



Robbie Young

I'm 27 years old and currently work for SAP, (used to be First Logic). I came to La Crosse for school, which I finished in 2009. I decided I had to stay here, and worked in a bike shop and a bar to get by until finding full time employment. I bought my own home, planted my roots, and realized I needed to participate more in my community. I volunteer with Human Powered Trails, now ORA, and support our local bicycle advocacy groups. when I'm not working or running for mayor, I like to brew beer, garden, and mountain bike.

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1) Does the city of La Crosse need a city administrator, and would you support another effort to create that position?

No, and no. The city needs a visionary leader. As mayor, I'd ensure I am surrounded by capable people, with the right tools to execute. I would also make sure they are driven by a new vision for La Crosse, where we are continually improving our city and reevaluating how we run our government.

2) The city has received frequent criticism for being overly generous with financial incentives for developers. What sort of incentives should be available from the city, if any? How does the city

best create a hospitable business environment?

TIFs have their place, and applied correctly can, and do, make money for the city. Mishandled, they can quickly turn into decade-long liabilities, and that's what we have to carefully manage. For the sake of transparency, I think the city should be more open with the people on the full structure of a TIF when it's being considered.

To better foster economic development, we should be focusing on growing the businesses we currently have, rather than trying to entice other businesses to come here. A diverse population of businesses results in a strong economy. Spending millions to attract one 50-person employer may seem like a good idea, but is kind of putting all your eggs in one basket. Those millions are better spent adding 50 new jobs at 30 different local businesses. This insulates our population from economic swings in certain markets. This concept is growing in popularity with smaller towns across the nation and is known as 'economic gardening'. Not only is it popular, but it's working. Littleton CO, the pioneer of economic gardening, has seen a 71 percent increase in employment and a tripling of sales tax revenues since 1989. They provide no tax breaks or financial incentives to attract outside business.

3) There are growing concerns La Crosse is experiencing a surge in crime, particularly drug-related crimes. How do you plan to deal with the increasing level of criminal activity?

It's counter intuitive to attempt to reduce drug use by trying to stem the supply of drugs. Our people aren't using drugs because they're available, they're creating a market for drugs because they're addicted to them. It's the most basic of economic principles. To reduce the

presence of drugs in our communities we must first reduce the demand for drugs. We can't punish away addiction. An approach working for a number of cities and states is instituting diversion programs, which keep people out of jail, and helps them overcome addiction. This lowers the cost to the defendant, but also lowers the rate of recidivism and the costs associated with jail or prison. If we want real change, we need to first challenge our idea of "break the law, you go to jail", because that's not producing desired results. I wrote a long essay on this, with a lot more information: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzUcZLHcn1U0tTN2RBWldvTU0/edit>

4) La Crosse's fire department is one of the most expensive in the state per capita to operate. Are you happy with the status quo in the department? What, if any, changes you would like to see in staffing, overtime use, equipment purchases or other expenses for the department?

I'd expect inefficiencies to be identified from within the department. Considering costs of such a sensitive and valuable public resource requires intimate knowledge of the fire department's operating budget. I would definitely meet with the department chairs and see what we could come up with.

We should always be focused on providing the best service at the most reasonable cost to the city.

5) A recent study of La Crosse neighborhoods details the challenges of some of the city's distressed areas. Do you see problems in La Crosse neighborhoods, and if so, how do you propose to remedy those problems?

Distressed neighborhoods offer a unique opportunity for the city of La Crosse, and we should embrace them. It's like a clean slate for experimenting in green architecture and urban living. There may be some bad houses in the city, but there are hardly any bad lots, and we should be working that to our advantage. With such an attractive place to live, providing less than desirable dwellings is something we cannot afford to do. Good neighborhoods benefit us all, through increased property values, a brighter street, and more funding for schools. There is so much to gain, for such a little investment, by improving our neighborhoods. This could mean making them more walk-friendly, facilitating bicycles, helping homeowners invest in their houses, or ensuring traffic flows safely through.

6) After years of steady increases, city taxpayers have recently experienced a string of little or no increase in the city's tax levy rate. Will you try to continue that trend, and how will you do it?

The most ideal way to address tax burden is to make sure the city is collecting more dollars while people are paying less as a proportion of their income. In short, we need to make sure people can afford their taxes. I'd love to reduce taxes, but the city cannot afford a decrease in revenue given the services it provides.

I am also open to the idea of completely reconfiguring the way we calculate and collect property taxes for both residential and commercial properties. In my opinion, this is something best studied and suggested by consultants, and if we want the most productive plan of action, I think we should be willing to pay to ensure have the most experienced minds possible developing that plan.

7) In the past year, city department heads have been given the authority to create new fees as they see fit. Should fees supplant and/or add to property taxes collected by the city? Are the fees that have been added in recent years excessive?

The key is balancing public benefit with personal cost. We can charge everyone to fund services only some use, or we can charge per-use fees. For some things, we all benefit, even if not directly utilizing a public service. Public schools are an example. For other things, specific user groups can be expected to offset costs for their consumption of a public good. No matter which method is being employed, we have to make sure we're using these fees to increase the standard of living in La Crosse.

8) Recently, the La Crosse City Vision Foundation, with the blessings of the La Crosse police department, has announced a plan to raise nearly a half million dollars to install surveillance cameras in the downtown for use by police. Do you support the plan? Why or why not?

No. Cameras don't reduce crime, and they cost a lot of money. Numerous cities have already found this out. That La Crosse is considering something that has failed so many times before and is expecting different results is disappointing. The city of Glasgow, Scotland actually saw an increase in crime after installing cameras. The city of Tampa spent millions on facial recognition cameras, but had to remove them after 2 years after they did not result in a single arrest. This was a camera network far more advanced than what La Crosse is considering!

9) Some have complained that the city council often seems to work against the current mayor rather than cooperating with him. How will you get the council to follow your agenda, if they're

all opposed to it?

We need a city government unified in a vision to transform this city. Elect me to guide that vision, and I'll make sure it's sold as effectively as possible to not only the council, but the state as well. Wisconsin will look at La Crosse and say, "We need to know what they're doing!" Elect other city officers who share in this vision and understand the things we've done in the past need to change.

10)What is the last book you read? What is the last movie you saw?

Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says About Us) by Tom Vanderbilt. It completely changed the way I view driving, and breaks down the mentalities of drivers and the situations that lead to traffic issues. I highly recommend it. Our library has a copy, and I now own two copies so I can share one and still have one as a reference.