

Candidates for Waconia Mayor & City Council

Business Climate - What can the City do to make Waconia an easier place to start, grow, or relocate a business?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

Waconia should continue building on its reputation as a great place to live, work, and do business. Our growing population creates a strong customer base and workforce, making Waconia an attractive location for existing and new businesses. The City should continue its proactive approach of working directly with businesses, streamlining permitting and development processes, and helping navigate City requirements. Continued investment in infrastructure and proactive marketing of Waconia's quality of life, location, workforce, and growth opportunities will help attract new businesses while supporting those already here.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

Waconia's business climate should remain competitive, welcoming, and predictable. My priority is keeping the City easy to work with, with clear processes, timely communication, and infrastructure that supports access and growth. I would continue partnering with the Chamber to understand emerging needs, especially from small businesses and new entrepreneurs. As the Strategic Plan evolves, I would ensure that zoning, permitting, and development policies stay aligned with market realities and support responsible growth. Strong collaboration between the City, Chamber, and business community is essential to maintaining a vibrant local economy.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

As mayor, I am active and visible. I see my role, in part, as an ambassador for new and expanding businesses. I spoke at 15 business openings in Waconia in the last 21 months. I follow up with a communication to the owner or manager. A personal touch is important.

Often times the most valuable thing we can give someone is evidence that we care. Personal notes show gratitude as I represent the city.

A collaborative city and chamber is a recipe for business and resident success. We have that in Waconia and I am happy to support. The Chamber is important as the city and the chamber link arms to promote Waconia. As mayor I am very involved with the chamber.

The city needs to keep property taxes low. This has been one of my focus areas. This is a major factor in getting business to grow/locate here. A modest property tax increase helps businesses who are making decisions to start or grow here. Modest, not excessive tax growth must be a focus for the city council.

Development & Permitting - Commercial and residential growth is active right now. How do you see the City balancing new development with an efficient, business-friendly permitting and approval process?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

The City can balance growth and efficiency by focusing on responsible development that is supported by existing and planned infrastructure. The permitting and approval process should be streamlined

and predictable while maintaining appropriate standards. Just as important, the City should understand community needs and expectations and evaluate how proposed developments align with them. By maintaining open communication with residents, developers, and businesses, Waconia can encourage investment and growth while ensuring development enhances the community and supports its long-term vision.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

Waconia has a responsive permitting process; shown by the pace of development we've maintained. As a Council member, I would support local business ownership by limiting unnecessary bureaucracy and measuring response times for our permitting teams. As needs evolve, we should modernize our processes while staying aligned with the Strategic Plan and protecting Waconia lifestyle. The goal is simple: keep the process efficient and predictable while ensuring development fits our long-term vision.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

I am pro-business. Businesses take risks daily with no guarantee of customers or sales. Cities must listen and walk beside business leaders throughout the process when they are building or adding on. Conversations are important as we are in this together. Residential growth is booming as Waconia is in demand. The market is active. The challenges for buyers are many; properties sell quickly, so a buyer needs to be ready. The cost of homeownership for some first-time buyers can leave them with sticker shock. Additionally, interest rates are high. Lower interest rates will help, but that does not appear to be on the horizon. I attended a Minnesota Valley Electric conference on Sept. 10. One presenter was John Suter, an economist from the National Rural Utilities Coop. in DC. He believes interest rates will not come down soon. According to Suter, our nation's deficit of 40 trillion dollars and the interest on the debt are the reasons why.

Infrastructure Investment – With downtown reconstruction nearly complete, infrastructure needs continue, including growing traffic and access concerns along key corridors as the city grows. How would you prioritize the City's next infrastructure investments, and how would you work with County and State partners to support traffic flow and business access?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

We should prioritize infrastructure investments based on safety, traffic flow, economic impact, and the City's anticipated growth. Continue to lean on City staff and qualified professionals to provide objective recommendations and understand how infrastructure needs change with population growth, development, and the varying needs of residents and businesses. We should continue to work closely with County and State partners to coordinate improvements on key corridors. Clear, proactive communication with residents and businesses affected by upcoming reconstruction will be essential to minimize disruption, maintain access, and support local businesses.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

My priority is disciplined execution of our infrastructure plan, ensuring execution supports quality of life and adapting actions as needs evolve. First, we should continue to improve and maintain streets,

sidewalks, and access routes. Second, we need to be more proactive in managing traffic flow for safety and noise, since these issues remain concerning for residents. Third, continued investment in utilities and water systems is essential for long-term stability. Finally, we must maintain parks, trails, and community facilities. As for outside funding, the team has secured state and county support for upcoming highway improvements. My focus is keeping projects on time and on budget.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

We need Carver County. One of my campaign promises was to work closer with Carver County. It had not been happening very well - it is now. I met at least once with all five County Commissioners. Relationships matter. I have a good relationship with them, and this helps Waconia. I have also had many conversations with Lyndon Robjent, the Carver County Public Works Director. I recently presented to the Carver County Commissioners. I thanked them for their support, and I shared with them areas where we can continue to work together. Early in 2026, I called a meeting with MNDOT, Carver County, and the City to discuss the dangerous intersection of County Road 92 and Highway 5. As mayor, I receive many complaints about that intersection. The intersection will now be placed on the 5-year project list. All of this work and more should answer the question of how I will work with MNDOT and Carver County. I have been doing so very well – and will continue to do so as your mayor.

Parking & Downtown Access – Are current parking and access levels sufficient to support existing businesses, or should that be revisited as downtown continues to grow?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

Current parking and access levels are sufficient to support existing downtown businesses as they stand today. However, as downtown continues to grow and development increases, I can see in the near future where additional parking capacity and access improvements will be needed. The current City Council and City staff continue to review and develop strategies to mitigate future parking needs, which is important as the downtown corridor evolves. This proactive effort should continue with future City leadership to ensure parking and access remain adequate to support businesses, residents, and visitors.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

I spend a lot of time downtown, and current parking appears well balanced with demand. As development continues, parking management must evolve alongside permitting and infrastructure planning. As a Council member, I would focus on maintaining a healthy balance between productive property use, traffic flow, and parking availability so businesses and residents can continue to thrive downtown.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

I am a champion for more parking downtown. You can ask Paul Machenthun at Hoppers or Steve Yetzer at the Wilford as two examples.

Several positive changes have taken place in the last two years.

- Partnering with the Wilford for added public parking.
- The city purchased land from the “Old City Hall” apartment building to improve parking.
- We added “small vehicle only” spaces and signs on 1st Street near Promise Church.

When the city redeveloped 1st St. in 2025, we had the opportunity to convert the bump-out drop-off space in front of the theater into parking spaces. These parking spaces in the heart of downtown could be converted. I wanted to convert them into parking spaces. The other council members did not. Those spaces are mostly empty, and our businesses need them, as do our senior citizens. We need greater awareness on Highway 5 that our downtown exists. This is in conversation.

801 Highway 284 Development - The City recently completed a market study for the 801 Highway 284 site projecting significant additional retail capacity for Waconia. What priorities would you bring to guiding development of this city-owned property?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

I would place a heavy focus on retail development at the 801 Highway 284 site, while also exploring the possibility of engaging a hotel chain to determine whether a hotel component could complement the overall development. I believe the current approach taken by City staff is the right one. Issuing an RFP allows the City to evaluate multiple development concepts, identify the strongest option, and determine what provides the greatest long-term benefit to Waconia. This process should help ensure the property is developed thoughtfully and positions the community for continued economic growth and success.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

My priorities would be to ensure the project aligns with our Strategic Plan, attracts retail and light industrial businesses that complement existing development, strengthens the tax base, and manages traffic flow and neighborhood impact responsibly. Because this is city-owned property, development should serve residents, support employers, and become a meaningful anchor for Waconia's next decade of growth.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

As soon as I became aware that Ridgeview wanted to sell this property, I informed our city administrator that we need to purchase this property to control development. That is the start of the good news on this property. Owning this property allows the City to improve a high-visibility parcel located in the city. Namely:

- We control what development will be on this site.
- We can align roads and transportation at 284 and Walgreens. As well as straighten 8th Street, on the south side of Highway 5.
- The future roadways on this property will create an excellent commercial area of 2-3 sites.
- This site will be a valuable welcoming area to the city.
- The council would like to see commercial development on at least some of this property.
- This is an opportunity to clean up this site. Cities have better access to grant dollars for properties that have had overhead and/or buried tanks.

The City is pursuing state and federal grants for frontage road improvements in this area.

Taxes & Budget – Business growth helps ease the tax burden on residents and schools, but it also raises the stakes on business taxes themselves. How do you balance city investment, services, and business tax competitiveness all at once?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

I believe the key is finding the right balance between responsible city investment, maintaining quality services, and keeping Waconia competitive for businesses. Business growth expands the tax base and can help reduce the pressure on residents and schools, but we also need to be mindful that businesses are making significant investments in our community. City investments should be strategic, sustainable, and focused on infrastructure and services that support long-term growth. By carefully managing spending, prioritizing needs, and maintaining an environment where businesses want to invest and grow, we can strengthen Waconia tax base while protecting the interests of both residents and businesses.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

Growth should expand opportunity without adding unnecessary financial pressure on residents or businesses. The city must invest prudently, prioritize essential projects, and maintain predictable tax levels. Expanding the commercial tax base through thoughtful business recruitment, including new tech businesses and anchor companies, helps ease pressure on both residents and employers. When spending is disciplined and growth is intentional, Waconia can maintain strong services while staying competitive for businesses.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

Commercial and industrial growth is a must. The city needs more land to expand our industrial space. Commercial growth has been steadily increasing in recent years. The city has a track record of using TIF funds for development.

The risk any growing city has is that the city, the fire department, public works, our schools and more will need to expand and/or add staff and equipment to accommodate growth. That cost is then pushed to taxpayers, or the city offers less services. Something must give. We have to be careful as a city not to price people out of their homes with high property taxes. I hear this often from senior citizens.

A balanced approach is needed so we can avoid large property tax growth. We cannot simply rely on property tax growth to solve the issue of a growing city.

For 2027, the city is looking at a property tax increase in the 5% range. TBD until December when the council passes the 2027 budget. It could come down from there as the budget is refined over the next few months.

Growth - How would you approach proactive business recruitment for Waconia – being intentional about the types of businesses we want to attract, in addition to the organic growth we already welcome?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

Very similar to my answer to Question 1, I believe building on Waconia reputation as a great place to live, work, and do business is one of the best recruitment practices we can have. I envision a healthy

balance of locally owned businesses alongside more national brands. Both can complement one another and provide the diversity of businesses that meets the needs of our growing community. The City also needs to be intentional and mindful about how we approach zoning and available locations to accommodate different types of businesses, because having the right locations and infrastructure is a key factor in attracting future investment and business growth.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

Recruitment should be intentional and aligned with our long-term vision. We should attract businesses that strengthen our tax base, support existing employers, and fit Waconia character. This includes modern manufacturing, technology enabled services, and anchor businesses that bring employees and customers to town. My background working with and for large and small employers in electrical infrastructure will make me an asset to the Chamber and the development teams already in place.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

Transportation is key to business recruitment and growth. Infrastructure needs for the city are needed in order to attract and keep business. Since becoming mayor, the council has passed several infrastructure improvements that will help the city retain and recruit businesses.

An additional water treatment plant will come online in 2028. If Waconia is going to add commercial or industrial capacity, we need an additional water treatment plant. These needs were researched, discussed extensively, and passed by the city council.

The completion of the downtown's four consecutive years of reconstruction projects is key. These projects improve not only the aesthetics of the downtown, but they have also improved transportation and walkability for a safer downtown.

Organic growth comes typically from community pride. We are doing well in this area but we cannot take it for granted.

Community Center - Safari Island matters to us both as a workforce draw and a tourism asset. As those redevelopment conversations continue, how would you approach funding a project of this size — and how do you see it strengthening Waconia on both fronts?

Nick Gleason* - Candidate for City Council

There is a clear need for a community center and additional amenities in Waconia, which was apparent in recent community surveys. In my opinion, Waconia has outgrown Safari Island, and future leadership should keep the need for expanded community amenities at the forefront of long-term planning. Funding a project of this size will require creativity and a combination of resources, including pursuing state and federal grants, lobbying our state legislators for support, and utilizing state-enabled local funding tools where appropriate. A modern community center could strengthen Waconia by providing amenities that attract and retain a strong workforce while also serving as a tourism and community asset.

Jim Lohan - Candidate for City Council

I'm an active member of Safari Island and appreciate the foresight of those who built it 25 years ago.

The full project, including the lease, amenities, and improvements, is scheduled to be addressed in our Strategic Plan for 2028. Safari Island is both a workforce draw and a wellness asset, helping employers attract and retain talent while supporting community health. A project of this size will require discipline, creativity, and partnership. Companies looking for new homes are increasingly open to sponsorship and partnership models, and some may be willing to participate directly in funding revitalization. My background working with large and small businesses would make me an asset to the Safari Island Revitalization Team.

Tim Litfin* - Candidate for Mayor

I have a professional background in education and in recreation. I helped design Safari Island when I was the community education director for Waconia Schools. Safari Island has served Waconia well since 2000. I am a proud member of Safari Island.

With the contract ending at the end of 2030 for the city's rent from the school district, conversations and study are at the forefront.

Funding an addition to Safari Island or to purchase land for a new community center will be expensive. Potential revenue sources are sponsorship, naming rights, property taxes, user fees, partnerships, State of MN grants and/or bonding dollars and more. The council needs to leave no stone unturned if we make a decision to expand or build a new facility.

The city has already conducted a recreational survey. We also did a Safari Island survey. This data helps the council understand better what the community wants. Our next step is to try and further understand what our citizens want.

Candidates for Carver County Sherriff

Vision & Priorities – The Sheriff's Office covers patrol, jail operations, dispatch, emergency management, and civil process across all of Carver County. What are your top priorities for the office in your first year?

Pat Barry

My priorities will be strengthening public safety and community partnerships, improving mental health response, and recruiting, retaining, and supporting exceptional employees. I will ensure our patrol, jail, dispatch, emergency management, civil process, and support operations have the staffing, training, technology, and leadership needed to serve a growing county. I will also focus on employee wellness and development, responsible budgeting, and strong partnerships with our cities, fire, EMS, law enforcement, and community organizations. My goal is to provide experienced, stable leadership while continuing to improve the professional service Carver County residents expect and deserve.

Jessica Heger

My top priority is the people. The roster dated 6/15/2026 showed patrol was authorized for 61 deputies but had only 52, with 37 of them having less than five years with the Sheriff's Office. By all accounts, the jail is running extremely well under its current leadership. Before making major changes, I will listen, understand what is working and identify what isn't. I will focus on ensuring every division has the staffing, training, and resources needed to serve Carver County effectively.

Other priorities include school safety, mental health resources, employee wellness and building strong partnerships with our cities, townships and public safety partners.

Background & Differentiators – What from your background best prepares you to lead a county-wide agency, and where do you see room to bring a new approach?

Pat Barry

Nearly eight years as Chief Deputy Sheriff has given me executive leadership experience to lead a complex, county-wide public safety organization from day one. I oversee 168 employees, a \$31 million budget, and operations including patrol, jail, dispatch, emergency management, civil process, investigations, and support services. I have led through significant challenges and change while building strong relationships across Carver County. Experience does not mean maintaining the status quo. I will continue strengthening employee development, mental health response, recruitment and retention, responsible technology, accountability, and innovation to prepare us for Carver County future.

Jessica Heger

I was a 911 dispatcher, a patrol officer, an investigator, a school resource officer and currently I am a Special Agent with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. I built a school resource officer program and two statewide programs from the ground up, including managing budgets and supervising staff. In my current role with the state's leading investigative agency, I work with law enforcement agencies across Minnesota.

I bring a fresh perspective focused on people and the community. I see opportunities to strengthen employee recruitment and retention, invest in professional development and wellness, expand community partnerships, and create a culture where employees feel valued and supported.

Staffing & Retention – Law enforcement agencies statewide are dealing with recruitment and retention challenges. What's your plan to keep the department fully staffed and experienced?

Pat Barry

Recruitment and retention require a long-term strategy. We recruit through colleges and technical schools, our Community Service Officer program, Reserve and Cadet programs, Pathways to Policing, veteran opportunities, and targeted advertising. We are also bringing back the Explorer Program to introduce young people to careers in law enforcement. I will continue strengthening these pipelines while focusing equally on retention through competitive compensation, quality training, career advancement, leadership development, and employee wellness. My goal is not simply to fill positions, but to recruit exceptional people, develop them, and give them reasons to build their careers with Carver County.

Jessica Heger

I have had conversations with people from surrounding agencies and they are not experiencing the same level of turnover or vacancies as Carver County. Employees who have left said it is not due to the

pay, call types or the community but because of the administration. You cannot have an administration that does not acknowledge employees and retaliates if you don't agree and expect it to be successful. I plan to listen to employees, provide effective communication and invest in training. My goal is to build a culture where employees feel valued and supported and want to make Carver County their career, not just a stepping stone. I don't want to just fill openings with anybody, I want to fill them with the right people.

Coverage in a Growing County – Waconia and other Carver County communities continue to grow, increasing demand on patrol and emergency response. How do you ensure coverage and response times – including coordination with EMS – keep pace, particularly in commercial areas?

Pat Barry

As Carver County grows, public safety must grow with it. In our contract communities, that requires working directly with city leaders to evaluate call volumes, response times, staffing, traffic patterns, commercial development, and future service needs. The Sheriff's Office and each city must plan together to ensure contracted staffing keeps pace with growth. County-wide, we must also coordinate patrol resources with dispatch, fire, EMS, and emergency management. As Sheriff, I will use data, long range planning, and strong partnerships with our cities and public safety agencies to maintain reliable coverage and timely emergency response as Carver County continues to grow.

Jessica Heger

Carver County continues to grow, with new homes and/or apartments being built in almost every community in Carver County. These new homes and apartments will bring more residents to the county. I have been unable to locate a comprehensive Sheriff's Office staffing plan that shows plans for the future need for deputies, dispatchers, jail staff, support staff, etc. to respond to the growth. We need to start addressing this now before it becomes a crisis. As Sheriff, I will use call volume, workload, response times and estimated population growth numbers to build a staffing plan while working with the County Commissioners and contract cities to budget for those needs before it becomes an emergency.

Traffic Safety & Commercial Corridors - As traffic increases along growing commercial corridors, what's your approach to traffic enforcement and safety in those areas?

Pat Barry

Traffic safety requires enforcement, education, engineering, and strong partnerships. As commercial corridors grow, we monitor crashes, speeds, traffic complaints, and changing traffic patterns to identify areas of concern. In contract communities, we work with city leaders to establish enforcement priorities based on their needs. We also partner with county and state transportation professionals to identify engineering and roadway improvements and pursue traffic safety grants that provide additional targeted enforcement. As Sheriff, I will continue using data, partnerships, grant funding, education, and visible enforcement to reduce crashes and keep our growing communities safe.

Jessica Heger

I believe it is important to enforce our traffic laws and also provide education in regard to those laws. Targeted enforcement addressing speeding, distracted driving, impaired driving, etc. is important. When staffing allows, I would like a dedicated traffic car to focus on areas of community traffic concerns as well as where crash data has shown there are issues. A traffic car helps reduce patrol deputies getting pulled away from calls for service. I would strengthen partnerships with our schools and bring traffic safety education into classrooms, talking to students about distracted driving, impaired driving, speeding, etc. and also about making good decisions while driving. I would also do this with newly licensed adult drivers.

Regional Coordination & Communication – The Sheriff's Office partners with local police, the county attorney, and neighboring counties. How would you approach those relationships, and how do you plan to keep residents and business owners informed day-to-day and during emergencies?

Pat Barry

Throughout my years serving Carver County, I have built strong relationships with local police, the County Attorney, neighboring sheriffs, fire, EMS, emergency management, and state and federal partners. As Sheriff, I will leverage these established relationships to share resources, coordinate major incidents, and strengthen regional public safety. Communication with residents and businesses is equally important. We will use community engagement, social media, public information, and direct outreach day-to-day. During emergencies, we will provide timely, accurate, coordinated information through emergency notification systems and our public safety partners so residents know what is happening and what actions they should take.

Jessica Heger

Throughout my career I have focused on relationships with the community and other public safety partners. I oversee two statewide programs that I stood up, which brings me in contact with law enforcement agencies across the state. I have seen how collaboration, and sharing resources can make communities safer. As Sheriff, I will build strong partnerships with local and neighboring law enforcement agencies, the County Attorney, schools, fire departments, and other community partners. The community deserves to be informed and some of the ways I will do that is through social media, outreach, community meetings and an annual report focusing specifically on the Sheriff's Office.

Candidates for Carver County Commissioner – District 4 & 5

County Levy & Business Tax Burden – The County Board sets the annual property tax levy, which affects commercial property owners alongside residents. How do you balance funding county services with keeping the tax burden manageable for local businesses?

John P. Fahey*

Balancing essential county services with a manageable tax burden is a core responsibility of the County Board. Maintaining a predictable levy supports business planning, and Carver County's AAA

bond rating reflects strong financial management. When setting the levy, the Board evaluates key services like public safety, health and human services, and transportation, while identifying efficiencies and leveraging partnerships to control costs. Long term capital planning, grants, and MnDOT partnerships help fund major projects without relying solely on property taxes, supporting business stability and growth.

Khai Tran

Every county dollar comes from someone who worked for it, including local businesses. I would begin with essential services & measurable results, then question spending that grows faster than the value residents & businesses receive including substantial commissioner salary increases difficult to justify when taxpayers pay more. Public officials should lead by example and treat taxpayer money as carefully as families & businesses treat their budgets. Long-term planning, competitive purchasing, and shared services can control costs without neglecting roads, public safety or essential services. Responsible growth can broaden the tax base. The goal is an affordable levy, disciplined budgeting and confidence that taxpayer money is used wisely.

Roads & Regional Infrastructure – County roads connect our communities to commerce and commuters. What are your priorities for county road and infrastructure investment in your district, and how does that affect business access and growth?

John P. Fahey*

County roads are essential for connecting District 5 residents, businesses, and commuters, and improving transportation remains a top priority. Highway 212 is the largest highway project to date, enhancing safety, capacity, and mobility between Norwood Young America and Cologne, and supporting business access and long-term growth. Improvements at Bongards, which have now led to a proposed \$135 million expansion at Bongards Creameries and continued investment in County Roads 33, 43, 10, and 30 help ensure reliable routes for employees, customers, and freight. Long term planning, safety upgrades, and strong partnerships with MnDOT and local cities keep projects aligned with community and business needs.

Khai Tran

District 5 needs safe, dependable routes for residents, agriculture, freight and customers. My priorities are completing the Highway 212 expansion between Norwood Young America and Cologne, maintaining county roads and bridges before repairs become more expensive, and addressing unsafe intersections and traffic bottlenecks. Infrastructure planning should be coordinated with cities and townships so roads support the growth communities want. Good transportation investment improves access to existing businesses, opens appropriate areas for growth and protects the public's long-term investment.

Communication - When county road projects affect business districts within cities, what's your expectation for how the County coordinates and communicates with city administration and the business community – before and during construction?

John P. Fahey*

When county road projects affect business districts, clear and early communication is essential. The County does coordinate with city staff before construction, so timelines, detours, access changes, and business impacts are understood and shared with the business community. During construction, regular updates via the County's website and email notifications - like those provided on the Highway 10 project - help businesses plan for deliveries, customer access, and staffing. Timely notices on lane closures or staging changes allow cities and businesses to adjust as needed. Strong communication keeps projects on track and supports the economic vitality of affected business districts.

Khai Tran

Communication should begin while a project is being designed, not after the detour signs go up. The County should meet early with city staff, the Chamber and affected businesses to understand deliveries, customer access, peak seasons and planned events. Before construction, businesses need a clear schedule, access and detour maps, signage plans and one county contact who can resolve problems. During construction, updates should be frequent and changes communicated quickly. The County cannot eliminate every disruption, but it can plan around businesses and treat their continued access as a project priority.

Economic Development & Land Use – Data center development has become an active land use issue in Carver County, with the city of Carver adopting a moratorium and concerns raised about farmland conversion and energy demand. How do you see the County's role in guiding this kind of large-scale development — balancing business growth and tax base against agricultural preservation and infrastructure capacity?

John P. Fahey*

Data center development requires careful review to balance tax base growth with farmland preservation and infrastructure capacity. The County evaluates each proposal based on zoning, transportation access, utilities, emergency service needs, and impacts on nearby residents. Existing land use policies, including one building eligibility per 40 acres and orderly annexation agreements, guide whether projects fit long term goals. The County works closely with cities, including Carver, to understand concerns about energy and water demand. A balanced, collaborative approach supports business growth while protecting agricultural land and ensuring infrastructure can meet future needs.

Khai Tran

Cities control land use within their borders, while the County oversees planning and zoning in all ten townships. That gives the County direct responsibility in rural areas and a countywide role in bringing communities together around reliable information and strong standards. Data center proposals should be evaluated for water use, energy demand, noise, roads, emergency response, farmland conversion, infrastructure costs and eventual decommissioning. After 30 years in technology, I support continued innovation and know that systems are becoming more efficient. Each proposal should be judged on current technology and verified impacts. Growth should fit the community, protect our agricultural identity and pay its own way.

Workforce & Regional Partnerships – The County partners with cities, schools, and organizations like the Chamber on workforce development. How would you support those partnerships to help local employers find and retain talent?

John P. Fahey*

Workforce development is a shared effort across the County, cities, schools, and the Chamber. I support partnerships that help employers find and retain talent by aligning training programs with actual workforce needs, strengthening career pathways in local schools, and promoting technical and certification programs tied to industry demand. The County also works with chambers and business groups to understand hiring challenges and connect job seekers to employers through coordinated outreach and readiness initiatives. Strong partnerships help maintain a reliable talent pipeline and support long term business growth.

Khai Tran

The County is most effective as a convener. I would bring employers, schools, CareerForce, chambers and community organizations together to identify real workforce gaps and build practical pathways into local jobs. That includes internships, apprenticeships, career exploration, short-term credentials and better connections between students, job seekers and employers. Retaining workers also depends on housing, childcare and transportation. County efforts should respond to what employers are actually seeing, avoid duplicating existing programs and measure whether people are being placed in jobs and staying in them.

Regional Transit & Commuter Access – As Carver County communities grow, are there commuter transit or park-and-ride needs the County should prioritize to help businesses attract talent from other areas?

John P. Fahey*

As Carver County grows, commuter access is increasingly important for employers who rely on talent from other areas. The County works with cities, regional transit partners, and the Chamber to evaluate where park and ride sites or expanded commuter options may be needed. Focusing on strategic locations along Highway 212 helps improve access for workers, support business recruitment, and reduce congestion. Strong regional transit connections ensure employers can draw from a broader labor pool and maintain reliable commuter options that support long term economic growth.

Khai Tran

Yes, but service should be based on demonstrated need and realistic ridership. I would use the County Mobility and Transit Study, employer input and commuter patterns to evaluate targeted park-and-ride or express connections, including better links between western Carver County, Waconia and the regional transit system. We should also preserve dependable options for residents who cannot drive or work outside traditional hours. Start with focused routes or pilots, measure usage and expand what works. Transit can help employers reach a wider workforce, but investments must be useful, sustainable and fiscally responsible.

Responsiveness to Local Business Concerns – As a Commissioner representing a specific district, how do/would you plan to stay connected with and responsive to business owners and Chamber members in your area?

John P. Fahey*

As the current District 5 Commissioner, I stay connected with business owners and Chamber members by maintaining regular communication with city leaders, attending Chamber and community events, and being accessible when concerns arise. I rely on ongoing partnerships with cities and chambers to gather feedback on transportation, land use, workforce, and infrastructure issues that affect local businesses. By being present, listening, engaging directly with business leaders and attending city meetings, I have responded quickly to concerns and ensured that County decisions reflect the needs of the business community. Buy local!

Khai Tran

I would stay connected by meeting regularly with chambers, visiting businesses where they operate and holding listening sessions throughout District 5, not only during election season. Business owners need a commissioner who asks questions, responds promptly and follows up when an issue moves through county government. I would share clear updates on budgets, road projects and decisions that affect them, and create simple ways to raise concerns before a vote is taken. If an issue belongs to a city, township or state agency, I would help make the right connection rather than simply saying it is not the County's job.

Candidates for State Representative District 48A

Private Sector Experience – Please describe your private sector experience or engagement with the private sector economy, particularly any experience relevant to small businesses like those here in the Waconia area.

Joe Brothers

I have worked for Wells Fargo Bank for 10 years, most recently as a vice president within the home mortgage division. I also worked as a teacher for a private 7 - 12 school in the Twin Cities for 11 years. My grandfather owned a Ford dealership, repair shop, and gas station in the small town my mom grew up in and it was in the family for 60 years until my uncle sold it. My brother owns a funeral home in a small town in Montana.

Jim Nash*

Recovering small business owner, Sr VP of Sales, Technology Evangelist

Economic Growth & Competitiveness – The Minnesota Chamber Foundation's 2026 Business Benchmarks report shows the state's economic growth stagnating. Why do you think that is, and what should the legislature do to improve and grow Minnesota's economy – including growing communities in the Waconia area?

Joe Brothers

Minnesota's economic growth is slowing because of worker shortages, high costs, and fewer people moving here. With an aging population, businesses struggle to find employees. High taxes, new regulations, and expensive living costs make it hard for companies to expand or attract young talent.

Lawmakers need a balanced plan to grow the economy. The state can support businesses by lowering taxes, updating Minnesota's paid family leave, and speeding up project permits. At the same time, investing in public schools, job training, and affordable childcare will help families thrive. In areas like Waconia, funding more housing, childcare centers, and local infrastructure will draw new businesses and support hardworking residents.

Jim Nash*

The burdensome regulatory environment, high corporate taxes, the heavy cost of Paid Family Medical Leave, and fear of things like a fifth-tier income tax are making Minnesota a very undesirable place to operate or open a business. Minnesota has fallen to 44th for tax competitiveness and personal income tax is the 4th highest in the country. These are stifling metrics and we must fix this if we are to attract and retain businesses.

Tax Burden & Fiscal Disparities – Minnesota's high tax rates are a top concern for our members, and Carver County businesses – including many here in Waconia – continue to carry a significant fiscal disparities tax burden. What's your view on reforming the fiscal disparities formula, and what would you do to advocate for Carver County businesses on this issue?

Joe Brothers

Minnesota's Fiscal Disparities Program was created to share the benefits of commercial growth and keep local public services strong. However, the 1971 formula needs updating because Waconia tax burden falls on fewer business owners, as two of its largest employers are non-profits that do not pay commercial property taxes. Meanwhile, modern roads make it easy for local residents to spend money in nearby hubs like Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Bloomington, and Edina. To protect local employers, I will push to modernize the formula so it reflects changing shopping patterns, local tax base constraints, and population growth. Updating this system ensures Waconia businesses are not overtaxed and can remain competitive.

Jim Nash*

Fiscal disparities is a little known anti-business cash drain for places like Carver County. We have made attempts to eliminate it in the past but DFL Chairs and Governors during my time in office have not taken it seriously. It is in effect corporate welfare taken from Carver County businesses and shipped elsewhere. That money should stay in business owners pockets

Paid Family & Medical Leave – What modifications to Minnesota's Paid Family and Medical Leave mandate, if any, would you support and vote for? (Reduce weeks / Narrow family definition / Opt-outs by size or industry / None / Other)

Joe Brothers

Minnesota's Paid Family and Medical Leave law offers important support for working families during major life events, but it also creates operational challenges for small businesses trying to manage coverage and costs. To keep the program fair and functional, I support targeted modifications that balance worker protections with business realities. These include offering expanded opt-outs or reduced maximum leave weeks for small employers with under 50 staff, narrowing the broad definition of family members to avoid confusion, and streamlining pathways for employers that already offer strong private leave plans. Refining these details ensures Minnesota families receive reliable care while protecting small business operations.

Jim Nash*

I voted against PFML at every step. In the first year it's already oversubscribed which necessitates more taxes being taken from businesses and individuals. I would support many plans from reduction of weeks all the way up to elimination. The business community has historically taken care of employees in emergency situations. But now an employee can take off 20 plus WEEKS which is causing problems for all businesses.

Emerging Business Issues – As emerging issues like data center siting and AI adoption reshape Minnesota's economy, what's your approach to these issues?

Joe Brothers

AI and data centers bring valuable investment and growth to Minnesota. While the 2025 Data Center Regulatory Law made progress on water supplies and energy costs, we must continue refining these guardrails. Responsible growth requires standards for noise, hum frequencies, and equipment setbacks to shield nearby neighborhoods. We also need full transparency and mandatory local input so communities have a say before facilities are built. Combining tech innovation with local oversight, workforce training, and neighborhood safeguards ensures Minnesota stays competitive while preserving our quality of life.

Jim Nash*

Specific to AI Data Centers there needs to be studies around and laws created that set ground rules for the building of them and the legislation needs to preserve the local control of communities to decide what will happen in their cities.

Business Advocacy Priorities – If elected, what would you do to advocate for the business community, and what are your top business priorities for supporting businesses in this area specifically?

Joe Brothers

My top business priority is to listen, learn, and partner with local businesses on legislation that meets their needs. Using my private sector background, I will work to prevent fraud and waste, protect taxpayer dollars, hold bad actors accountable, lower taxes, and build broad coalitions to pass laws that strengthen our district and revitalize rural communities. I'm eager to champion Carver County's talented, innovative neighbors and showcase the unique advantages that make our area a prime spot to start and expand a business. My vision is to unlock our full potential by establishing Carver County

as a Center of Technology Excellence, attracting high-paying, quality jobs while protecting our hometown character and way of life.

Jim Nash*

When reelected I will continue advocating for a reduction of burdensome regulations and permitting, lowering of corporate and individual tax rates, reduction or elimination of PFML, Federal tax conformity, and bringing MN back to competitive parity with our adjacent states for tax favorability is a priority. If we cannot compete with our neighbors for businesses, we will become an island and will ultimately lose out on great opportunities for our state to grow.

Candidates for State Senate District 48

Private Sector Experience – Please describe your private sector experience or engagement with the private sector economy, particularly any experience relevant to small businesses like those here in the Waconia area.

Julia Coleman*

Prior to serving in the Minnesota State Senate I worked for the trade association representing Minnesota's health innovation and care industry. I worked with over 650 member companies, both giants in the industry and small startups, getting a firsthand look at what helps companies to grow and thrive here in Minnesota. Upon getting elected I found out a set of twins would be joining my one-year-old, and took a handful of years off to focus on my family in the interim. As the children grow, I have been working on my own small business, focusing on executive presence coaching and wedding coordination. As a legislator, I have won multiple endorsements and awards from organizations representing large and small businesses in Minnesota.

Dr. Dan Kessler

As the owner of a private mental health practice, I know firsthand what it takes to operate a small business in a highly regulated industry: managing a budget, paying taxes, meeting compliance requirements, navigating regulations, and making decisions about when and how to grow. Rising health insurance costs make it harder for small businesses like mine to hire and compete with larger employers, as well as limiting growth. I've also experienced how licensing requirements costs limit growth and access to new markets. We should make health coverage more affordable and ensure licensing, permitting, and other regulations protect the public without creating unnecessary barriers to hiring, investment, and growth.

Economic Growth & Competitiveness – The Minnesota Chamber Foundation's 2026 Business Benchmarks report shows the state's economic growth stagnating. Why do you think that is, and what should the legislature do to improve and grow Minnesota's economy – including growing communities in the Waconia area?

Julia Coleman*

Under the trifecta, mandates and compliance costs piled on. Neighboring states competed for jobs, Democrats made it more expensive to operate here.

I watched firsthand as Democrats completely cut employers of all sizes out of the conversation. Now, I hear the same thing from small shops and larger employers: after what the trifecta did at the Capitol, they're struggling, delaying hiring, and looking at other states. We must bring businesses back to the table when making decisions, and work to make Minnesota more competitive and business friendly.

For Waconia, I'll continue partnering with the county and city on successfully improving infrastructure here to allow for more growth, more opportunities and more success for our businesses.

Dr. Dan Kessler

Minnesota businesses are facing rising costs for insurance, labor, fuel, supplies, and other essentials. Housing and commercial development costs also make it harder to attract workers and expand. We should address these barriers while setting a bigger goal: make Minnesota the best state in the country to start and grow a business. That means supporting innovation in industries where we have a competitive advantage, including health care and medical technology, ag-tech and food production, and advanced manufacturing, while expanding housing, developing skilled workers, and streamlining permitting and unnecessary regulatory barriers.

Tax Burden & Fiscal Disparities – Minnesota's high tax rates are a top concern for our members, and Carver County businesses — including many here in Waconia — continue to carry a significant fiscal disparities tax burden. What's your view on reforming the fiscal disparities formula, and what would you do to advocate for Carver County businesses on this issue?

Julia Coleman*

Minnesota ranks 44th for tax competitiveness with the 2nd-highest corporate rate in the country. In a Chamber survey, 77% of businesses said Minnesota's high taxes are pushing them to grow or move out of state. 71% say state taxes are a bigger burden than five years ago. Among manufacturers, 53% say Minnesota's business climate is worse than five years ago.

As the former Vice Chair of the Taxes Committee, I will continue to advocate for a competitive tax climate here in Minnesota, which will support businesses throughout the state, including here in Carver County.

Dr. Dan Kessler

Minnesota's tax system should encourage businesses to invest, hire, and grow. I support federal tax conformity that rewards R&D and business investment, more competitive income tax rates, and targeted tax relief that makes it easier for small businesses to make their first hires. I also support reforming the Fiscal Disparities Program so growing communities like Waconia retain more of the tax base created by new commercial investment, while preserving regional tax-base sharing. Carver County shouldn't be penalized for attracting businesses, creating jobs, and investing in growth.

Paid Family & Medical Leave – What modifications to Minnesota's Paid Family and Medical Leave mandate, if any, would you support and vote for? (Reduce weeks / Narrow family definition / Opt-outs by size or industry / None / Other)

Julia Colman

Minnesota businesses have been sounding the alarm on the one-size-fits-all program Democrats passed. Each business has its own unique needs. As a mother, I understand the importance of healing after childcare, and I recently cared for a loved one passing from dementia. I understand both issues - businesses need flexibility, and employees need time to care for themselves and others. That's why I authored and supported a free-market solution to fill in the gaps for small businesses who want to offer paid family and medical leave, without having an expensive, government-run program that is breaking the bank and making it harder for employees to get approved time off.

Dr. Dan Kessler

Paid family leave has provided peace of mind while I build my practice. Given my age and history of cancer, short-term disability would be prohibitively expensive and would likely exclude pre-existing conditions. At present, I am covered affordably and without these limits. Even though I pay both employer and employee sides, it remains a value for me and my family.

That being said, I have also heard from other small business owners that they are pinched by both the cost of this mandatory program and lost staffing. Like many new laws, PFML could benefit from modification. I will seek out feedback from business leaders on what can be done to alleviate burdens while ensuring we are following the Minnesotan value of taking care of each other.

Emerging Business Issues – As emerging issues like data center siting and AI adoption reshape Minnesota's economy, what's your approach to these issues?

Julia Coleman*

I believe the government closest to the people serves the people best. I support allowing each city, with their own unique needs and feelings on the issue, to handle whether or not they'd welcome a data center in their community. On the state level, there should be strong permitting requirements, guardrails in place to protect utility rates and the environment, and transparency throughout the entire approval process. Regarding AI, I believe it is an inevitable change coming to our economy, but there must be protections on it regarding minors, privacy, etc.

Dr. Dan Kessler

Minnesota should embrace innovation while managing its impacts responsibly. AI has the potential to increase productivity, create new businesses, and improve people's lives. Its adoption should largely be driven by the private sector, with regulation focused on high-risk uses and preventing harm, not restricting innovation. Data centers can bring investment, jobs, and tax base, but projects should have local support to ensure residents will not experience hardships due to them. The issues of water consumption, potential for increased electric bills due to power usage, and noise need to be addressed. New developments should invest in added grid capacity, use water responsibly, and deliver meaningful benefits to the host communities.

Business Advocacy Priorities – If elected, what would you do to advocate for the business community, and what are your top business priorities for supporting businesses in this area specifically?

Julia Coleman*

I have a strong record of fighting for a healthy business climate, both in Minnesota and Carver County. From bringing over \$70 million back to Carver County for local infrastructure projects that boost our economy, to advocating/voting for less mandates and a more competitive tax climate, I have been a friend to the job creators in this state. If elected, I will continue to make sure our business communities have a seat at the table, a voice in the legislature, and a fair shot at thriving here in Minnesota.

Dr. Dan Kessler

Minnesota should be a top-five state to start and grow a business. I'll champion a pro-growth agenda that lowers barriers to entrepreneurship and investment, streamlines permitting, and supports sustainable housing, commercial development, and infrastructure. In Carver County, I want local businesses to grow, create jobs, and build lasting prosperity for their owners and employees. Making health care, child care, and housing more affordable is part of that agenda: it helps businesses attract workers, reduces costs employers are increasingly asked to shoulder, and gives families more money to spend in our local economy.

Contact the Candidates

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How Can I Vote in Waconia?

City of Waconia residents have multiple options for voting:

1. Vote by mail.
2. Vote at City Hall, 201 South Vine Street (City of Waconia Residents Only).
3. Go to the Carver County Government Center, 600 E. 4th Street, Chaska.
4. Vote in person on Election Day on November 3, 2026.



Early & Absentee Voting at City Hall (Waconia Residents Only)

Early voting for the 2026 General Election begins on Friday, October 16, 2026. City Hall will be open the following dates and times for absentee voting for City of Waconia residents only.

- Mondays - Thursdays: 7:30 am - 4:30 pm
- Fridays: 7:30 am - 11:30 am
- Saturday, October 24: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
- Tuesday, October 27: 7:30 am - 7:00 pm
- Saturday, October 31: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
- Sunday, November 1: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
- Monday, November 2: 7:30 am - 5:00 pm

How Do I Vote by Mail?

To request a mail ballot, please visit the [Secretary of State's Website](#) or waconia.org/votebymail.

City of Waconia Polling Locations

Your polling location has likely changed for 2026. The City of Waconia is now divided into **four** precincts. [Find your polling place.](#)

Current Elected Officials

For a full listing of current city, county, state, and federal elected officials, visit DestinationWaconia.org/live/#government.

