



WFW: Coatesville Candidate Forum, May 6, 2009

Working Families Win held a forum with the candidates for Coatesville City Council on May 6, 2009. Ingrid Jones (Ward 2) Karl Marking (Ward 4), Kurt Schenk (Ward 4), Kenneth Allen (At Large), Matthew Baker (At Large), Winifred Mayo (At Large), and Joe Hamrick (At Large) attended.

These written responses to the prepared questions were submitted:

Question 1 One of the challenges facing Coatesville is the rise in crime. What is your plan to deal with it?

Ingrid Jones – Ward 2

In my view, hopefully, with council confluence, we will take the initiative to reinstitute the bicycle patrol and the narcotics division. Then, permit law enforcement officers to prudently and reasonably do the job they have been trained to do. Let them do their job.

Karl Marking – Ward 4

I think an important first step would be to acknowledge the fact that there are those in the City's administration who would argue that crime has not risen, but actually fallen and would be able to point to a certain slice of the statistics that could - on the surface - support that. I think for those of us who actually live in the city - rather than its outskirts - we know the real story because we see it in our daily lives.

First we must enable the police department to hire additional qualified resources. In terms of hiring needs, consider that 20% of the police force (according to an article in the Daily Local at the time) left after the appointment of Chief Matthews. Or, consider Lansdowne. Lansdowne is a city of remarkable similarity to Coatesville in both physical size and demographics, yet they have 3 patrol officers on duty at any given time and we have only 2. I have actually called the police to report a crime and been told "I'm sorry; both officers are busy right now. We can't send anyone." I was door knocking two weeks ago and was told a similar story by a resident in 4-1.

Second, we need to better utilize the resources already in place. For example, why haven't we been using the PennDOT cameras which have been in place since XXX to assist the police in solving crimes along Lincoln Highway? I've attended meetings where I've heard County Government employees state that the Coatesville police department was told by the city's administration NOT to use them. It is also my understanding that the police department was told NOT to file citations for malicious mischief or petty crimes (such as the graffiti that has plagued the city) in an effort to cook the crime statistics.

The city recently approved the purchase of its own cameras, but until such time as they are installed, we should begin the immediate use of the PennDOT cameras.

Once we've restored the infrastructure, including the narcotics task force, we need to

- Rigorously and appropriately enforce codes relevant to run-down properties which are targets for petty crime and mischief and keep property values low which in turn takes money away from the city's tax base;
- get parental and community involvement through the enforcement of curfew ordinances already in the city's charter, and
- we need to actually follow-up and process the 7,000 plus outstanding arrest warrants with \$2 MIL in associated fines (1/2 of which comes to the city). If we don't enforce the laws, there's little incentive for people to obey the laws.

Ken Allen – At Large

Crime is a symptom of other deeply rooted problems. I believe the attack on crime must be two-fold: love and justice. Justice because of the overall systematic oppression placed on our communities. There are issues of training (or the lack of), transportation, adequate and affordable housing, as well as job opportunities (especially for ex-offenders). We also need to develop more positive activities for our youth. Police action must be swift and fair, dealt with love and not malice. And they must begin to rebuild public trust. We are slowly losing our sense of community and council can help by showing love. How? First to each other, then to the community by listening, engaging, and really serving the needs of our community. Loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. People rarely commit crimes against those they love.

Matthew Baker – At Large

1. Hiring of more police officers
 - Use these officers in restarting the Narcotics division of the Coatesville Police Department
 - To be used in restarting the Cops on Bikes patrols
 - To be used in establishing Coatesville Walking Patrol
2. Follow-up on outstanding warrants
3. Install the surveillance cameras – monitor and determine if more are needed
4. Town watch/Guardian Angels – use them in collaboration with CPD. We have over 11,500 residents, many of which would step forward to work with CPD to help make this program successful

Winifred Mayo – At Large

First of all, I'm not a trained law enforcement officer but I do believe that crime has escalated. My belief is that there must be a balance as to how a law officer handles criminal issues as well as integrating into the community. My investigation has shown that we are lacking in this area. I think it's critical that a candidate understands what the budget is for our law enforcement and how each of the items in that budget are applied. Once I determine how much money is budgeted and where it's supposed to be spent then I'll be in a better position to make recommendation as to how to improve our much needed law enforcement areas. The bottom line is that I do agree that our law enforcement needs help and it's extremely important this issue is dealt with very carefully but rapidly.

Joe Hamrick – At Large

A little more than 3 years ago Coatesville had an efficient and respected police force, stewarded by an effective and competent police chief. There was nothing wrong with our police department.

However, the newly elected city council members offered very little if any support for Chief Belize. Having decided to resign his post as Coatesville's Chief of Police, Belize personally recommended Lieutenant Canale as his replacement. Yet this recommendation fell upon deaf ears. Regretfully the council felt otherwise. The subsequent appointment of Chief Matthews has contributed to the streets of Coatesville returning to the hands of those individuals who continue to pollute our community with crime, drug traffic, violence and arson.

Now that Chief Matthews is gone, council did the right thing and selected Lieutenant Canale as the new chief of police. As a resident, if I've got to march the streets again like I did in '95 when I was a member of the Coatesville Hard Hats who routinely marched through the streets of Coatesville in an attempt to keep these drug dealers from peddling their wares. I am prepared to do this again to help Chief Canale. If elected I will work on getting more money from the Weed and Seed program for additional officers. I will also work on looking for additional funding in other areas for support of our police department.

Question 2 Transparency is often considered a sign of good government. Do you agree? What aspects of city government do you want more available?

Ingrid Jones – Ward 2

Regarding transparency in government: perhaps it may be for those on the inside looking out, but sometimes not for those on the outside looking in. I sincerely would like for us to have open government that works for the people with strict accountability and services in all departments.

Karl Marking – Ward 4

Transparency has been a cornerstone of my campaign since I first decided to run, so yes. I agree. The short answer is anything of public record. Specifically:

- I think the budget should be made readily available (both in print and online)
- Any year-end accounting filings should be made readily available; where allowed by law (both in print and online)
- I think any time a discussion is scheduled for a council meeting that will involve short hand-outs, said hand-outs should be available to those in attendance. If you attend council meetings with any regularity, you know I'm talking about a fairly small number.
- I think the agenda should be made available on the city's website by close of day the Thursday before each meeting to afford people the opportunity to attend given the particular items on that week's agenda.
- Further to this point, I think that the public should be able to speak on each issue *in advance* of the council vote. This is how it used to be until the 4 incumbent seats currently up for election changed the policy at their very first session. The council serves the people who elected them, yet they marginalize the people in attendance and move them to the back of the agenda. In fact, council meetings have a whole segment on the agenda for audience comments and questions, yet council picks and chooses the questions they want to respond to. Regardless of the comment or question, council should respond consistently.
- I think the salaries paid to consultants in lieu of hiring a full-time staff member should absolutely be disclosed.
- Finally, I'd like to see:
 - Every department head should have to sign off on both receiving and understanding the state's code of ethics for municipalities
 - Everyone with hiring authority should have to sign-off on the county's nepotism policy

- Every lead, manager, council and committee person involved in a major project should have to disclose any ties – whether professional or familial. This will greatly reduce both the fact and appearance of any wrong-doing or ethical misconduct or conflicts.

Ken Allen – At Large

I believe in open and transparent government and we can start that by changing the structure of how meetings are held. The issues should first be shared with the community and then there should be a feedback session before decisions are made. That way the people have a say in the process. I believe that people have a pretty good idea of what will benefit them. Again it is about giving a voice to the voiceless. We are representatives, not kings or rulers. Finally the decisions that are made should be explained. We should also be up front and open concerning city finances. Transparency shows honesty and integrity, which is sorely needed.

Matthew Baker – At Large

Yes absolutely agree and it's something strongly missing in the current administration. In my opinion here are some of the aspects of city that should be transparent:

1. Financial documentation
 - a. Budget – How is it that West Chester, Phoenixville, Lancaster do but we don't?
 - b. Financial Statement – again other cities have
 - i. Basic financial statements
 - ii. Audit report findings
 - iii. Adopted legislation
 - iv. Public records access –
 1. Instructions
 2. If you are denied – next steps
 - v. Pension (police/fire) information
 - vi. Bids, RFPs, RFQs – currently only information listed for Weed and Seed. So where is the rest of it? Or are we not creating RFQs for expenditures
2. Agenda for upcoming meetings – currently not posted on Coatesville website
3. Website
 - a. Upcoming community events page
 - i. Examples:
 1. Street/park clean up
 2. Parades
 3. Picnic
 4. Socials
 5. Revivals

Winifred Mayo – At Large

All things that are being worked on should be made available to the public. One way of doing that is to print handouts to be given at the council meetings or put on the city's website as things move along. However certain personnel, legal and real estate matters cannot be made public until certain actions have taken place as they would jeopardize not only the privacy issues mandated by law and certainly the negotiating position that would disbenefit the city and citizens should these certain matters be put out to the public before their time. Further, like in my previous tenure, I feel more citizen input is a must, therefore I would be very open to hearing views and requests for information by the citizens.

Joe Hamrick – At Large

Transparency in government is important to many tax paying citizens in Coatesville. Each and every taxpayer has a right to remain informed on how the city is spending their tax dollars. And not only do they have the right to know where this money is being channeled, they have a right to expect to see their neighborhoods improved upon with these funds. If they continue to pay into a system which provides them with very little return it leaves them feeling cheated and overlooked. I believe it is important as a candidate to keep the public informed concerning the city's budget and its respective financial obligations. City residents should be able to access budget information on a quarterly basis either on the internet or at city hall. Additionally the budget for the city should be presented to the citizens in a document which is a line by line list of our income revenue and expenditures.

Question 3 – Do you think the City of Coatesville will need more revenue? If yes, how will you and council raise it?

Ingrid Jones – Ward 2

Regarding the need for more revenue: yes, probably – eventually all the municipalities do. We already have in place infrastructure for 20,000 people, that is, with water and sewage. What we do not have is enough people paying real estate taxes. There are around 11,500 residents in Coatesville. Less than half of them pay real estate taxes...or most don't pay, as they are renters.

What we want is new residents and new businesses that will pay property taxes. In other words, we could bring in new condos, townhouses and businesses that would lure new taxpayers. Then, should they later re-sell, that too would bring in even more revenue and tax money. Perhaps then the tax burden could be somewhat lighter on the current taxpayers who are shouldering the load.

Karl Marking – Ward 4

It's difficult to say as I've never seen a full accounting of what money we have and where it's being spent. But I can tell you one thing, should we need more revenue my solution won't involve raising taxes if at all possible. We live in one of, if not the, highest taxed area in the county. . . and yet seem to enjoy the lowest standard of living.

Firstly, I'd like to see revenue generating positions such as the parking officer restored. This position usually pays for itself around the midpoint in a year and then the next 6 months generates income for the city.

Second, I'd like to see the code department's citations enforced. Just as an example, I recently took it to task to get resolution for a neighbor in a rental. The fuel oil tank failed leaving the tenants without heat from Feb 6 till the city finally evicted them through the act of classifying the house as uninhabitable some 6 weeks later. I made many phone calls to the PA Department of environmental protection and put so much light on the situation that finally the council voted to reject the landlord's permit in the city. However, in the process it came to light that the landlord allegedly owed the city over a \$100,000 in fines and fees already. As I mentioned earlier this evening I have found out that there are over 7,000 unprocessed citations and warrants totaling over \$2 MIL dollars outstanding in the city of Coatesville as a whole. Half of that would go to the city if processed. I'd like to see that happen long before a tax rate hike.

I'd also like to see the city explore the availability of grants. There are so many grants available to a city of our size and with the issues we face. I've heard members of the current administration

argue that they don't want a budget reliant on grant funds, but at the same time, create budgets reliant on home sales in one of the worst real estate markets in our time. There is no shame in asking for assistance from others and I think sometime pride gets in the way of progress.

What I don't want to see is any more tapping of the trust fund. It's a bad model to borrow from Peter to pay Paul.

Ken Allen – At Large

I believe that first we need to be better stewards of the revenue that we have. It's not our money but the community's. In looking at stabilizing the budget and obtaining more funds let's start by lowering the taxes. That would invite people and businesses to stay as well as bring new businesses and homeowners to Coatesville. Why do people move out? High taxes. Lowering the taxes would likely invite more people in and effectively raise the tax base.

Matthew Baker – At Large

Yes absolutely

Code enforcement

- Collection of outstanding fines and code violations

Warrant enforcement

- Collection of outstanding fines

Parking enforcement officer

- Meter fines/parking violations – Yes we will have to hire this person. How do we pay for it? Eliminate Public Relations Specialist position and force our city manager to do his job. Take that money and rehire parking enforcement officer.

Note: with the increase of officers we can then enforce the following:

- Speeding
- Loitering
- Littering
- Noise

RDA – Separate website that provides prospective buyers details on city owned properties

Streamlining city hall – lower costs

- Parking tickets
- Trash bills
- Property violations

Winifred Mayo – At Large

The bottom line is the city has had problems paying their bills. It would be nice to have more revenue however the reality of that happening would be mostly by raising taxes which I'm absolutely not in favor of. I do believe that enough cuts can be made on items that are considered to be wasteful spending. I want to make it clear that I'm not interested in cutting services, that the answer is in straightening out the items that are considered wasteful spending. A few areas that need attention are: the city considered handling its own track pick up and that would allow us to maintain a budget of what the current landfill and disposal fees are and also allow the city to create jobs. Another example is to consider eliminating unneeded consulting that is being paid for monthly for computer and networking services not used or not needed by the city. My investigation into this matter leads me to believe that part of these services and recommendations could be provided by the Coatesville Area School District free of charge.

Joe Hamrick – At Large

Of course Coatesville needs more revenue to support its daily operation costs. To increase revenue I would recommend that city council looks into a potential parking authority. We own the property across from the Chetty site on 3rd Ave. and Lincoln Hwy. The city could break ground on its first parking lot on this site, which would provide necessary parking for new businesses in the downtown area. City council needs to refocus its attention upon its downtown business district instead of wasting countless hours on the Flats, which after 8 years still remains an undeveloped eyesore which has generated zero revenue for the city. We also need to enforce collections of the code violations and trash fees.