



STAYING INFORMED: Alton Mayor Brant Walker responds to reelection questions

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Following the reelection of Alton Mayor Brant Walker to a second term after his unprecedented 2013 write-in victory, RiverBender.com sent a list of questions to him via email regarding the city's future.

Those questions were compiled from forum questions, ideas from candidates Scott Dixon, Dan Rauschkolb and Joshua Young, and personal conversations with Alton voters. They were sent following Walker's reelection to his city email address. These exact questions would have been sent to each of the men, assuming they had won the

April 4, 2017, election. Walker responded via the official email address of Kimberly Clark, Walker's Chief of Staff. The answers provided by Walker and his administration



are presented verbatim in Italics below.

What about utilizing renewable energy for local businesses? (Question sourced from Young's promises to utilize solar, wind and possibly hydroelectricity to offset energy costs for local developing businesses).

The City has a Climate Protection and Energy Efficiency (Coolcities) Committee that looks for innovative ways to utilize renewable energy within the city. I would like to see the City go in the direction of renewable energy. Anything that would produce less pollution and fewer greenhouse gases and will not run out as fossil fuels are predicted to, would be a plus for the city and businesses. I would like to see our local businesses turn to other resources such as Solar and Wind Energy, in the future, if there is a way to do so without competing with wildlife habitat and migrating birds.

Could offer public Wi-Fi to downtown area? (Question sourced from Rauschkolb's promise to have Wi-Fi access in a downtown or technology district in order to enhance the ability of start-ups and new businesses to have access to the maximum amounts of resources available).

The City is currently communicating with Charter Communications to check on the probability of offering Wi-Fi to our Downtown area. As you know there are many layers involved in supplying this like the cost of having fiber optics installed, working with

Ameren to have Wi-Fi attached to their poles and the cost that would be incurred by the city, on a monthly basis, to offer this service.

How about an ice skating rink at the riverfront? (Question sourced from Rauschkolb's idea to have an ice skating rink at the Riverfront Park, citing it would be a popular attraction and would stay true to Alton's requirements to utilize that area as a "commons").

The City has pondered an ice skating rink for many years as the park was designed to accommodate such usage. This remains a viable option for the winter season subject to further due diligence. However, any operational costs and further site requirements needed to facilitate the rink would need to be taken into consideration.

Maybe a fishing pier? (Question sourced from an idea mentioned by Rauschkolb at the Alton Main Street Candidate Forum, and mentioned again by both Young and Dixon during a candidate discussion on WBGZ radio)

Currently, there is not a location within Riverfront Park that is conducive for a fishing pier. Portions of the riverfront is city-owned and other areas are federally leased. This would require further assessment and coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Can make the amphitheater more accessible to local bands? (Question sourced from criticisms against Walker made by Dixon regarding the overall use of Riverfront Park, as well as personal conversations with several Alton residents from the spheres of music, non-profit and other entertainment and community-building organizations).

The Amphitheater has a commission that meets every third Monday of the month. If anyone wants to use the amphitheater, they are welcome to attend the meeting to present their plan for usage and dates and as long there are no events scheduled during that time (concerts, weddings) anyone including local bands are able to use it. There is however a fee for the use of the amphitheater.

How about making Gordon Moore more accessible to inner city kids? (Question sourced from an idea proposed by Dixon to justify the park's forefront of most of the city's funding allocations in the Parks and Rec Department)

The City has spoken to Madison County Transit about placing a new bus stop at the park and they have indicated in years past that they've had one there and the bus stop did not get utilized very much. Because we will now have the all-inclusive playground at the park, Madison County Transit is willing to put a bus stop there again. The details are still in the early stages, however we expect to have an answer by the end of the summer.

What going to do with all empty buildings? (Question sourced from several forums, which asked each candidate either this question or some form of it).

The City remains committed to providing incentives and technical assistance to spur the redevelopment of vacant buildings. We are limited in our reach to compel private property owners to sell or redevelop their properties, however we will make use of all available resources and leverage to revitalize vacant buildings.

Could at least clean up the graffiti?(Question sourced from one of Rauschkolb's original campaign promises)

The issue of graffiti on some of our buildings has been brought to the attention of our Public Works Department and they have been and will continue to make every effort to remove it. The city recently purchased a high pressured steam washing and sand blasting machine that would enable the removal of the graffiti.

Could add some community gardens? (Question sourced from ideas of both Dixon and Young as well as personal conversations with people working toward Alton's beautification and sustainability).

The City has worked with Alderwoman Martin and residents of the 4th Ward in starting their first community garden. I support community gardening as long as the produce is distributed evenly among those who participates in the garden and I also support the produce being in our local stores. Currently there is a plan to establish a community garden as part of the comprehensive Norside park redevelopment plan.

Why is African American history so overlooked and what will you do to change that?(Question sourced from a question asked at the Community Awareness Candidate Forum, which featured no question screening).

Honestly, I do not know why it has been overlooked in the past. But I believe the history of our local African Americans should be researched and exhibited in some way. I would welcome the opportunity for my administration to work with historians, members of the African American community as well as with the state and federal government to insure Alton's African American history is known, documented and displayed.

How could utilize the pedestrian bridge better?(Question sourced from personal conversations with Alton voters).

Attracting tenants for available downtown buildings and diversifying the retail offerings within the corridor would be the most practical approach to generate foot traffic. That would, in itself, lend to the increased usage of the pedestrian bridge. This approach

would then have to be coupled with riverfront and amphitheater programming events that will further support the use of the bridge.

Could make Halloween like Mardi Gras? (Question sourced from personal conversations with Alton voters).

The Halloween Parade is the oldest parade in the nation. The parade is sponsored by the East End Improvement Association but we would be open to any ideas to expand or make it better.

How will you implement the community policing platform better, to ensure everyone is held accountable? (Question sourced from several questions asked at each forum as well as coverage of that policing study by RiverBender.com. Walker's administration has overseen a massive attempt to expand Alton's community policing platform as well).

As you know, we are involved in a groundbreaking community policing program conducted by former St. Louis Police Chief Dan Isom and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. This program brings together our police department, community leaders and residents to identify problems in our community and gain valuable citizen input on solving those problems. I am committed to continuing these important efforts to bring together all citizens of Alton in a shared and cooperative effort to improve our city for every citizen. By continuing our strategic plan, we will continue to increase communication between our police department and our youth, increase awareness and attendance of organizations through communication and increase law enforcement community awareness.

How will you make the Fourth Ward feel more integrated into the rest of Alton? (Question sourced from a question asked at the Community Awareness Panel as well as personal conversations with residents of Alton's Fourth Ward).

By continuing to build trust and positive relationships between our Police Department and residents. By continuing my open door policy at City Hall where the community's ideas, suggestions, and complaints are heard. Our Police Department, with support from the administration has also added community events such as Ballin' with a Cop, Coffee with a Cop, and Summons of Joy in an effort to continue to build bridges in the fourth ward as well as throughout the community.

What are you going to do to better utilize grassroots efforts in the city? (Question sourced from Young constantly speaking of grassroots efforts and local "champions" to whom he pledged support if he were to have been elected).

We will continue to work with any group that have ideas to help the City. Currently, we're working with Hope and Drew Mader, who initiated Rock the Hops, to help upgrade Norside Park. We also work with Lucy Playhouse, as well as the Coalition for Concerned Citizens in their efforts to improve the quality of life of citizens in the City of Alton. We're also working with the entire community in bringing money for Gordon Moore Park. Rock Spring 2020 is another grass roots organization.

How do you plan on increasing both tourism and diversity ?(Question sourced from the campaign platforms of both Young and Dixon as well as the focus of the Walker administration during his previous term in office).

The City plans to continue to work hand in hand with the Alton Regional CVB to grow tourism. This coming year we have several new group arrivals, conferences and sporting events that will add to our tourism growth. These include the Illinois Licensed Beverage Association, Haunted America Conference, Mississippi River Games, Kick-It Midwest Regional Championships and several planned motor coach arrivals. In addition, the CVB has expanded its digital marketing efforts to target Midwestern drive markets like Chicago, Kansas City and Indianapolis to lure them in. From a leisure perspective, the CVB has taken a new approach on the visitor guide and seasonal guides to be more storytelling on our city and destination. This does not even mention the growth of events being considered for the riverfront with the American Queen steamboat arrivals and the Liberty Bank Alton Amphitheater concerts and events. 2017 is on pace to be a record year for our industry, with double digit growth very possible!

In regards to diversity, my administration has a proven record of bringing together diverse members of the community to find common ground and provide solutions to issues facing our city and its citizens. My administration revamped the previously dormant Human Relations Commission by creating the Community Relations Commission as a vehicle to bring people of various backgrounds together to solve problems in an effective and constructive manner. I am committed to continuing these important efforts to bring together all citizens of Alton in a shared and cooperative effort to improve our city for every citizen.

Does any of your plan involve gentrification? (Question sourced from personal conversations with Alton voters).

Gentrification has not nor will be an aim or goal of the administration. Gentrification often inherently involves the displacement of low-income populations and small business owners. We seek to foster a local economy and environment which allows segments of the community and business owners to prosper and thrive.

How do you feel about a possible heroin task force utilizing federal and state agencies?(Question sourced from a campaign promise from Rauschkolb to create such a task force).

Safety and security of our residents is my number one priority. The City has already added a third detective to our drug unit to combat the trafficking of heroin that comes into our City. We have and will continue to have our monthly Line in the Sand meetings with the U.S. and Madison County States Attorney's as well as parole officers to combat drug dealers in our City. We have partnered with and begin to exchange information with St. Louis Area police departments and we have increased our efforts in signing up more confidential informants. With that being said, I agree in the participation of a task force that would help target drug dealers.