



Iowa City Area
Business Partnership's
2021 Voter's Guide
to the North Liberty Mayoral
and City Council Elections

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North Liberty Mayoral Candidate 2021



Chris Hoffman

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Community Service: I've served on the North Liberty City Council since 2007, and as Mayor Pro Tem since 2017.

Prior to that role, I served on the city's Communications Commission from April 2004 to November 2007.

I've coached, or assisted, our daughter's softball and basketball teams from 2012 to 2019.

I also volunteer with the NL Optimist Club (2012 to present) and the Friends of Coralville Lake (2016 - present).

What do you love most about the community? I love the people. Our ability to grow and thrive as a community is because of those that call North Liberty home. Our willingness to volunteer, innovate, support and connect with each other is special to this growing city.

With so many issues to address, what would be your primary focus on the council? I'm running for mayor, but the answer/context is similar. From my perspective as a 14-year member of the city council, part of the mayor's role is to help guide the council's discussion and provide resources they need to make the best decision they can..

I've been a part of hundreds of conversations regarding issues in the city. One constant during those conversations has been the involvement of our community. Whether we're planning Blues and BBQ or the city's annual budget, the feedback and support from so many voices is critical to the success of the project or the policy.

As a current member of council, I know the support a mayor can bring is critical to the outcome and success of a conversation or decision. I am well positioned to not only provide context, but to also participate in the discussion to support the council's role.

Finally, advocating and recruiting for the next group of leaders in the city is a role the mayor can/should take on. Our city commissions and boards are filled with caring, compassionate and involved members of our community. They are critical to the future successes of our city.

How do you define economic development? I would define Economic Development as the desired outcome of inclusive planning, aligned public/private benefits, and equitable policy and delivery of services. Economic development starts as a seed. If planned for and nurtured, it will provide jobs, housing, recreation, and support to the entire community.

Economic development can come from any number of sources. It can come from a new business providing a needed product or service to our city, with both public and private funding support. It can come from policy decisions from the city council regarding how to allocate an annual budget. It can come from the city's Zoning and Usage ordinances, specifically in regards to housing inventory and land use.

The point is, economic development can come from anywhere and can have a different effect on each of us. Aligning our collective visions with input from our entire community is critical to the future success, and creation of, economic development.

It's also important to recognize the long-term impact our decisions can have on our community and our residents/businesses. By supporting our businesses, or providing a service such as transit, we will achieve significant economic development that serves our community for generations to come.

Our community continues to grow. How should the city plan for future growth? In a phrase, our city should plan for future growth just like it has for the past 10 years. When I first joined the city council in 2007, the city's To Do list was significant and behind schedule. By around 2012, I would say we had designed, planned, and constructed a clear path to staying on top of, and ahead of, our growth. Since then, there are very few "growth related issues" that surprise us. In fact, I call this work the Blocking and Tackling of running a city.

It's important to pause here, if I may, to address growth in North Liberty. When I hear my challenger say the city is "struggling" to keep up, I wonder what he thinks he sees? We've invested millions of dollars over the past 14 years in new roads, water and wastewater lines, bike paths, city parks, and community facilities. We are most certainly busy, and growing, but definitely not "struggling" to do so. In fact, our 5-year Capital Improvement Plan is added to and worked on every year with the guidance and input of our city staff, our council and our community. Schools have been built, neighborhoods developed, and new businesses started, because we've planned for it.

What are the most important issues facing businesses in our community and how can the city support them? I think the most important issue facing businesses today is the availability of workforce. The competition for workforce has put the focus on businesses to differentiate themselves as much as possible in benefits, location, compensation, perks, etc.

North Liberty can support businesses in two big ways, and is already doing so I believe.

First, affordable and diverse housing options have been a hallmark of our development over the past 10 years. Whether it is a rental unit, a small first-time home, larger home, or congregate living, we can probably fit most needs.

Secondly, providing transit within or outside our community. We have transit partnerships with Johnson County SEATS and Coralville to bring workforce to/from North Liberty and NLTAP to provide service inside North Liberty.

How can the city help attract and retain a diverse workforce? To expand on the previous question first, I know the city has been studying/adapting Transit options for almost 15 years. In that time, we've learned to be flexible in how we deliver Transit service and to pay for it.

Sadly, the biggest takeaway we find from working on Transit over the years is that there is not as high of a demand for usage as there is in Iowa City and Coralville. The University of Iowa is a major reason those services are so widely used in those cities. A large part of North Liberty's population commute by car as their means of transportation to Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, and many other regional destinations. To address Transit, and attract a diverse workforce, our standing Transit Committee has considered ride-sharing programs with some of the city's larger employers, as a perk for working in North Liberty. A big-picture solution to Transit could be in the works in the coming years, with the connection of a passenger rail line between Iowa City and North Liberty. Future plans for the line could take it to Cedar Rapids in the decades to come as well.

What unique perspective or skills do you bring to the council? My 14 years on city council are a big advantage I bring as mayor. I've been a part of every decision regarding the future of this city since 2007 and bring that experience/knowledge with me.

I think a unique skill I bring is the ability to adapt to new information. As a city councilor, and hopefully mayor, it's incredibly important to be open to new ideas and information. I always have an opinion on the topics we will discuss, but I know I will be prepared to learn more when we start.

Working with 5 city councilors as mayor, it is truly a team effort and collaboration.

North Liberty Mayoral Candidate 2021



Mike Mbanza

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Community Service: For the past 10 years, I have dedicated my life to public service: I have worked for different nonprofit organizations, and I currently work locally as a lawyer and serve as the Executive Director of Path of Hope, a nonprofit organization that I founded, with the mission to help low-income families. In the past year alone, we have helped thousands of low-income families with basic needs such as housing, employment, transportation, connection to local resources, social adjustments, etc. I also serve as a volunteer in the Neighborhood Ambassador Program for the Harvest Estates neighborhood in North Liberty.

What do you love most about the community? I love that North Liberty is a young community and a family-friendly small town that offers residents options for local employment, medical and professional services, restaurants, grocery stores, parks, a community, and recreation center, library, and senior citizen facilities.

With so many issues to address, what would be your primary focus on the council? The population of North Liberty is rapidly growing and our current city government is struggling to keep up. North Liberty, the second-fastest-growing city in Iowa, currently has about 20, 479 residents; but we continue to depend on services borrowed from nearby cities like Coralville and Iowa City to meet resident needs. Our city has neither a city transit service nor an ADA Paratransit Service of its own; our Streets and Parks Department is short-staffed and does not have enough snow trucks and street sweepers, and does not have enough space to store the equipment it does have. Some of the trucks are damaged and need to be replaced. the fire department needs a truck with a ladder that can reach the top of tall buildings like

the greenstate credit union; currently, there is none. there is not enough diversity in our police department, city services, city government, and local schools including elementary, middle, and high schools. Racial inequality needs to be addressed.

As Mayor I hope to work on the following in the next 4 years:

1. City tax money will be spent in a way that gets the greatest value out of the services and infrastructure that our residents depend on.
2. We will have a city-owned transit and ADA paratransit services;
3. We will have two fire stations with staff working onsite 24/7 and enough storage and ladder trucks that can reach the tallest buildings in town;
4. Fairness, Inclusion, and diversity in the police department, city services, city government, local schools including elementary, middle, and high schools.
5. Racial inequality will not be tolerated.

How do you define economic development? Economic development is the creation of wealth for the benefit of city residents. Our city government is responsible for strengthening the business environment and creating economic opportunities for our residents. As mayor, I will ensure that the city economy is keeping up with the growth in the population.

Our community continues to grow. How should the city plan for future growth? Affordable Housing: We should have workforce/transitional housing to meet the needs of residents.

City Service Departments: As Mayor, I will implement a city-owned transit service and ADA Paratransit Service for our residents. I will make sure that our Street and Line Maintenance Department has enough employees to repair our streets; I will ensure that they have enough snow removal trucks and street sweepers to clean up the roads without delays; I will also make sure they have enough equipment to maintain stormwater lines, to repair and maintain waste-water mains and water mains, and to mow the City's grassy spaces right away. In addition, they will have enough space to store the equipment. City services should have a language line available for non-English speaking residents in need. We will have two fire stations with staff working onsite 24/7 and enough storage and ladder trucks that can reach the tallest buildings in town.

Fairness and Inclusion: As Mayor, I will promote fairness and inclusion in the community. I will take action to promote diversity in our police department, city services, city government, and local schools including elementary, middle, and high schools. Our city will welcome everyone regardless of their sexual orientation, national origins, disability status, veteran status, age, etc. Our senior citizens will not feel discriminated against; our veterans will receive the assistance they deserve, and our local police department will not feel obligated to enforce federal immigration laws. An anti-bullying campaign in schools will be launched.

The city should also provide subsidies to local landlords and small businesses to promote affordable housing for low-income families and to grow the city's economy.

Infrastructures: the city will continue to provide basic services, build enough roads and replace the water and sewer lines in older neighborhoods.

social Services: The city will provide free medical assistance to qualified residents and invite nonprofit organizations to offer services at the rainshaw house free of charge. I will also work with local nonprofit organizations to better meet the needs of residents.

What are the most important issues facing businesses in our community and how can the city support them? The city should encourage residents to start small businesses by providing grants to help with start-up costs, giving tax breaks to small businesses whenever possible, and sponsor entrepreneurship training for small business owners.

How can the city help attract and retain a diverse workforce? By sponsoring training on entrepreneurship for small-business owners; offering incentives for businesses to have a least 50 percent of diversity in staffing, and encouraging and supporting businesses owned by the minority.

What unique perspective or skills do you bring to the council? The main duty of the City government is to serve its residents by listening, understanding, and meeting their needs. This is exactly what I have been doing for the last 10 years. I have listened to the needs of residents and founded a nonprofit organization to meet those needs.

In addition to being a lawyer, I have dedicated the last 10 years of my life to public service: I have worked for different nonprofit organizations, and I currently and serve as the Executive Director of Path of Hope, a nonprofit organization that I founded, with the mission to help low-income families. In the past year alone, we have helped thousands of low-income families with basic needs such as housing, employment, transportation, connection to local resources, social adjustments, etc. I also serve as a volunteer in the Neighborhood Ambassador Program for the Harvest Estates neighborhood in North Liberty. Through my work and community involvement, I have personally seen the struggles of our residents. I am grateful to say that I know the needs of our residents and the issues that our city has been facing for the last 15 years at least. I am the only mayoral candidate with the skills to lead the team of hardworking city council members and city staff to solve the issues that our current government has been unable to address.

North Liberty City Council Candidate 2021



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Community Service: North Liberty Community Pantry (Volunteer and Board Member), North Liberty Blues and BBQ Planning Committee, North Liberty Planning and Zoning Commission (2003-2007), Johnson County Bar Association (Past President), Iowa Municipal Attorneys Association (Past Board Member), Iowa State Bar Association Real Estate Section Council and Legislative Committee

What do you love most about the community? I love the people of North Liberty. We are a diverse bunch from different backgrounds and with different interests. Everyone brings their own experiences to make an active and outgoing community.

With so many issues to address, what would be your primary focus on the council? My primary focus will be on educating myself about the issues we face and challenging my colleagues on the Council to do the same. If we can have informed discussions about the issues North Liberty faces, we can challenge ourselves and the City's staff to create and implement appropriate and creative solutions to those issues.

One of the biggest issues I know we face is addressing the racism that exists in our community. The City can't force people to stop being racist, but it can take steps to ensure biases don't affect how community members are treated. The Council recently made a small step in the right direction by adopting a hate crimes ordinance, but there's a lot more work to do. We need to continually review our policies and practices to ensure our systems are not part of the problem, and I will challenge my

colleagues on the Council to consider how every issue that comes before us affects our neighbors from marginalized communities.

How do you define economic development? I would define economic development as anything that provides value to the people of the community. It might be a large company building a new facility, which adds jobs and property tax revenue and has a clear and direct impact on the local economy. It also might be a small business expanding to provide a needed service, or one entrepreneur using their home or a shared space to get a new business off the ground. Those smaller businesses have a more indirect affect on the local economy, but it's still economic development.

A person who has access to a shared workspace can potentially grow their business and eventually expand into their own rented or owned building. They might be creating additional jobs for community members, or they might just be making sure they can meet their own needs. Either way, they're adding value to the community.

Our community continues to grow. How should the city plan for future growth? We saw in North Liberty in the early 2000s that planning for growth isn't always easy. We've grown a lot since then and seem to be in a better position to react. The City has very capable staff who've done a good job guiding us for many years. We need to continue hiring good people and trusting them to help us plan. The Council should also regularly review and update its capital improvements plan to make sure we're keeping up with the growth we see and expect to see.

We should also support implementation of sustainable building, development, and management practices. Our public improvements should be designed to minimize their impact on the environment and we could give incentives for LEED certification.

Finally, we must ensure we're meeting everyone's needs, not just those buying large lots or living in gated communities. That means ensuring developers are building a variety of housing stock, effectively managing the costs of city services, and supporting affordable child care initiatives. North Liberty should be available to everyone.

What are the most important issues facing businesses in our community and how can the city support them? I think a lot of businesses are still struggling with the pandemic, both trying to find employees and making ends meet. The City should be prepared to help those businesses utilize available state and federal resources that will help each business recover and thrive.

Another big issue is the cost of starting a new business. We should be supporting shared workspace and maker space initiatives that increase access to our neighbors who don't have the capital to buy or rent their own space or equipment.

How can the city help attract and retain a diverse workforce? The first step is making sure opportunities are available. We need to continue to work as a region to draw employers to our communities.

We also need to ensure that we have the sort of housing available that workers are looking for and can afford. This might mean giving incentives for or even requiring the construction of housing that is affordable for everyone. We have a lot of different types of housing in North Liberty, but we shouldn't be limiting single-family home ownership to those who can afford a \$200,000 home. We should embrace more density and smaller homes to make sure everyone has a shot at the American dream.

We also need to remember what we heard from community members in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd last year. Our neighbors told us that they don't feel welcome in North Liberty because of the color of their skin, some because of encounters with police, some because of encounters with other citizens, some because of encounters with businesses, and some because of a reputation they heard from others. We can't change our past, but we can work to make life better for our neighbors from historically marginalized communities.

What unique perspective or skills do you bring to the council? I've spent almost 15 years acting as city attorney or assistant city attorney for various small towns in the ICR area. For the last nine years I've also represented real estate developers and builders with projects in some of our larger cities. Before law school I worked for the Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments administering state and federal flood buyout grants for cities and counties in Northeast Iowa. I'll bring the perspective of someone who has worked behind the scenes and my experiences will allow me to hit the ground running on City business of all types without much of a learning curve.

North Liberty City Council Candidate 2021



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Community Service: I have served on North Liberty Boards including Tree and Storm Water and Transit. I have been serving on the North Liberty City Council City for almost 2 years and have had 8 more years on the Council prior to my current term. I am active with Scouting and am an Assistant Scoutmaster with Troop 207.

What do you love most about the community? North Liberty is a growing community with many energetic people who like to be involved in many events. We are nationally known as a great place to live. I really enjoy working with engaged citizens who offer ideas and participate in City activities.

With so many issues to address, what would be your primary focus on the council? The immediate issue that will need to be addressed is how to distribute ARPA money to help people who are suffering or who have suffered due to the COVID pandemic. The Council will need to reach consensus on this so that the money is not delayed in getting to those who need it. There are many agencies already working with individuals and one way to rapidly get funds to people is by supporting the efforts of these agencies. Some of the funds can be used to offset City expenses but I would prefer the money be spent in ways that will directly affect the individual. There is opportunity for collaboration with other local governments for joint programs to help people that will need to be explored.

How do you define economic development? Economic development is a process to help better a community by promoting activities to help businesses grow, especially local companies. Businesses can provide good jobs for people which leads to improved quality of life for the individual. This in turn

helps promote more business growth and the cycle can continue. School system activities to help develop and retain workers are important such as education and job training programs. Cities can help this by working to keep taxes and service fees low and investing in needed infrastructure and working to ensure the city is welcoming to all people so that the city is a desired place for people to move to.

Our community continues to grow. How should the city plan for future growth? It is apparent the Corridor will continue to develop, and more people will move here. North Liberty has been planning for future growth and this has been a continual process for quite some time. As one of the fastest growing cities in Iowa for the last several years North Liberty has upgraded city utilities and has models to project when future upgrades will be needed. Utilities have been extended to expected growth areas. Roads are being upgraded as needed. An update to the Comprehensive plan is just starting. The need for an additional fire station has been identified and work is ongoing to find an appropriate site.

What are the most important issues facing businesses in our community and how can the city support them? Currently the lack of workers is a huge problem for our local businesses. Gaps in infrastructure such as roads and utilities are also an issue that can limit the growth of the business community. Working to make North Liberty a great place to live will help attract workers. Being proactive in planning for and building and funding needed infrastructure for business expansion is important. Working with businesses and the State of Iowa to secure funding via grants or tax rebates are also a way that North Liberty can support businesses.

How can the city help attract and retain a diverse workforce? The best way the North Liberty can help attract and retain workers is to make sure North Liberty is known as a welcoming community for all people and is a place that they can live and work and play and be valued for who they are. North Liberty needs to make sure that quality amenities such as parks and roads are available. Working to ensure that North Liberty is known as a safe community by providing adequate Police and Fire Protection is important. In addition, it is important to find ways to help keep the cost of city services down and to budget wisely to help making living here more affordable and to provide for services to help people in need.

What unique perspective or skills do you bring to the council? I have prior experience on the Council and working with Staff and other elected officials, so I have a good background in how the city functions. Professionally I am used to working with persons from multiple disciplines as a team and collaborating together to manage complex healthcare problems.