

# WHERE THEY STAND

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## SECTION B

### Greenwood City Council: Districts 1, 3

Republican primary candidates

Primary election day: May 8 ■ Voting hours: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. ■ Web Extra: Expanded answers and more questions at www.thejournalnet.com

**District 1**  
Pick one



MIKE BEELES



JOHN M. GIBSON, INCUMBENT

On May 8, voters in Greenwood Districts 1 and 3 will pick candidates to run as Republicans in the November general election. Reporter Annie Goeller and assistant managing editor Michele Holtkamp-Frye interviewed the candidates on a wide range of issues. Voters have a right to know where the candidates stand on the issues. Use these pages as a guide to help you make your voting decision.



**District 3**  
Pick one



BRUCE ARMSTRONG, INCUMBENT



JEFFREY A. COLVIN

**Beeles**

Property taxes always top one. Haven't raised taxes, but they've gone up. Properties are reassessed, and city keeps same tax rate. With a higher assessed value, people pay more taxes. City is boring. Need more activities and better appearance. Make city attractive to draw more retail businesses and companies. Greenwood's been idle too long. Public services need to be improved and increased. Need to prioritize each department, modernize police department and add patrolmen. City is not meeting national standards. Crime is on the rise, and no one is talking about it. Need more awareness of what departments are spending.

**Gibson**

Expansion would be one. Open a corridor for us to expand the city east from County Line Road past Emerson Avenue. But we have to be asked to annex. Also need to retain and improve downtown Greenwood. Several property owners have been concerned, and we are addressing those issues. Need to upgrade as many streets and roads as possible in city. Finished work in Northern Park and Valle Vista, now it's my turn to get my area repaved. Whole city has to find money through appropriation or grants and not overtax the budget.



**What are the top three issues facing the city? How would you address them?**

**Armstrong**

First issue continues to be housing. City has flooded the market with starter homes and lost the balance. Was caused by previous city council. Current council has attempted to improve the diversity of homes to restore the tax base. Second issue is the need to improve the diversity of jobs. "We are still too dependent on warehouse jobs and don't have enough high-tech, high-wage jobs. That's the kind of stuff we should be trying to attract to Greenwood." Third biggest issue is the swimming pool and approving the right one in Greenwood. "I believe we need a reasonable replacement for the current pool."

**Colvin**

Top issue is to strengthen the quality of life, including infrastructure, roads, bridges, water and sewer service. Also includes health and safety and making sure police and fire departments are adequately staffed. Providing recreation, parks and cultural events is very important. Second issue is to prioritize economic development activities. Strengthening the local economy helps keep the city's tax rate relatively low to moderate. City should start pursuing high-dollar businesses. Another top issue is revitalizing downtown Greenwood. Downtown is quaint and has historic significance. Would try to examine it and pump more life back into it.

**Beeles**

Yes. They'll be by themselves. Would have to be public meeting by law.

**Gibson**

Will follow the law. Knows rules and regulations. Is even concerned about going to dinner with council members or calling a special meeting. Won't meet in private. Council members don't schedule any meetings in private. Council publishes date and what they will discuss. If working on economic development commission project, we let them explain what they want, but it's not in a closed meeting. Officials of city are all there.



**Will you follow the letter and spirit of the Open Door Law? What if an attorney or other elected official makes a recommendation that goes against what you know the law is? What if someone requests to meet with the council in private?**

**Armstrong**

Yes. Would deny requests that violated the law. Bottom line is the law is the law, and it must be followed.

**Colvin**

Absolutely. If presented with request that violated law, would remind them what his interpretation of the law is. Would hope it wouldn't be the city attorney. Would remind them what the law is and refuse to meet with them in private. Said record speaks for itself. Rarely found an excuse to meet in private. Met once or twice on a lawsuit during previous term on council. Would be doing the peoples' business, so be open. Has nothing to hide. Is sensitive to personnel and litigation issues. But even in those cases, meeting has to meet specific reasons.

**Beeles**

City can't attract companies or retailers unless it has something there to offer. There are many empty retail stores. City is losing more than it's adding. Council plays important role in pursuing new industries and retailers.

**Gibson**

City starting to parallel sales with professional medical businesses, such as general practitioners and buildings with specialists. Is professional job, don't have weekend traffic and is not going to overtax school system. City still has options to work with development. Have tax-increment financing district to build community up. Can't pick and choose ones that come in, but we can guide those that do. Also have intent to build convention centers and meeting rooms at County Line Road exit off Interstate 65.



**Greenwood's employers are dominated by two sectors: commercial/retail businesses along U.S. 31 and State Road 135 and distribution centers. Are there other types of industries the city should pursue? What role does the city council play in attracting industry and better jobs?**

**Armstrong**

"What we need is the higher-end jobs that will allow people to support their families on a single job." Role of the council is to approve tax abatements for companies that bring something to the table and not approve every abatement that is requested. Council approved abatement for Arbonne. About 95 percent of those jobs pay \$11.25 per hour or less compared to the county average of \$13.60 per hour. "We need the \$20-an-hour-and-up jobs."

**Colvin**

Yes, there are other industries to pursue. City has pursued those. Biomedical industry is a large, high-paying industry. Should also pursue high-tech and computer tech industries. Any community, in order to strengthen the economy, must diversify. City should use tools available, such as tax incentives and abatements. Does this by actively pursuing those companies and trying to make the approval process as fair and open as possible so people know the ground rules coming in. City has to self-promote and market itself to whatever industry it wants to attract.

**Beeles**

Yes, they should. Status gives city more money to operate with. Is beneficial to claim second-class city status. With status, there is more funding available from state, which takes the burden off residents.

**Gibson**

He and mayor had several conversations concerning second-class status and the possibility Greenwood could go to that, but that's after doing more research into the requirements, such as who would have to come on board with administrative staff. Knows city would have to hire more people, need to see what works best.



**Should Greenwood pursue second-class city status? Why or why not?**

**Armstrong**

No. The additional costs far outweigh the additional benefits. It would cost a minimum of \$250,000 per year for the added risk. The bond bank is a significant issue. Doesn't believe city of this size with the assessed value is enough for it. City doesn't have the right financial resources. Also, controller needs to be an elected position. State law says controller is appointed by the mayor in a second-class city. Need ability to have that person accountable to the public. Also would add districts and council members. None of the council members are overworked now. Represents the largest district by population at this time and is not overworked.

**Colvin**

The issue came up before and was pursued. Reasoning in the past was to professionalize the city accounting system. Could still be a positive because city would have a controller. Another aspect is that the council would expand. Could be a positive or negative.

**Beeles**

Doesn't know.

**Gibson**

Tax abatement is when an organization or business comes in and requests leave of taxes on land or machinery. City will supplement the income to the tax base by percentage for a few years to 10 years. Usually, in doing so, make more income in developing land, build professional buildings and not increase school enrollment like with housing developments. No such thing as inappropriate. Can happen anytime, but there is a process they have to go through that can take four to six months.



**What is tax abatement? When are they appropriate? When are they not appropriate?**

**Armstrong**

Abatement is a way for the city to attract businesses by forgiving a portion of their taxes. Tax abatement is appropriate for companies that bring jobs that support families. Another issue is that use of a tax abatement within a tax-increment financing district is especially touchy. That makes TIF districts last much longer than they should. Would be open to an abatement within the district only in the case of significant wages that are well above county average.

**Colvin**

Tax abatement is an economic development tool to help attract businesses. Abatements are appropriate when trying to lure a businesses. Need to use guidelines specifying size of company, number of jobs, payroll and what taxes will be paid. Abatements are not appropriate when you don't want that business in your community. Company may bring 600 jobs. But if they all pay \$5 an hour, then excitement goes away quickly. Would consider jobs, taxes, type of industry and the rate of pay. Would look at what that business would do for the quality of life and environment.

**Beeles**

TIF district is a welfare district. Schools are on their own separate fund and are a separate tax. Overall the whole city is pretty much equal in its tax rate or tax division.

**Gibson**

Is improvement of land that would not normally be used for anything else. Money goes to redevelop community with roads, streets, sewers. Phase out district when everything is filled in, when existing land is completed or at least ¾ and can handle it.



**What is a tax-increment financing district? At what point, if ever, should the city's eastside TIF district be phased out and tax money from the district should be returned to the general fund, schools and the library?**

**Armstrong**

A tax-increment financing district is a methodology for directing the taxes collected to pay for the infrastructure improvements needed for that area. "I believe that the TIF on the east side needs to be phased out immediately, but the problem is that you can't get rid of it until the bonds are paid off." Favors paying off the existing debt and then terminating the TIF district. One of the issues with the TIF district is that city is killing property owners in the Clark-Pleasant school district by denying the schools the taxes they should be entitled to.

**Colvin**

Purpose of TIF is to establish a boundary around a growth area. As businesses locate, taxes from that area stay there and pay for improvements in the area. "To me, that is one of the purest forms of requiring people to pay their own way." Can pay for roads, sewers and fire stations. A downside is that it captures all of that, so others don't share in it initially. But they still receive other types of taxes. Would examine to see if there is a surplus of money and the TIF is collecting too much, to see if it should be phased out or modified. Said that is reasonable and should be considered.

**Beeles**

Council needs total breakdown of each department, so they can know what each department is spending. Needs to be broken down by each department. Budget gets three readings now, over a month and a half, which is open to the public. Each document needs to be public information. System has worked for 20-plus years, doesn't see any alternatives needed.

**Gibson**

Would go over every department chairman's submission of budget. No. 1 priority is salaries and to make department efficient with equipment and materials. Once council sets budget in summer, go through a hearing and sometimes find out city is going to be short. Do levy and look for cuts. Often cut materials, not salary. Not much of a way to alter process. State mandates the procedure, council has to follow up with State Board of Accounts and submit forms necessary.



**The annual budget can be considered the single most important tool the city council has. What steps would you take individually to review the budget? What process should the council use to publicly review the budget? How would you alter the city's budget process?**

**Armstrong**

The budget process works in that each department makes a presentation to the council. Council sees their issues. "I haven't seen any changes that need to be made, or we would have at least proposed changes." Now it seems to work the way it is. Looks at every budget line and compares it to previous years. Based on the fact that the city is growing, sees need for increased police and fire protection. Any budget needs to go up because city is providing for more and more residents. Must minimize increases in tax rates.

**Colvin**

Step he took on the city council was to review the budget in its entirety. Studied the budget, needs, past spending and past requests for additional spending or transfers. Budgetary process has built-in safeguards that call for the budget to be published and the council to conduct public hearings. Those are rarely attended. Council could take an extra step and use the Internet and technology to publicize the budget as much as possible. Always remembers that it is not his money; it is the people's money.