

Questionnaire for Invercargill City Council Mayoral and Councillor Candidates

Chambers of Commerce Southland believe the calibre of the local government candidates is an important issue in the coming local elections. We set to identify candidates who support and acknowledge various key actions and policies which will enhance Invercargill as a good city to do business in and which is run effectively and efficiently from a commercial perspective. Responses to the following questions will be used by the Chamber to represent our members' interests.

1. Please outline your vision for Invercargill city in 2011?
Population increase is the key to spreading the ratepayer base and retention of essential Services, in particular health, which is funded on a population basis. My Vision: "A Vibrant Regional City providing first class facilities and infrastructure that is safe and clean"
2. Name three key issues that you support and will campaign on?
Encouragement of industry,
redevelopment of Appleby residential area.
Continue to enhance the city's infrastructure.
3. Please outline the specific initiatives you will support to ensure that Invercargill has a business friendly environment.
Continue to enhance CBD. Ensure Council owned land is appropriately designated to ensure that any industry wishing to establish has unimpeded access. Continue to lobby for cheaper airfares.
4. Name five key priorities you see for infrastructural investment in the city over the next five-years.
As outlined in Council's LTCCP – Roothing, Alternative water supply; waste water treatment; renew Tiwai Bridge; sewage sludge & green waste compacting

5. Do you support the use of public private partnerships when council is looking at building, operating or maintaining infrastructure?
Not in operating or owning infrastructure. I would favourably consider Public/private ownership of the airport

6. What are your views on the council's use of debt to fund projects? Do you think the council has an appropriate level of debt?
On a personal note I dislike debt, but for a Local Authority or Company it is Essential for expensive Capital Works or major replacement of infrastructure e.g. Tiwai Bridge. Invercargill in comparison with most Authorities has a low Debt to equity ratio. Borrowing is the only fair way if the asset has a life Exceeding 30 years eg Theatres, Pools, Water & Sewerage. This is known as Intergenerational.

7. What is your position on whether Council should free up more land for residential housing?
Council has some endowment residential land and sections taken for non payment of rates. It does market these and sells at fair value. Council has sold sections for low consideration to Habitat for Humanity. I agree with this policy.

8. What is your position on climate change and carbon neutrality?
If climate change means warmer Invercargill "Bring It On!" Is it a natural cyclical phenomena or is it due to greenhouse emissions? Science disagrees. I am against trading carbon credits. I find this obscene. It creates an industry out of nothing, makes the wealthy wealthier and the rich countries can carry on polluting because they can afford to purchase 'offset' credits. If carbon emissions are to be cut it must not be a 'knee jerk' reaction. We must have alternatives in place.

9. Do you think Councillors should be paid in proportion to the number of meetings they attend, or a through a fixed annual fee, or in some other way?
Council has no control. A global sum is set by the Local Government Commission. The ratio between Mayor, Chairpersons, Councillors, Community Board, Members is set by Council. No meeting fees are paid, the only exception is for members service on a Hearings Panel.

10. What are your views on Council ownership of non-core assets including trading enterprises of Council i.e. those assets that are not essential to run local government? What do you define as core or strategic assets and why?

Core and strategic assets: Halls, Theatres, Pools, Roothing, Parks & Reserves, footpaths, water wastewater, electricity distribution. Non Core: Forestry, Contracting, Airport. My view of ownership of Non Core Assets is Local Govt is about people. Forestry when it comes on stream will subsidise rates. A contractor who understands the infrastructure maintenance is essential although this could be privately owned and who would want the airport? Yet, it is essential for Southland's progress.

11. Do you agree that trading enterprises should be governed by a commercial board of directors and such businesses should be run on a commercial business basis?

Yes

Aren't they already? There seems to be a perception that elected members somehow their professional expertise upon joining council. This is a myth. It could be said that Commercial Directors have cost investors millions of dollars recently with the collapse of Feltex and several Investment Companies.

12. Do you consider there is a further need for local government reform? If so, what are your reasons?

I don't believe that bigger is necessarily better. If there is a will within a community, like the amalgamation of Banks Peninsula with Christchurch, okay. In that case it could be proven that there were significant advantages. Local Government is about local people. Less Central Government imposition of ever increasing compliance would be appreciated.

13. What are your views on combining local authority service delivery, and amalgamations with neighbouring authorities?

Southland Territorial Authorities have a number of projects which we share. I chair the Regional Waste Committee, Regional Transport, Rural Fire, Civil Defence, Customer Services etc. I believe the Regional Council should be disestablished and 2 Unitary Authorities formed – Southland District, Invercargill City.

14. Name three actions that you will take to ensure Invercargill city delivers better service and value to rate payers and residents.

Satisfaction Surveys have given Council a big positive tick. We could increase some services, e.g. inner city cleaning, more security cameras, but these come at additional cost.

15. Would you support a rates target so that council's rates income does not exceed the combined rate of inflation and population growth per year?

This is a Utopian Theory. Industry inflation, particularly roading is often well above base inflation. The City's infrastructure would deteriorate. We are bound by regulation governing depreciation of assets to either spend on assets or alternatively set the money aside.

16. Do you support the use of differential rates whereby business rate payers pay more than residential rate payers per dollar of rateable land? If you do, how would you justify this?
Yes. Differential rating is but one tool Councils can use to smooth rating. Invercargill unlike Wellington is not aggressive toward business. Business unlike the residential ratepayer has the ability to claim back GST on rates and has other tax advantages. Were the Govt to take the GST off rates as was originally intended because it is a tax on tax, there may be no need for differential rating.

17. What are your views on council use of fees and charges?
User pays, unless there is an element of public good.

18. Do you think the community should pay for its own water on a user pays basis?

The Community does through a uniform annual charge. Industries or high users of water are metred and pay accordingly. Invercargill's water supply is among the least expensive in NZ

19. Please identify three courses of action you would want to promote to ensure and vibrant C.B.D
I was Chairman of the Inner City Steering Committee during the CBD upgrade. Ensure the expensive upgrade is well maintained and enhanced so it doesn't become 'stale'. Work with police and agencies to enforce liquor ban.

20. List five keys issues that you consider need addressing by the Council in the next three-years
The LTCCP already addresses these issues. The answers given in 2 and 3 outline my position.

Name of person completing questionnaire: Geoff Piercy

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