

## 2024 Portland City Council Election – Tips for Making Voting Decisions

I spend a lot of time thinking about elections. In part, because I run Civics workshops and, in part, because I just want to make the best choices I can.

One thing to keep in mind, overall: One simple test of a City Council candidate's fitness for office is whether the candidate is advocating issues which are actually under the jurisdiction of the city [versus the state or the federal gov]. Are they talking about real issues in your district, and in Portland? Or, are they focused on issues that are under the primary responsibility of the state or federal government? Your City Councilors represent you in the CITY government, for the CITY's and YOUR DISTRICT's issues – that's where they should be focused.

How will I make my choices? I use three key criteria:

1. I decide what matters most to me. Usually, there are one or two major issues that I care deeply about. Obviously, other things matter, too. But, for these issues I really need to know that candidates appreciate their significance.
2. I don't want to hear platitudes or cut-and-paste, statements that are essentially the same thing coming out of multiple candidate mouths. Anyone – and I do mean anyone – can recite the complaint of the day/month/year, be it graffiti, homeless folks on the street, or taxes. If it sounds like canned talk – guess what, it is. Find people who can speak about a topic like they really understand it. And, finally...
3. Look for candidates with real knowledge and solutions. It's one thing to care about an issue as a candidate. It's another thing to really understand that issue. And, even better, to understand it enough to be able to offer solutions. Another reflection of depth of knowledge is knowing what the city has already done or, is in the process of doing, regarding a topic.

“Actions speak louder than words.” Do they have actual experience working on the issues that matter to you?

In short, figure out what matters to you, examine what a candidate says about those topics, and evaluate whether they really seem to have more than a superficial understanding about the topic. Finally, do they have any serious – not cookie-cutter – plans/solutions to offer.

Evaluating candidates takes time, but it's well worth it. **These folks will make decisions that will affect your life.** If you want City Councilors to take what matters to you seriously, then take how you evaluate them seriously!

Resources to help you evaluate:

Candidate websites

News and TV articles/segments [search Google/Yahoo News and/or local news media sites]

Candidate Forums

Social media postings

If you have questions of candidates – contact them!

If you have questions of candidates – get 3-4 people together and ask for a meeting!

**Share freely.** Donna L Cohen, MLIS, MEd, Civics for Adults, Portland, Oregon [www.civictinker.info](http://www.civictinker.info)

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