

Innovation Valley (www.ivalley.org)

Haverhill's Next Mayor Should Have A Very High IQ

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There are at least five candidates running for mayor in Haverhill, including the incumbent, Mayor James Fiorentini, seeking his third term in office. Former Mayor James Rurak, who served four terms, Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce President Sally Cerasuolo-O'Rorke, political newcomer June Barkas, and local river legend Captain William "Red" Slavik are challenging the incumbent mayor. A candidate's Innovation Quotient (IQ) should be a key factor in winning the race.

During my ten years on the Haverhill City Council, including the last two years as president, I often struggled with the stifling effect that municipal government's 20th century mindset and culture had on innovation, which held back desperately needed progress in our city. It will take skill, knowledge and courage to bring the political establishment into the 21st century to enable innovation to drive Haverhill forward.

We have identified four factors to determine a candidate's IQ. Three are dominant issues, while the fourth is a request for an open-ended challenge and associated innovative solution to be proposed by each candidate. Candidates will be asked to submit responses to each of the four factors. A candidate's IQ can be estimated by simply rating each candidate by using a scale of one (lowest) to ten (highest) for each factor; the average is the overall IQ rating.

While other factors will undoubtedly impact your selection of the best candidate, IQ is a major differentiator. We hope that each of the candidates will present comprehensive action plans during the campaign, identifying the strategy and the specific steps that they will take to address each factor. One immediate benefit of this approach is to lessen the importance of campaign sound bytes and perception by providing relevant substance in an organized, professional manner.

Perhaps the Haverhill school system and Whittier Vo-Tech can mobilize students to help present the candidates' proposals to the community in an unbiased manner. They could also sponsor a forum of a different sort, where each candidate has up to 45 minutes to present their proposals live and recorded, for easy playback on the web and cable television. One approach would be to allow each candidate to make a group presentation, to demonstrate leadership and showcase the talent that they will bring to City Hall.

We will post each candidate's proposals for the four factors and any supporting information on our blog at www.ivalley.org, effective immediately.

To reflect the real world, we will allow each candidate to revise their proposal at any time up until a week before the primary election. Citizens will be able to comment on the proposals at the blog, but are asked to be professional and to focus on the subject at hand; we will be moderating the discussion. For contrast, we reserve the right to identify our own solutions to the posed problems and/or to rate the responses from the candidates.

Factor #1 - Solve the Long Term Financial Crisis

The goal here is to address Haverhill's long term debt resulting from the sale of the Hale Hospital, which fluctuates around \$7 million over a twenty-year period, with jumps in the next few years. The debt is due primarily to the high cost of Hale retirees' pensions and lifelong medical benefits

that have been mounting for decades. While the sale left the city debt-ridden, it was a good move to pull the city out of the complex and unstable hospital business, thereby improving Haverhill's bond rating because a major risk, the Hale, has been unloaded.

Former Mayor John Guerin was saddled with the hard job of scaling back employees, both at City Hall and the school department, each by about 20%. Since then, Haverhill has maintained only a bare minimum Police Department and enough firefighters to keep our stations open. The school department has had severe cuts, to the point where important programs have been slashed and students pay a fee to play sports. The administrative departments at City Hall have been ravished.

Haverhill has used one-time revenue, such as the sale of city properties and additional funding from the state earmarked specifically to reduce the Hale debt, to close recent budget gaps and limp along, but those options are fading fast. There has been an effort to leverage the governor's smart growth initiative to convert factory buildings in the downtown to apartments and condominiums, and several large retail stores have moved to Haverhill to exploit a big jump in population in the past

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— Bill Gates

without properly analyzing and identifying the cause and effect of the problems. The cause and effect are likely to be very complicated, ranging from employee accountability in a stagnant 20th century organization, lack of modern problem solving skills and methods, to students who come from broken homes.

At the same time, the requirements of education have shifted as identified by Bill Gates at www.iste.org: "In addition to command of basic facts and information, today's worker must have the ability to use resources productively, master interpersonal skills, manipulate information, understand systems thinking and operate technologies. The foundation for these competencies rests with basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as well as the ability to think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, and know how to learn for a lifetime."

Each candidate is asked to provide a plan with specific steps on how they intend to evolve the Haverhill public schools into a Center of Excellence, as recognized by the state and, most importantly, the parents and students in Haverhill.

Factor #3 – Develop a Global Business Development Strategy

The lingering economic problems for the Merrimack Valley region are illustrated in a highly touted report by MassINC and the Brookings Institute, entitled: "Reconnecting Massachusetts Gateway Cities: Lessons Learned and Agenda for Renewal." The report states:

"The Gateway Cities have continued to slip in importance in relation to Boston on key measures of economic performance... Gateway Cities continue to struggle with deindustrialization, and have not yet found a niche in the specialized knowledge-oriented economy that has revitalized the Boston area in recent decades."

Each candidate is asked to provide a strategy and action plan to address Haverhill's future role in a knowledge-based economy niche in the Merrimack Valley. Other strategies for meshing Haverhill with the global economy can be substituted.

Factor #4 – Candidate's Open-Ended Challenge and Innovation

Each candidate is asked to identify an innovative approach to solve another challenge facing the next mayor of Haverhill.

Each of these IQ factors requires innovative solutions. The standard responses will not make the grade.



ten years. However, one thing is clear, the financial crisis continues.

Each candidate is asked to provide a multi-year business case, with specific actions that they will take to solve the financial crisis. The candidates are also asked to identify contingencies to reflect uncertainty in the future.

Factor #2 – Evolve Public Education into a Center of Excellence

According to the state's MCAS-based performance criteria, the Haverhill school system has been underperforming for several years. The superintendent and School Committee have been jumping to conclusions for solutions, such as a longer school day or summer school,



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The Innovation Valley initiative seeks to help stimulate economic growth and quality-of-life enhancements in the Merrimack Valley. Every month we will report on innovative businesses, practices, and ideas that are helping to make Merrimack Valley the place to be. Look for our article in print media and online at www.ivalley.org.