

Meet the candidate: Linda Vacon looks for 8th term on Holyoke City Council in Ward 5

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HOLYOKE — Linda Vacon is serving in her seventh term as Ward 5 city councilor.

She's served as chair of charter and rules, public safety, and ordinance committees. And she wants to have the council seat again.

Ahead of Tuesday, The Republican reached out to all candidates for the opposed City Council seats to answer a short questionnaire.

Find more candidates and responses in the past week's print editions or online at masslive.com/topic/election.

Name: Linda Vacon

Age: Over 21

Address: 7 Pheasant Drive

Profession: Retired health services director

Position running for: City councilor, Ward 5

Introductory statement: I am running for reelection, first, because I enjoy serving the citizens of Ward 5 and Holyoke and, second, it gives me the opportunity to bring my educational background, a master of education, and management experience to the table to help practice good government.

My priorities have been constituent service; supporting quality of life and preserving neighborhoods and looking out for overburdened taxpayers; working to keep an affordable local government and protect rights of voters to control local issues. I do the homework, research information and ensure transparency of information for the public as required.

It has been an honor to serve, and I will do my best for Ward 5 for the next two years.

Question 1: What is the biggest problem in the city and how would you address it?

Affordability for residents who live in Holyoke is a big problem. The combination of increased property values, ever-increasing property taxes and rent, along with fees, the cost of food, gas and heat, are causing many to struggle, even after paying off a mortgage. One way to address this is to evaluate every open position in city government to ensure it is essential, rather than simply fill it because it is in the budget.

Question 2: The City Council always struggles to keep taxes low, while providing needed services and making advancements. How specifically will you balance the three?

The reality is the current City Council has few cuts to proposed budgets presented by our mayor. The first step to have balance is to actually reduce expenses in the budget process. In the last budget, new positions were added. The first step is to have a City Council where seven members will vote to make reasonable cuts to right-size our city government. We cannot tax and spend our way out of the current fiscal situation.

Question 3: The housing crisis continues to take a toll on residents and those who want to move to the city. How should the city attack the problem?

Some strategies to address our housing shortage include: One, our city can share information with residents of changes in state law that give them flexibility to provide housing for relatives/others on their property when they meet certain regulations. Two, the Building Department can be more collaborative with property owners while ensuring compliance with regulations. Three, we can continue to seek private investment and provide tax relief for contractors able to renovate vacant buildings.

Question 4: What types of development would you like to attract to the city and how would you do it?

We need a variety of retail, restaurant and manufacturing. We have a reputation for being a very difficult city when it comes to opening or expanding a business as the permitting process remains cumbersome. We need to improve this process. People reportedly establish their business in other communities due to frustration with delays in our city. The Schermerhorn project is one example of delays. We look forward to the re-opening of this Ward 5 restaurant.