living in a state of homelessness.

7. Some residents in the North End say they have long complained about how train tracks there are an impediment to the neighborhood's economic growth and connectivity to the rest of the city. How have you engaged with residents on this topic? What, if anything, can be done to address it?

I was pleased to recently invite Mr. Ron Rosales, USD 259 School Board Member, who expressed concerns about the tracks, to meet with the Director of Public Works, the City Engineer, the Traffic Engineer and me about the railroad tracks at 21st and Broadway.

Unfortunately, there are two major barriers that prevent commonly suggested physical changes to the train tracks at that intersection. The first is that there is an extensive rail yard of numerous sets of tracks on the north side of that intersection. The whole rail yard logistically cannot be elevated, nor will the railroad move it so that the tracks can be elevated on a bridge over 21st Street like they are downtown. Unfortunately, federal regulations prohibit the City of Wichita from requiring the railroad move the rail yard.

The second common suggestion is to create a 21st Street bridge over Broadway so cars would not have to stop for trains. This would not only require elimination of existing industrial businesses east of Broadway, but more significantly, would entirely wipe out the existing NOMAR area west of Broadway. Business owners and residents alike have expressed significant opposition to demolishing that area for good reason and I understand why.

The City of Wichita's Public Works Department is assessing several less disruptive solutions. For example: Could the City of Wichita work with the railroad companies to avoid trains blocking the tracks along 21st St. North for long periods of time? (Federal regulation doesn't allow City ordinance to prohibit blocking streets.) Could technology be used to alert drivers that they may be delayed, allowing them to find an alternate route at certain times of the day? There are other solutions being explored. I am committed to continuing these discussions with residents and City staff to address this issue.

8. Do you have a current full-time job? If so, what is that and for how long have you been in that position?

I do not hold a full-time job outside of my position on the Wichita City Council. I retired in 2018 after serving almost 25 years at Wichita State University.

9. Do you publicly identify with a certain political party? If so, which one?

I do not identify with a certain political party. I am registered "unaffiliated."

10. How old are you?

I am 64 years old.

11. Can you share if you have immediate family members such as a spouse and/or children?

I am married to Charlie (husband of 40 plus years). We have an adult daughter, son-in-law, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, all living in Wichita. My mother, sister and brother live in Wichita. My father passed away last year. I have a brother who lives in Texas.

12. How long have you lived in District 6?

I have lived in District 6 since 2004. I have lived in the Wichita area all my life (except when I was away for college).

13. In what ways have you been involved in District 6 to date?

I have been deeply committed to neighborhood advocacy and community initiatives for over 15 years, including serving as the co-chair of Clean Air Wichita (that resulted in smoke-free workplaces, including restaurants and bars) and serving on various other committees for parks and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and facilities.

The community knows me, knows my work ethic and that I get projects accomplished. This is demonstrated by the number of boards and coalitions on which I am asked to serve, as well as the results of my efforts.

Prior to serving the residents of Wichita on City Council, I served on the City of Wichita Board of Park Commissioners as the District 6 representative for eight years (elected as President in my last term) and the City of Wichita District 6 District Advisory Board. I was also deeply involved in:

- Wichita Bicycle Master Plan Steering Committee to develop a guide for the City of Wichita regarding bicycle infrastructure investments, operations and policies
- Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Regional Pathway System Plan Advisory Committee to establish a backbone pathway system to connect existing and future bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the region
- City of Wichita Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces (PROS) Technical Advisory Group to develop a 20-year strategic master plan that will help attract and retain business and industry and the workforce they employ
- Local bicycle and pedestrian groups to convert the 17th Street rail corridor into a pathway, now known as the popular Redbud Trail

Since my election to City Council in 2017, I have regularly attended neighborhood association meetings of the more than 10 associations in District 6. Every day I dedicate my time to working on initiatives, projects, issues and concerns in District 6. I currently serve on 13 boards of directors, executive committees, policy bodies and advisory boards. All of these boards and coalitions are connected to District 6 directly (i.e., their facilities or organizations are located in District 6) or indirectly (i.e., their work is beneficial to District 6). These organizations are:

- Mental Health & Substance Abuse Coalition Board
- Botanica Board of Trustees [Co-chair Volunteer Committee]
- HumanKind Ministries Board of Directors
- Regional Economic Area Partnership of South Central Kansas (REAP) Executive Committee [Vice-Chair 2020-2021]
- Arts Council Board of Directors
- WSU Tech Industry Advisory Board
- Health & Wellness Coalition Advisory Council
- Downtown Wichita Board of Directors
- Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WAMPO) Transportation Policy Body
- Old Town Association Board of Directors
- South Central Kansas Transportation Coalition
- Hispanics in Real Estate Board of Directors
- Raise My Head Foundation Advisory Board

No one will work harder for District 6 or show more care for the future of our city.

14. What are the biggest challenges facing District 6, how is it different from other City Council districts, and how do you address those challenges?

Neighborhood issues: Citizens’ voices should be heard on issues of concern to them, including providing accessible services, improving crumbling infrastructure, addressing/reducing blight, encouraging affordability and diverse price points in housing, ensuring public safety through community policing and community partnerships and addressing the root causes of homelessness.

I will continue to address these challenges: by working on zoning cases, street repair and neighborhood plans, projects such as creation of a new District 6 Community Center, effective implementation of the City of Wichita’s urban infill strategy; by working with District 6 community police officers and community partners on safety; and by leveraging the City of Wichita’s funding for homelessness prevention/services and community partners to eliminate barriers to access to care for those experiencing homelessness.

Quality of life projects: It is important to provide unique park and recreational opportunities, maintain the City's library system and assist in offering a variety of arts and cultural experiences in District 6.

Since I have been in office, we have made improvements and enhancements to several parks and offered many recreational opportunities in District 6, including:

- Orchard Park and Minisa pool renovations and new Evergreen water playground
- Riverside Tennis Center update with new pickle ball and tennis courts
- Wichita Rowing Association boathouse installation
- Fresh Air Baby Camp improvements
- Kansas Wildlife Exhibit improvements
- Great Plains Nature Center outreach programming across schools in District 6
- Open Streets NOMAR
- Wichita Symphony Orchestra Playing Across the Parks partnership
- Westside Athletic Field improvements and partnership with Friends University
- Evergreen Park improvements including futsal court and disc golf course installations
- Sherwood Glen Park land donation and playground installation

Continued improvements and enhancements of these types, as well as funding of libraries and cultural arts amenities in District 6 (including Botanica, Wichita Art Museum, City Arts, Mid-America All-Indian Museum, Keeper of the Plains, Advanced Learning Library, Evergreen branch library and Old Cowntown Museum) are critical to the quality of life for District 6 residents.

An accomplishment in 2020 was to develop a plan to provide dedicated funding to make public art part of city projects. Public art demonstrates the uniqueness and depth of the arts in Wichita. It enhances the quality of life for residents and visitors. The challenge will be to ensure that projects in District 6 are awarded this funding for art-worthy projects.

Strong local economy: The current challenge in our economy is ensuring good paying jobs and the workforce to fill them. Initiatives that have demonstrated success and will continue to address this challenge include:

- Supporting key regional industries to ensure innovation in the region
- Supporting export programs to bring about global export trade
- Supporting programs that ensure talent and workforce development at our regional colleges and universities
- Improving the ease of doing business for small businesses
- Supporting the efforts of regional entrepreneurs
- Supporting programs that keep and attract large corporations
- Collaborating with Sedgwick County elected officials to provide infrastructure for economic vitality of the region

These challenges need to be addressed while continuing to spend taxpayers' money wisely.

15. Do you believe the city should adopt, modify before adopting, or not adopt the proposed anti-discrimination ordinance — and why?

I support a non-discrimination ordinance for Wichita. I believe no one should be discriminated against. Voting for protection against discrimination is the right thing to do.

One thing people on both sides of the argument have agreed upon -- the process of the creation of this ordinance is unacceptable

I have never seen an issue that has been so divisive in our community. People have been left out.

It has led to a lot of misinformation and people being reactionary rather than having the time to thoughtfully consider what is being proposed.

Therefore, I agreed to extend the passage of this ordinance until we gain better community engagement in this process. For example, I would like the newly created Wichita Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights Advisory Board involved.

Passing a non-discrimination ordinance is the right thing to do.

Just as important, I support a non-discrimination ordinance that is clearly written and leaves no questions about what it does and does not do, what the complaint process is and how and by whom the ordinance is enforced.

We don't want unintended consequences or omissions from the ordinance to result in legitimate complaints being thrown out or overturned on appeal, because we rushed to pass a faulty ordinance.

In addition, we need to have an entirely new legal and judicial mechanism in place before the ordinance goes into effect in order to process and adjudicate complaints, including the training of staff. None of that exists today.

We need to get this ordinance right, and I'm confident we will by working on it to clarify what it does and to add to it what is missing.

I support a non-discrimination ordinance. I just cannot brush aside the division in our community without addressing their concerns and aspirations.