

# Rita O'Connor: 2021 candidate for Long Grove Trustee



Rita O'Connor

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Four candidates are vying for three four-year seats on the Long Grove village board.

## **Bio**

City: Long Grove

Age:

Occupation: Real Estate Broker, Attorney

Employer: Self-employed (ReMax Suburban sponsoring brokerage)

## Q&A

Q: How do you view your role in confronting the pandemic: provide leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents -- even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state and federal authorities?

A: As a neighbor, spouse, friend, parent and trustee in Long Grove I support and model the Illinois Dept of Public Health guidelines as well as the Executive Order of the Governor. For those who see the issue differently, I have listened and understand their frustrations and anxiety.

Long Grove is a non-home rule community, and therefore is under the regulatory authority of the county and the state. We followed the IDPH suggested protocols, as did our merchants, while heartily supporting the first amendment rights of all.

Q: Did your town continue to adequately serve its constituents during the disruptions caused by the pandemic? If so, please cite an example of how it successfully adjusted to providing services. If not, please cite a specific example of what could have been done better.

A: Long Grove, and its Economic Development Commission, supported our residents and merchants by hosting informative Zoom meetings to educate and guide them on the availability and necessary protocols to obtain Paycheck Protection Program funds. Those federal funds helped business owners to continue to pay their employees during the mandated shut down. Long Grove also offered a partial waiver of liquor license fees for 2021.

Additionally, our Economic Development Commission reached out to each of our business owners to touch base, determine any needs the village could help with, and to let them know we support them.

Furthermore, we closed Village Hall to protect our employees who moved into home offices to keep the business of the village up and running for the residents and contactors. We are proud of them and greatly appreciate their efforts.

Q: In light of our experiences with COVID-19, what safeguards/guidelines should you put in place to address any future

public health crises?

A: We are exploring better online and phone capabilities in the very near future to be ready for doing even more for residents, contractors, and vendors as we continue to work off-site.

Q: What cuts can local government make to reduce the burden of the pandemic on taxpayers?

A: The Village of Long Grove runs on a lean annual budget of approximately \$4,000,000.

Our residents pay NO municipal tax as is levied by 97% of other municipalities in the state.

Long Grove revenue is derived primarily from the following: sales tax, the Village share of the Illinois motor fuel taxes, TIF revenues, grants, and permits. These revenues pay for road maintenance, plowing & salting, employee salaries and benefits (5 employees), Lake County Sheriff protection, engineering fees, etc. Additionally, the Village has a financial reserve of approximately one year of revenues. This mechanism was put in place to ensure that we will still be able to carry out vital village services in the event that the current amount of sales and motor fuel taxes decline precipitously. Our goal is to continue to manage our revenues in a responsible manner to avoid having to levy a Village tax in the future.

Q: What do you see as the most important infrastructure project you must address? Why and how should it be paid for? Conversely, during these uncertain economic times, what infrastructure project can be put on the back burner?

A: Our most important current project is the resurfacing of North Krueger Road. It is in critical condition and thanks to competitive bidding and fiscal planning by the Village, it will be in much better condition by mid to late summer 2021. Also, we need to continue to expand and connect our pathways so residents can keep their cars in the garage and walk or bike safely between neighborhoods and shopping areas.

Budget discussions will begin at the next Board meeting for 2021-2022 and we will discuss adding or subtracting contemplated road projects at that time. Last year we delayed the much-needed repaving of Stemple parking lot in the downtown area due to the economic uncertainty of COVID. We have received a grant from Illinois to pay for part of the cost for Stemple which will enable us to pave the village portion of the lot very soon, perhaps this year, depending upon contractor bids.

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the stance your board/council has taken on permitting recreational marijuana sales in the community? What would you change about that stance, if you could?

A: In the fall of 2019, the Board passed an amendment to Title 10 of the Long Grove Village Code prohibiting the sale of adult use recreational cannabis businesses. I believe it was the right decision at the time.

It is not lost on us that the state of Illinois has historically oversold expected tax windfalls to its citizens for initiatives such as the lottery (the tax dollars were supposed to fund education) and gambling. We listened to credible presentations from drug rehab professionals outlining how hard drug use frequently begins with marijuana. The board also acknowledged that the cannabis issue is very similar to the issue of the sale of alcohol and its and subsequent rates of addiction. Subsequently, we decided that we needed to respond as we did in order not make a hasty decision and to be able to revisit the issue at a future time.

I am open to revisiting the issue after we poll the residents and are able to determine what the potential tax reimbursement to Long Grove would be, based upon tax payments sent to similarly populated towns. I believe that medical marijuana should be supported, and I would not object to a cannabis growth facility. I will not vote my personal opinion. I will vote as the majority of our residents request.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better the community that no one is talking about yet?

A: My Board duties for the last 4 years have been focused on roads, bridges and pathways. As a result, I recently raised the possibility of a pedestrian bridge over Route 83 at Robert Parker Coffin Rd as well as

one over Route 53 at Schaeffer to allow for safer nonmotorized routes to connect neighborhoods not only to each other, but also to shopping and dining. In addition, I am currently researching the infrastructure requirements for car charging stations which would be a welcome, and soon, a necessary addition to the community.

Undoubtedly we will need to obtain grants to accomplish these goals, but we have been successful in the past, and I think we can be in the future as well.

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