



A Working Plan for Carbondale

Integrity, Responsibility, Opportunity

As a candidate for mayor, I have many goals and plans for the city. In the course of the campaign I have discussed these ideas, learned new perspectives, and built plans that use the best of all these sources. I have heard a great number of ideas for how Carbondale can be a better community for everyone. Whether I am listening to workers, retirees, business owners or students, I hear both an optimism and a desire to be a part of building our community. This working plan highlights many of the good ideas I would like to work on with the citizens of Carbondale and our region.

For each topic I have noted concerns people share, ideas for how we can address those concerns, and steps we can take as a city.

Integrity in campaigning

Carbondale, like all of Illinois, is concerned about ethics in government. I am fortunate to have learned from many people over many years about how to limit the influence of money in politics. I have been a board member of the Jackson County League of Women Voters and the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. In these roles I have learned from people like Lillian Adams here in Carbondale and Cindi Canary in Chicago, two people dedicated to making the political process work for everyone. And having grown up in a political family, I know firsthand that honesty and politics do not have to be conflicting ideas.

My goal is to make the political process more about democracy and less about selling jobs and influence. Illinois places very few limits on campaign finance and disclosure. For example, people can contribute thousands of dollars to local campaigns and hide behind names of businesses, trusts or other organizations. My standards, and your expectations, are higher. I firmly believe that no one person should be able to donate

huge amounts of money, and I believe you should know who my contributors are. You should not have to take my word for it -- you should be able to make an informed decision when you vote.

Disclosure of my personal income and assets can help voters make an informed decision. Voters should be able to know what I own and how I have invested. This information can help voters determine whether I can be a fair leader of our community. I also believe this campaign should be about issues and ideas, not personal attacks. In order to address these concerns, here are the steps I have taken and will continue to take. I challenge all other candidates to follow.

Action:

1. I will not accept campaign donations over \$50.
2. I will not accept campaign donations from city employees.
3. I will disclose the names of donors to my campaign.
4. I have made public my most recent tax return and a report on my income and assets. I will make these disclosures annually as mayor.
5. I have signed and will abide by the Illinois Code of Fair Campaign Practices.

Openness in governing

Carbondale citizens want to have access to and be a part of our government. This is a simple request. Many Carbondale residents, like Leslie Duram, have asked me about how the city decided to purchase the American Tap property at three times its appraised value from a convicted felon. This is information which should be available to the public, but the majority of the council has continued to keep this information hidden. I have worked to make this information available, and I will continue to do so. This is just one example of the ways in which Carbondale government can and should be more open.

My goal is to provide as much public access to city records as is possible. Some matters, like personnel decisions, will still have to be closed, but most business should be conducted out in the open. If there is a question as to whether or not a matter should be discussed in public, I will favor openness. I will use the city's public access television channel to make sure that citizens have access to council meetings, planning and zoning commission meetings and liquor control commission meetings as well.

Action:

1. Regularly evaluate, with the council, city clerk and city attorney, minutes from closed meetings, with the goal of disclosure whenever possible. When closed meeting records cannot be made available to the public, I will provide as much information as is possible as to why information is not available.
2. Disclose, to the extent possible, what kinds of discussions will take place in closed meetings and why they cannot be made public.
3. Use the city's website to notify the public about upcoming council agenda items as soon as possible. More advance notice will allow for more citizen participation.
4. Broadcast public meetings, including liquor control commission meetings on the city's public access television channel.
5. Promote, rather than discourage, full participation for Carbondale citizens in public meetings.

Responsibility with our money

Carbondale residents are concerned about how our city money is being spent. As private individuals we pay close attention to how we use our own money. The city should steward its resources in the same way. I have learned a great deal about planning from Carbondale resident Linz Brown. Linz expresses well that city resources should be spent based on identified priorities and needs rather than on slogans. Lee Fronabarger, who I met through his work for his neighborhood in Carbondale, has helped me see government spending as an investment. In Lee's work for a public outdoor pool he is always focused on comparing the dividends that will result from different priorities in spending.

My goals are to use our city resources as wisely as any of us would use our own household resources. At home we don't spend without understanding our budget. In our family budgets we have long term and short term goals, and we often make short term sacrifices to attain a long term goal. Often we have to say no to something that is just beyond our means. The city's money, your money, should be spent as carefully as we spend limited resources in our own families' budgets.

Action:

1. Increase council and citizen participation in the budget process through monthly presentations at council meetings from city departments. These presentations will allow us to better understand how our money is being used and what future needs may be.

2. Increase citizen participation in the process of identifying needs for capital improvements in the city. Actively seek input from neighborhood associations and other organizations within the city.
3. Reexamine spending on a city-wide repaving program to determine whether all roads need the proposed improvements. Make road improvements on a pay as you go basis whenever possible.
4. Identify and take advantage of opportunities to reduce energy consumption by the city, including use of more efficient city vehicles where possible.

Environmental responsibility

There is interest and inspiration to be better stewards of the environment everywhere, from Memorial Hospital's energy planning to Kris Schachel and the Southern Illinois Center for a Sustainable Future. My most direct inspiration in this area comes from my daughters. Reilly and Brennan are often reminding me of how we can recycle or compost more than we already do in our household. Many young people are passionate about the environment, and I welcome their participation and leadership.

My most immediate goal is to address city government as a consumer of energy. Since all of us together pay the power bill for the city, we have both an economic incentive and an environmental incentive to reduce our energy use. The city can be a leader in energy conservation. The city can also be a leader in some very simple ways to address environmental issues. Planting more trees is one of those basic steps, encouraged by Nobel prize winning advocate Wangari Maathai. And the city's recycling program, while good, can be improved.

Action:

1. Conduct an energy audit of city facilities. Ensure we are taking advantage of simple steps like using florescent bulbs and adequate insulation.
2. Budget to invest in solar panels on top of the city-owned Eurma Hayes Center. This investment can cut our energy use in half for that building, and in doing so, pay for itself. Assess whether other city facilities, such as the waste water treatment plants, can also benefit from solar power.
3. Use the expertise of the city's forester to help neighborhood groups choose and plant trees throughout Carbondale.

Safe Neighborhoods

As a smaller city, one with an actual sense of community, we have many advantages in the area of safety. We more often know our neighbors and can look after each other. This sense of community also means that we can respond better when we share concerns about our safety. Incidents of violence in the last two years have generated an appropriate community response. As neighbors get together to talk about safety, some of the same concerns come up repeatedly. Fran Fanning, a Cherry Street resident, represents many of those concerns well. Like many Carbondale residents, Fran lives in an area where some houses are beautifully cared for and others show a lack of care by the owner. Fran recognizes that city codes address much of the disrepair, but that the codes are often not enforced. A house in disrepair makes an easy target for crime.

Most landlords work hard and take pride in the housing they offer. Better information for both renters and landlords will serve everyone. If renters can get an idea about the reliability of a particular landlord or address, and landlords can more easily verify a renter's history, the rental market will operate more effectively, better serving renters, landlords, and the entire community.

As a former prosecutor, I understand the many levels at which we address safety concerns. My goals are to promote neighborhood cohesion and increase the effectiveness of our code enforcement system, both of which should result in increased security. Promoting neighborhood associations will promote safety. Police would rather respond to a call about trespassing at a neighbor's empty house than to respond to a report of burglary when the family returns home. And effective code enforcement can eliminate the unlit doorways or broken door locks that are an invitation to crime. Stepped up code enforcement will not be free. A small fee for rental home inspections will cover some costs, but we have to be ready to pay more as a city to secure benefits for everyone. Safer neighborhoods and better housing will help us recruit and retain students, professors, doctors, workers and business owners.

Action:

1. Promote neighborhood associations through crime watch programs and neighborhood association start up kits. Make it easy for neighborhood groups to learn from each other. Designate a member of the city planning staff to help neighborhood groups work with the city.
2. Build code enforcement into an effective, efficient system, one that responds to needs of the entire community. Pay for the system, in part, through a small inspection fee.
3. Use the internet to make more information available about specific properties, specific landlords and specific tenants. Use the city's website to provide information about both successful inspections and code violations.

4. Expand the scope of the housing construction incentive program to promote conversion of obsolete rental units to owner occupied housing.
5. Enforce codes that prohibit massive dumping of trash on city right of ways when tenants move out. The city should not clean up after irresponsible landlords or tenants.

Economic development

Everyone in Carbondale has a stake in economic development. The health of our community is dependant on a continuing variety of jobs and opportunity. Our two largest employers, SIU and Southern Illinois Healthcare, can attract more people to live, learn and work in Carbondale if there are a wide variety of jobs available in the community. Retail and service businesses depend on having a base of customers with money to spend.

I'm familiar with the risks that business owners take. As a young lawyer in practice with Treva O'Neill, I enjoyed the process of meeting and representing clients. My income was a percentage of the business that I generated. I had a keen understanding that a day off, while pleasant, meant that I was not earning any money. My biggest investment was my time. Most business owners, like Katrina Phillips of Rag Wear, have to invest even more in terms of both time and money. I want to promote that spirit of investment in Carbondale.

My goals are to promote the best of Carbondale businesses, take advantage of our existing strengths, and promote a better balance among public and private sector jobs. In order to promote the best in Carbondale businesses, I would like to work with the business community to recognize businesses that stay in Carbondale for the long haul. There are many programs that offer incentives to new and expanding businesses, but we should not ignore the many businesses that have been the backbone of our local economy for many years. In terms of new and expanding businesses, we need to focus first on taking advantage of the areas where we are currently strong. We can identify and recruit businesses that can complement our strengths in the areas of education and health care. And where we can, we need to promote a spirit of entrepreneurship – that willingness to invest.

Action:

1. Budget for a full time city employee who has the sole mission of business development and advocacy.
2. Establish a program of recognition and appreciation of businesses that have stayed in Carbondale and helped build our community.
3. In cooperation with organizations that recruit and support businesses, establish a program of regular assessment of the needs of local businesses.

4. Work with major employers to encourage their employees to live in Carbondale.
5. Establish a pilot program of microcredit, very small loans, for area youth who have a desire to build their own small businesses.

Opportunity for everyone:

Carbondale represents opportunity for many people. Students come from all over the world to have the opportunity for an education at SIU. City government can be a part of ensuring that Carbondale stands for opportunity for everyone. People like Linda Flowers, Principal of Thomas School, work to provide that kind of opportunity every day. Linda has worked hard, with a coalition of community and university volunteers, to bring string music education to every second and third grader in the Carbondale Elementary Schools. The program is unique in Southern Illinois and has been selected as a model program for the state.

Linda Flowers and the John Thomas String Program are just one example of what we in Carbondale can do to bring opportunity to everyone. I want to accentuate our community focus on education at all levels, from early childhood to continuing education. I understand that the best predictor for student success is not wealth or social status but parental education. In Carbondale, educational opportunity is everywhere. Let's take advantage of education, Carbondale's central industry, and improve opportunities for everyone.

Action:

1. Use the office of mayor to highlight the best of Carbondale's educational opportunities. Challenge the negative assumptions about Carbondale public schools.
2. Leverage city funding of community organizations so that our money is being used to add opportunity whenever possible. For example, use funding as a way to promote a city wide reading program.
3. Establish a voluntary system of citizen service to the community. Use the city website and newsletter to link volunteers with opportunities and link groups that have complimentary missions.
4. Increase opportunities for student internships within the city.

Intergovernmental cooperation

Carbondale is not an island. Our city is part of a county, state and nation. We are also part of other local governmental units such as school and park districts. Working cooperatively with each of these other governments is in our best interest. I first worked with Sheriff Bob Burns when I was a prosecutor. I understand how his ability to address the meth problem affects Carbondale citizens in many ways. And I often talk with my neighbor Ann Knewitz, an active participant in local government, about how the city and the park district can work in ways that are mutually beneficial.

My goal is to work cooperatively with other governments. As the daughter of two Illinois state legislators, I have literally grown up around government. Ties are important, and bridges are too easy to burn. Maintaining a working relationship, even in the face of disagreement on issues, is required.

Action:

1. Work directly with SIU President Glenn Poshard to maximize state and federal funding for SIU, the anchor of our local economy.
2. Work with Senators Durbin and Obama and Congressman Costello to make sure Carbondale can fully benefit from federal opportunities.
3. Work with Attorney General Lisa Madigan and other state officials to make sure they understand the unique needs of Carbondale.
4. Work with the Jackson County Board, other Jackson County elected officials and leaders of the Carbondale school districts, park district, and others to help each other in the many areas where we have common interests and goals.

Sheila Simon
404 North Springer
Carbondale, IL 62901

sheila@sheilasimon.com