



# Greater Spokane Valley Chamber Candidates Questionnaire

*Ben Wick, Candidate for Spokane Valley City Council Position #6.*

## **Briefly introduce yourself and list your qualifications for elected office.**

My name is Ben Wick, I was born and raised in the Spokane Valley. I graduated from East Valley High School and went on to Eastern Washington University graduating Summa Cum Laude with a B.S. in Computer Science. I am happily married to my wife Danica and we have two young girls Sabriel (who is three) and Hermione (who is one). I am currently the IT Manager for Spokane Industries a metal castings / stainless steel tanks manufacture in the Spokane Valley and serve the citizens of Spokane Valley as their City Council member in which I am seeking reelection.

I am a current Spokane Valley Kiwanis member, involved with the Spokane County Interstate Fair by volunteering as the Llama Superintendent and formerly served on the Spokane County Fair & Expo Center Advisory Board which I chaired for 5 years. I have also completed the Spokane County Sheriffs Citizens Academy and the Spokane Valley Fire Citizens Academy (called Fire Operations 101). While serving on the City Council I represent Spokane Valley on the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (current chair), co-chaired the Ad Hoc Spokane Valley Economic Development Committee, and chair the Spokane Valley Lodging Tax Advisory Committee.

## **Why do you choose to live and work in the City of Spokane Valley?**

I live and work in the City of Spokane Valley because I love the quality of life we have. Growing up in Spokane Valley, I have a great appreciation for the character of our neighborhoods and enjoy the opportunities available within Spokane Valley. We don't have live in dense housing developments and we can enjoy more freedoms like having animals if we want to. We have great schools for our children and a safe environment for them to grow up in.

## **What does public service mean to you?**

Public Service to me is about serving others. As a city council member I believe that in order to serve the citizens best I need to listen to everyone, do my research on issues including learning what others are doing related to the topic, and making decisions that provide the best outcome for the citizens of Spokane Valley either today or in the future. Sometimes that means putting aside my personal views and opinions in order to make decisions that benefit the greater good for the City of Spokane Valley.

**What is the most important ONE thing you could do to support business growth and development in the City of Spokane Valley?**

The most important thing that the City of Spokane Valley do to support business growth and development is to provide the infrastructure necessary. The City of Spokane Valley already has a reputation for being helpful and efficient to do business with. However, we have areas within the City of Spokane Valley that don't have the infrastructure needed to allow development. For example, we have a large 500 acre industrial zoned area in the Barker Road area which we cannot permit new businesses in because it is lacking the necessary infrastructure. There is what is considered a failing road intersection at Barker and Trent that needs to be redone to allow development and the sewer system needs to be extended to the area as well. These are the types of things the City of Spokane Valley can do to help support business growth and job creation.

**The Greater Spokane Valley Chamber recently announced the Big FIVE for a Greater Spokane Valley (attached). What are your thoughts on the Big FIVE? What can you do as an elected official to support the implementation of these five initiatives?**

I really like the Big 5 and appreciate the Greater Spokane Valley Chamber stepping forward to lead that inclusive process. I have some ideas on how we can help support some of those initiatives. I think our infrastructure projects that we have been prioritizing align nicely and have a direct impact on the Big 5's Greater Goods / manufacturing goal. The City Hall plans and development helps establish the Greater Vision and can help emphasize the Greater Outdoors with the design currently being considered. There are a number of things that we can do to help support the different initiatives and I am excited to help be a part of the Big 5 and hope to be able to continue to be a part of it.

**What is the biggest challenge facing the City of Spokane Valley?**

The biggest challenge facing the City of Spokane Valley is project and spending prioritization. There are currently lots of ideas and projects identified that are good projects and ideas, but we cannot afford to do them all at once. We are one of the few cities in our state that has a pay as you go philosophy with essentially no debt. We have a good balanced budget that provides for essential services and leverages state and federal grants for our major capital projects. It is easy to approve additional spending, but we need to be strategic and keep an eye on what would give us a better return in the future.

### **What should the priorities of city government be?**

- 1) **Public Safety.** Currently Public safety is over 50% of the city's budget. We need to make sure we keep our city safe while continuing to find efficiencies that allow us to control costs.
- 2) **Infrastructure.** We need to maintain our streets and find ways to develop the infrastructure needed to allow for expanded business growth. We have found that every dollar we spend on street preservation or maintenance we save up to eight dollars in the future (by not having to rebuild the whole road). We have made progress in that direction, but we still aren't able to fully fund street maintenance.
- 3) **Maintain the philosophy of a Contract City.** The City of Spokane Valley is the tenth largest city in Washington State with 93,000+ residence. However we only have 87.4 employees for the entire city. By being a contract city we keep a lean efficient staff and hire businesses to provide services such as snow plowing, street sweeping, street maintenance / road construction, or even garbage disposal. We have found that by contracting out these services we save our tax payers money and are provided with the flexibility to be able to respond more rapidly to changes in the economy. In doing so we have become models for other cities within our state and are often looked as the example for others to follow. We need to maintain this philosophy to keep our city strong.

**It is often perceived that our local governmental agencies do not get along with one another.**

**What are your thoughts on this perception? If the perception is true, how would you change it?**

I think that there is some truth to that perception. When you look at our regions local governmental agencies it is often thought or assumed that we are all structured very similar. However, we are structured fairly different from each other. Spokane for instance is a strong mayor form of government which has a separately elected mayor's position and the mayor is responsible for the daily operations of the city i.e. is essentially the executive branch of the government; and the city council sets the policy and direction as the legislative branch. Spokane County on the other hand has three elected commissioners which serve as a combined legislative and executive branches of the county. So they are responsible for daily operations and policy / direction. The city of Spokane Valley is a council-manager form of government. In our city we elect seven city council-members and after each election we choose amongst ourselves who will serve as mayor, our mayor is more of a figure head spokesman for the council but doesn't have really any more responsibilities than the other council members. In our city we hire a professional City Manager who is responsible for the day to day operations of the city and that position has the executive authorities within our city. I highlight these differences as I believe that the conflicts often arising between our jurisdictions come from communication issues and a misunderstanding of how each of us are different. I believe that we can change this by working to improve our communications. Having regular meetings to jointly discuss issues, better understand each other's perspectives, and I believe would go a long way to improve relations.