

Sun-Times 2019 Municipal Election aldermanic candidate questionnaire

The Chicago Sun-Times invites you to complete our 2019 municipal election questionnaire.

We will use the answers to the questionnaire in our endorsement decision-making process and we will post your questionnaire responses online. Also, we will use your answers in news stories, informational graphics and elsewhere in the paper and at suntimes.com.

Responses are due by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 18. Feel free to also send us your resume by email at candidates@suntimes.com. If you have a candidate photo, please email it now to candidates@suntimes.com.

Thank you.

The Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board

Name * Derek Lindblom

Political/civic background: * I have a long political and civic background including as a staffer in the Mayor's Office and on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, on the Mayor's Task Force on working families that brought earned sick leave to Chicago, and as an active board member of both the 43rd Ward Democrats and the Wrightwood Neighbors Association in my Ward.

Occupation:* Health tech startups and Venture Capital

Education: Harvard College, Class of 2003, *magna cum laude*. Harvard Law School, Class of 2008, *cum laude*, President - Harvard Law & Policy Review.

Campaign website (if applicable): voteforderek.com

Twitter handle (if applicable): @DerekLindblom

Facebook page (if applicable): [Facebook.com/DerekLindblom43/](https://www.facebook.com/DerekLindblom43/)

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please write your responses in the field directly below each question.

Top priorities

What are the top three priorities for your ward? *

Our main policy priorities are stable city finances, public safety, and energizing our commercial corridors.

Recent civic work

Please tell us what you have done in the last two years to serve the city, your neighborhood or a civic organization. Please be specific. *

I've have been on the Board of the 43rd Ward Dems since the election of the current committeeman in early 2016. I have also served as the Membership Director of the Wrightwood Neighbors Association for several years where we more than doubled membership. Before that, I was a member of the Working Families Task Force on Paid Sick Leave - which brought guaranteed earned sick leave to hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans. Over the years, I've assisted numerous local and City-wide charitable organizations on issues such as public health, chronic disease, sexual trafficking, and many others.

Pensions

Chicago is on the hook for \$42 billion in unfunded pension liabilities, which works out to \$35,000 for every household. Those pensions, in the language of the Illinois Constitution, "shall not be diminished or impaired." Should the state Constitution be amended to allow a reduction in pension benefits for current city employees or retirees? How about reducing pension benefits for new employees? Please explain. *

During my time in the Mayor's office, I was the lead policy negotiator on pensions in 2013-2014 that resulted in the SB 1922 bill that was backed by 28 of 31 City Union Locals and the Sun-Times Editorial Board. While most of those reforms were struck down by the Illinois Supreme Court, they helped confront the pension funding challenges for the first-time and reversed decades of kicking the can. I have worked closely on pensions and I am passionate about ensuring that we have stable pension funds. As we tackle the significant challenges that still remain we can only be successful if we do it together.

I have a demonstrated track record of working with partners in Labor, listening and moving forward together with Labor. This attitude is how we got the city to actuarial full funding of pensions and together we can ensure that we are giving retirees and their families the quality of life they have earned and deserved while protecting taxpayers, including both private sector and public employees who pay taxes in the City of Chicago.

I don't think we're done yet. The City is still facing increasing ramp payments and the long-term health of the funds is still dependent on assumptions that may or may not play out depending on the rate of inflation and long-term stock market returns. Going forward we're going to have to deal with these issues together in a thoughtful and creative way that's cognizant of both the real impact on retirees and their families and the burden borne by the taxpayers.

In short, I don't think we can take anything off the table on pensions. The problem is too large and too serious to rule out any reform efforts at this point. Preventive change is massively

preferable to a bankruptcy scenario that would result in significant pain all-around. We don't know how the market, inflation, or the political possibilities will pan out and I think it's critical for the City and Labor to have any option available, including circumscribed constitutional change that frees their hands to negotiate with each other, as part of that toolkit. The only way we can solve this is altogether, and I think I have the experience and record to be able to do that.

Revenue

Of the following often proposed sources of new revenue for Chicago, which of the following do you favor, and why? A Chicago casino, legalized and taxed recreational marijuana, a LaSalle Street tax, a commuter tax, a property tax increase, a municipal sales tax increase, a real estate transfer tax increase, video gambling. *

I believe we need to generate revenue in smart ways that avoid pushing residents or jobs outside the City to the extent possible.

I support a Chicago casino close to the Indiana border or as part of a convention center complex. I think the appropriate goal with a Chicago casino should be to maximize revenue while minimizing any additional cost to both the economically-challenged and middle class in Chicago. A casino close to the Indiana border, for example at the Port District, will simply move gambling a few blocks. However, this few blocks will make a gigantic difference to the City as the tax revenue will shift from northwestern Indiana to Chicago. A high-end casino as part of McCormick place would principally serve conventioners and tourists. Both these options would minimize the additional Chicagoans who would gamble while maximizing the City's revenue without raising property taxes.

I am in favor of legalizing and taxing cannabis. This is one of the very few taxes that consumers actually want to pay. Colorado has seen significant tax revenues from cannabis taxation and I believe we could replicate and exceed that here. This would also enhance some of the City's business relocation and human capital attraction efforts.

I am against the following taxes:

- -- Continued property tax hikes (along with significant reassessments) are making the City unaffordable for many families. We're also beginning to hit a point where the City is becoming tax uncompetitive with many cities we compete with for business and human capital. We've already gone to this well, even though it has been one of the most corruptly administered taxes in the Country. We can't just continue to do so because it is the simplest solution. We have to work harder.
- -- LaSalle Street Tax: The industry in question is simply too electronic and mobile to tax at the local level. Despite any good intentions behind the tax, I believe it would fail in practice and simply remove the trading industry from the City. Perhaps worst of all, we'd also likely lose our burgeoning FinTech cluster in such a scenario as well. This would result in weakening our tax base and lowering our long-term total revenue intake.

- -- I'm worried about a commuter tax bringing us into an escalating tax war with the suburbs that becomes a backdoor for an income tax.
- -- I do not support an increase in the municipal sales tax on goods as we're already one of the highest Sales tax jurisdictions in the country.
- -- I do not support a real estate transfer tax increase as well. We already have reasonably high real estate transfer taxes and this tax is too cyclical to be a dependable revenue source in any case.
- -- I do not support video gambling. This feels like all the very worst aspects of Casino gaming, then putting it everywhere in the City, and then getting an absolutely miniscule amount of revenue from it compared to a casino.

What other sources of new revenue do you favor or oppose? *

I think additional revenue increases beyond cannabis and a smartly-located casino have to be the last resort, not the first choice.

I also think we have to drop our fixation with the property tax as the eventual solution to all problems. Let's focus on everything else before reaching for more revenue, and then, only if we must, let's look at revenue sources where we're an outlier on the low end compared to other cities and states. Let's stay away from the property tax and other areas where we're already high compared to our peer cities.

TIFs

Tax-increment financing districts are a primary economic development tool for Chicago. In a TIF district, taxes from the growth of property values are set aside for 23 years to be used to support public projects and private development. What changes do you favor, if any, in Chicago's TIF program? *

TIF has a long and checkered history in our city, but has also funded significant public infrastructure projects. We can't get rid of TIF without a plan to make up for the sizable infrastructure investment TIF provides. However, we can radically reform the TIF program to stop the leakage of taxpayer dollars to useless or near-useless programs with little-to-no public good.

First, let's reform TIF so it's completely transparent. Every year, let's publish a TIF-budget like the City's general budget, that details every project and where the money is going. If sunlight is the best disinfectant, let's put TIF in the desert at high noon.

Second, let's ban any TIF dollars being given as profit to developers and private companies. The City is simply not well-positioned to judge when to hand over public dollars to a private entity (if ever) and the potential for abuse and corruption is simply too high.

Third, let's limit TIF spending to three essential items: Public infrastructure, parks, and public schools (specifically the physical building needs of our public schools). These are clear public priorities that have limited funding streams and where TIF has a clear and necessary role. Infrastructure, parks, and public schools are a critical part of the new development and revitalization TIF is intended to produce.

Finally, let's look into potentially changing the State law and taking TIF from zoned and geographically bound usages to a more flexible City-infrastructure fund. This could be a valuable revenue source for public infrastructure, parks, and public schools (specifically the physical building needs), while not obeying often nonsensical geographic limitations.

Aldermanic power

What will you do to rein in aldermanic prerogative? *

We need to rethink the Aldermanic position completely. I am proposing three major reforms:

First, let's limit an individual Alderman's ability to "hold-up" businesses for personal reasons or campaign-finance motivation. Let's take routine decisions that currently require individual Aldermanic approval and flip the presumption to make the approval automatic unless the Alderman proactively says no. If the decisions fall in commonly approved specifications, let's force an Alderman to issue a veto with written reasons in a specified short-window of time. Let's include an appellate process for clear errors. The burden should be on the Alderman to hold up a routine matter, instead of on the business to plead for approval.

Second, let's launch a blue-ribbon commission dedicated to rethinking both Aldermanic prerogative around City-wide issues and the number of Alderman in general. Let's move away from the traditional Not-In-My-Backyard ("NIMBY") approach to almost every decision. Instead, let's allow the City to take some decisions out of the hands of the individual Alderman and instead make them at the City-wide level together as a collective body.

As part of this commission let's also look at how many Alderman we have and how much money we spend on our political system that could be going to infrastructure, police officers, and teachers. For example, if we were to reduce Chicago's City Council to the average elected official per person of America's other largest cities, Chicago would have only 20 Alderman. Even the most "represented" City in the top 10 largest U.S. cities besides Chicago only has the per-capita equivalent of 30 Alderman. That we're so much of an outlier should give us pause as we pour tens of millions of dollars into political actors and staff instead of direct services to our residents. Let's start a discussion about it. If everyone else including taxpayers and public employees is already giving up long-held gains to fix Chicago's financial challenges, politicians should have to at least look into giving too.

Finally, on an individual level. I will refer any development, permit, or zoning change with a conflict of interest (which would include significant campaign donations) to an outside committee

of neighbor leaders and experts to decide in my stead. We have to take major action to stop our notorious “pay-to-play” culture and this would be a strong first step I’d hope others would follow.

Police reform

The City of Chicago has entered into a federally monitored consent decree to overhaul the training and practices of the Chicago Police Department. Civil libertarians say it is long overdue, but others say it is unnecessary and could make it tougher for the police to do their job. What’s your view? *

There’s a lot of good in the consent decree, especially the lifetime training requirements for police officers, that make this an important reform. However, I am wary of the creation of additional layers of bureaucracy and some of the rules concerning limitations on foot pursuit. We need to take the best parts of the consent decree and use them to drive improvements for both our police and our communities, while mitigating cost and bureaucracy that doesn’t help residents or police officers.

Guns

What should Chicago do to reduce the number of illegal guns? *

Over the years, we’ve witnessed too many shootings around the country and in Chicago, and too little action. From my time working on the United States Judiciary Committee, I’ve been fighting for common sense gun safety laws that will save lives. We need to do all we can here in the City, and working with surrounding states and localities, to make our communities safer and stop the scourge of gun violence.

I have a five-point plan to crackdown on illegal guns and reduce gun violence in Chicago:

- -- Make it a felony to transfer an illegal gun used in a crime to a minor.
- -- Crack down on straw purchases of guns.
- -- Partner with the Public Health departments of other cities and states to study gun crimes. Cities and states must lead the way since the federal government has blocked the CDC from studying gun violence.
- -- Create a multi-jurisdictional task force to go after the worst offending gun shops in the region.
- -- Invest in data-proven mentoring and support programs for youth at risk of gun violence.

Schools

What is the appropriate role of charter schools within the Chicago Public Schools

system? *

The ideal situation is a local public neighborhood school and many of them thrive in my neighborhood, including the one my son is about to start at (Oscar Mayer). This allows the school to act in both its education capacity while also building community capital and drawing families closer together.

I do believe charters can play a role in driving innovation, testing new concepts, and addressing especially challenging circumstances. There are some great charter schools, and some not so great charter schools. Let's hold the poorly performing charters accountable while taking the lessons from the great charters and applying them throughout our schools.

Should the Chicago Board of Education be solely appointed by the mayor, as is now the case? Or should Chicago switch to an elected school board or some hybrid? *

I believe the Chicago School Board should have some elected representatives to act as a check and balance that prevents corruption and introduces new ideas. No good governmental system is run by only one actor without any corresponding check or balance and this needs to change. I believe this hybrid model strikes the right balance between an independent perspective and voice while still avoiding diffused responsibility often inherent in large committees.

I worry that a 21-member committee without clear leadership would fail to have a strategic vision for the schools and become bogged-down in political disputes. Perhaps most importantly, by removing any accountability for the schools from the Mayor, you would be taking away a critical chess piece pushing for CPS in Springfield. CPS depends on significant funding from Springfield and the City needs to bring all its biggest powers to bear to fight for our kids there. Putting the Mayor completely on the sidelines in those fights is the wrong move for Chicago.

Affordable housing

Is there enough affordable housing in your ward? Please explain. *

We have a not insignificant amount of CHA housing in the 43rd, principally in four large CHA developments. Still housing affordability is a very serious issue in our community, especially as more and more multi-family buildings are de-converted into very large single family homes. As Alderman I would make sure we're still developing 3-flats, 6-flats, and other housing options in our community to keep the area more affordable. If we don't push for varied development, Lincoln Park could easily become Lake Forest South and lose what makes this neighborhood special.

Immigration

Chicago, by ordinance, is an official "welcoming city." This means the Chicago police are generally prohibited from detaining undocumented immigrants on behalf of federal immigration authorities. What's your position on this policy? What more — or less — should be done with respect to undocumented immigrants who live in Chicago? *

I am strongly in favor of Chicago's role as a welcoming City. I believe Chicago should lead the way as an example of positive immigration in the U.S. and this includes our role as a welcoming City as an important part of that.

I would also write and push for Chicago to advocate national immigration policies that allowed more immigration to cities. For example, let's let immigrants who are willing to contribute to Chicago and live in our City for a period of at least ten years into this country through a new visa program. Chicago can deal with all the perceived challenges of New Americans (fun fact - New Americans are less likely to commit crimes and more likely to start new businesses than native born Americans). Let's let Chicago get the benefit of lots of New Americans and the many benefits they'll bring.

This is the fastest, and perhaps best long-term, policy initiative to reverse our population decline and increase our tax base.

Ethics

Should the inspector general have the power to audit and review City Council programs, operations and committees? Why or why not? *

Yes. With evidence that meets an agreed-upon legal standard, the Inspector General should have the power to audit and review City Council programs, operations and committees. In order to root out corruption and improve the public's faith in city government, I believe it is imperative that we do all we can to empower the Inspector General with the ability to conduct good-faith investigations of City Council.

Would you employ, or have you employed, staff in your office who have outside jobs or contracts with entities that do business with the city? If so, please explain. *

No. I will always be a full-time Alderman and my staff will be completely disallowed from any conflict of interest. This should be the standard for all Alderman.

I should note - I would suggest we look at banning new Alderman - starting with the class after mine, but including myself as a voluntary participant - from earning outside income while serving as an Alderman. We can begin to eliminate Aldermanic conflicts of interest on a go-forward basis and by limiting it to new Alderman (and any other Alderman who want to join me in a voluntary pledge), it would stand a fair chance of passage.

Role model

Is there a past or current alderman whom you model yourself after, or would model yourself after, or take inspiration from? Please explain. *

Yes - I want to call out three Alderman I think are the best at different areas of the job and who I would seek to emulate in their core competence.

Vi Daley (also Alderman of the 43rd Ward from 1999 to 2011) was known for her strong and dedicated constituent services. She was for prompt and attentive responses and was the first Alderman to use technology (email at the time) to alert residents about street cleaning and other issues. I would seek to bring back her listening and attentive style.

Ameya Pawar is a great example of an Alderman who drove change in a key policy area: earned sick leave. Ald. Pawar ran and drove a task force of many different interests on this issue all the way from initial advocacy to ordinance passage. He shows what an energetic Alderman, who's passionate about a critical issue, can do for the City.

Finally, Dick Simpson has a long and storied history as a reformer and a leader in Chicago politics. I would seek to bring back that reform tradition in what I do and how I approach the many ethics reforms we need to see in City Council. It's time to stop being afraid of change and embrace Chicago's next chapter.