

## Rock Island Election Guide

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
Tuesday, 27 March 2001 18:00

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### Mayor

### Vince Thomas

### Mark Schwiebert

**What are the three most pressing issues likely to fact your city during your term, and what specifically would you support to address them?**

**Thomas:** Affordable housing for all income ranges.

Ensure all boards and commissions reflect city's demographics.

Ensure ecosystem is maintained in new developments.

I would support proposals to develop decent, safe, and sanitary housing to meet the market needs of the community. Be open to all segments of the community and build a more equitable society. Remove barriers to city-hall accessibility – cooperate with the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**Schwiebert:** Continued and expanded regional cooperation on issues of area-wide concern, such as bridge crossings, promoting economic development (jobs) for the Quad Cities, and preserving and expanding jobs at our area's second-largest employer, the Rock Island Arsenal.

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Expanded housing opportunities, particularly in southwest Rock Island. This would be advanced by implementing the suggestions in our new Southwest Rock Island Master Plan, including “conservation housing” and “neo-traditional neighborhood” development.

Continued enhancement of our quality of life, by promoting and expanding the arts, entertainment, and recreational opportunities in our area.

**Differentiate yourself from your opponent on three issues you think are important that you also expect your governmental body to consider during your term.**

**Thomas:** Support establishment of an office for the support and expansion of small business.

Support efforts for conversion of the Arsenal to other uses when it is closed and make plans now with the community’s help – establish best uses.

Support efforts to establish economic-development projects when Jumer’s Casino riverboat leaves.

**Schwibert:** Economic development. I’ve worked to promote a cooperative approach between government, neighborhoods, business, and labor both in Rock Island and on an area-wide basis. My opponent has generally opposed area-wide initiatives, and appears willing to write off major employers like the Rock Island Arsenal.

Housing redevelopment and expansion. I’ve helped develop and begin implementing a master plan for our southwest area with input from all interested groups, while also favoring incentives for redevelopment of older neighborhoods. My opponent has opposed initiatives in both these areas.

Revitalizing the older areas of our community. I’ve helped sponsor Rock Island’s pioneering historic-preservation ordinance and worked to develop and improve the downtown District as well as Century Woods Apartments and 11th Street on the west side, by allying government with the neighbors and businesses to get results. My opponent has generally been critical of these initiatives and instead seems to favor more public housing and confrontational rather than cooperative approaches.

**List three specific programs or projects for which you would support increasing funding, even if it required reducing funding to other programs or projects.**

**Thomas:** Affordable housing for those persons below median income.

Support schools to provide breakfast programs.

Support small business – expansion efforts and new.

**Schwibert:** Some projects may require added city support, though we should be able to afford them without cutting other programs. This is because we have been growing our tax base and

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adding discretionary revenues from sources (like the Casino Rock Island) to fund special projects. Some areas for additional funding could be: the North Garden, "Children's Garden," next to the Quad City Botanical Center; added funding for the Rock Island Community Industrial Revolving Loan Fund to create additional new jobs; and enhancing our arts base downtown.

**List three specific programs or projects for which you would support decreasing funding, regardless of whether the budget required it.**

**Thomas:** Marketing of southwest Rock Island.

Making room for mega stores in residential neighborhoods.

Refurbishing the downtown plaza. (It needs to be removed.)

**Schwibert:** We have attempted as a city to review our programs annually to ensure funding is at an appropriate level, so I do not see any current programs that deserve to be significantly de-funded.

**If it were clear that a large majority of people in your city and/or ward opposed a proposal that you strongly favored, what decision would you make and how would you justify it to your constituents?**

**Thomas:** I would not oppose their decision. I would encourage those who argued with me to organize and seek a compromise.

**Schwibert:** After listening to what the people wanted, if I felt their conclusion was based on insufficient information, I would offer the public the information I had available. If there was still disagreement and it was a matter of conscience for me, I would vote my conscience and explain my reasons to the public. Otherwise, I would support the public's wishes. For example, with the proposed new Family Aquatic Center, I initially had mixed feelings; but when a scientific survey indicated strong citizen support and we were able to identify revenues from the Casino Rock Island to pay most of the construction costs, I actively worked to make this new facility possible.

**What specific proposals would you support to bring genuine economic growth – new jobs that pay well, companies committed to the community – to your city? What do you think are the most effective tools available to city government to spur economic development?**

**Thomas:** I would support small manufacturers who can exist in available spaces. I would support efforts to grow the local economy by encouraging business to manufacture locally what we "import" from other areas for our use. For example, help small bakeries to produce bread for local grocery stores. Encourage (support) area farmers to produce eggs for local consumption instead of "importing." There are other products – such as what local schools need.

**Schwibert:** We have pursued the following programs with considerable success:

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Revolving-loan funds, which tie below-market loans to the number of jobs created by the borrower. As the loans are paid back, the proceeds can be used for new loans. Rock Island initiated this program in the Quad Cities in 1985. It has been so successful that the federal Economic Development Administration has funded a Bi-State Revolving Loan Fund patterned after the Rock Island model that has created many more jobs for our Quad City area.

Area-wide marketing of the Quad Cities. No area city can go it alone in the competitive environment of marketing our area for new jobs.

Using our strengths as the basis for our development initiatives. For example, our riverfront, historic downtown areas, fine quality of life, and solid workforce can be great magnets for attracting businesses if coupled with aggressive marketing efforts, including constantly updated Web-site information, to prospective businesses or residents.

### **What specific proposals or policies would your support to ensure that economic development in your city does not come at the expense of other parts of your town or the other Quad Cities?**

**Thomas:** Not transferring manufacturing plants from one side of the river to the other.

Meet with mayors, development groups, and others to ensure all are in agreement before a firm relocates from one side to the other. I would include labor organizations in these discussions.

**Schwiebert:** We are already doing many things to avoid “cannibalizing” each other. We work cooperatively as an area to market our strengths to the outside world and to create greater awareness of the Quad Cities in state and national capitals. These efforts foster a spirit of cooperation that reduces parochialism between the cities. Likewise, a compact was reached several years ago between area cities by which no city approaches an existing business with plans to expand until after the city where the business is currently located first has a chance to see if it can meet the expansion needs.

### **List specific concepts, proposals, and projects that you think will ensure a vital and sustainable downtown in your city.**

**Thomas:** Remove barriers to traffic and people by removing the plaza.

Entertainment can still be encouraged by closing off the street on days supported by downtown retailers.

Provide subsidies to small businesses (tax breaks, utility subsidy) to encourage development of retail stores.

Assist minority businesses with similar subsidies.

Provide funds to advertise and market the small businesses. (A McDonald’s franchise doesn’t need a subsidy.)

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Provide events that specifically attract segments of the community who cannot afford to attend entertainment events by providing subsidies; they are a part of the community also.

Tax breaks and “incentives” to mega or large businesses have been a common practice because of the promise of jobs.

**Schwiebert:** Continuation and expansion of loft apartments and other residential housing next to and within the downtown District.

Improvement of public facilities that support The District, including upgrading of the Great River Plaza.

Support the arts projects downtown to build the Quad Cities’ identity as an “Arts Mecca” and to make The District a centerpiece of this, in collaboration with the new art museum in downtown Davenport.

### 3rd Ward Alderman

**John Wilde**

**John Bauersfeld**

*Candidate did not return survey but submitted a statement that follows Wilde’s answers.*

### **What are the three most pressing issues likely to fact your city during your term, and what specifically would you support to address them?**

**Wilde:** Streets and other infrastructure. We need to get back to doing maintenance activities along with the major repairs.

Parking downtown. We need to find more available parking so customers can come to the businesses.

Small business. Paying attention to their needs and working as hard to keep them as we do to bring in new ones.

### **Differentiate yourself from your opponent on three issues you think are important that you also expect your governmental body to consider during your term.**

**Wilde:** 18th Avenue. The citizens are against widening it; until they change their minds, so am I. I’m in favor of putting some parking back. I’m in favor of allowing parents to pick up their children at Washington Junior High School. The city complains about unfunded mandates passed along from the feds and the state. Here they are doing the same thing. We should be part of the solution, not the problem.

Landscaping. We spent \$208,000 to design landscaping. What will the actual landscaping cost? How will we maintain it when we don’t have the time and manpower to maintain what we already have?

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Job costs. We should do more work using city crews instead of contracting it out, especially when city staff says we can do the job in-house for almost half the cost.

**List three specific programs or projects for which you would support increasing funding, even if it required reducing funding to other programs or projects.**

**Wilde:** Streets and infrastructure. Property-tax rebates for new construction of homes, rental properties, and businesses. Cameras in police cars.

**List three specific programs or projects for which you would support decreasing funding, regardless of whether the budget required it.**

**Wilde:** Fewer paid studies and surveys. Some are done just to convince the public to do what the council wants.

New landscaping. Getting our streets back on track with repairs and maintenance should take priority.

**If it were clear that a large majority of people in your city and/or ward opposed a proposal that you strongly favored, what decision would you make and how would you justify it to your constituents?**

**Wilde:** Depends on the amount of opposition. If 80 percent were opposed, I would go with what the people want. If it were more evenly divided, I would listen to both sides then vote what I believed.

**What specific proposals would you support to bring genuine economic growth – new jobs that pay well, companies committed to the community – to your city? What do you think are the most effective tools available to city government to spur economic development?**

**Wilde:** Tax incentives for all new construction.

Actively going to businesses to bring them to town.

Our city looking good brings pride, people, and businesses to our community. I want our city to be clean and to look good. We can start by taking care of the landscaping we already have and by bringing back services we have eliminated – things to help our residents clean up, like the refuse trailer or the monthly special pick-ups.

**What specific proposals or policies would your support to ensure that economic development in your city does not come at the expense of other parts of your town or the other Quad Cities?**

**Wilde:** If existing businesses need to expand or move, we should offer them the same incentives and help we offer new businesses.

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We need to make all of our citizens more aware of programs that are available to everyone.

### **List specific concepts, proposals, and projects that you think will ensure a vital and sustainable downtown in your city.**

**Wilde:** Moving the boat will be good in two ways: We will get the boat in a place where it can't just pick up anchor and float away; and it will open up areas of downtown for needed parking.

**Bauersfeld:** Running for re-election to the City Council is a serious decision for me, as I take the responsibility of representing the people of my ward and of Rock Island an honor. Re-election means that I will be able to continue the work on many great projects already in process and be an integral part of a team to develop and implement new projects for the betterment of all citizens. Our city must stay on course and remain the "city on the rise" by keeping Rock Island a safe place to live, with quality services supplied at reasonable costs, with growing neighborhoods.

Staying connected with the citizens of Rock Island is essential. Some of the key issues they tell me are foremost are: continuing to hold the line on taxes, property and others; quality of life; lower crime rates; expansion of southwest Rock Island; better access to the riverfront; the expansion of our retail and industrial tax base. They also expect the City to continue to provide great service in: snow removal, garbage pickup, and street repair and maintenance.

I am proud to have been involved in decisions that have made significant improvements in Rock Island. Some examples are:

- Property values of Rock Island continue to grow – over 80 percent citywide since 1989 and our dependence on property taxes continues to decline. Our tax rate has dropped from 4.13 per \$100 in equalized assessed value to \$2.61 in nine years.
- Our industrial base over the last nine years has grown dramatically – \$193 million in private financing and created or retained 2,500 jobs. Over 1.3 million square feet of new commercial and industrial space has been built within our city.
- Crime continues to decline throughout the city. Since 1994, Part I crime decreased from 3,472 to 1,865 incidents – a 46-percent drop. Last year alone we have seen a 19-percent drop in serious crime.
- We have expanded the branches of our library system, 30/31, and southwest Rock Island. Last year saw Rock Island complete the last leg of our bike and hike path by connecting it to Moline. The District continues to expand and enhance the special events that draw tens of thousands to our downtown.
- We have also seen the Southwest Rock Island Area Plan adopted and a bright future is foreseen. Now under construction are loft apartments in our downtown – a \$6.2 million project. Recently the Paddock Office building, the Rock Island County Criminal Justice Center and the Rock Island Fitness and Activity Center expansion have been built. Of course, the Family

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Aquatic Center will soon be a reality.

- With all the development activities there will be ongoing efforts by the City Council, Mayor and our excellent staff, to maintain the high quality services at affordable prices that our citizens have come to expect.

There still remains much to be done. My job as a member of our city council is to set the tone for our city and keep us the “city on the rise.” All things begin with council cooperation. It is nice to hear the other cities’ citizens saying “like Rock Island has” for a change! My common-sense approach to problem-solving is an asset. I promise fiscal responsibility – a conscientious review of our financial budget as well as ongoing accountability during the year.

The days ahead will bring new problems to solve. We need vision, energy, teamwork, and that positive tone the council now has to take each issue forward to improve the quality of life for all our citizens. I am committed to keeping our course and actions, ones that prepare our city for the successes of the future.