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Chat about the Lawrence City Commission race with candidate Boog Highberger

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Boog Highberger was elected to City Hall in 2003. He said one of his key successes in the past four years was a living wage ordinance, which requires companies that receive a tax abatement to pay a living wage of at least \$10.38 per hour, which is 130 percent of the federal poverty level. He also said the city's planning process is now more responsive to new residents.

Moderator: Thanks for joining us for our online chat with candidate and current commissioner Boog Highberger. I'm 6 News reporter Laura McHugh and will moderate this chat.

Boog Highberger: Howdy, folks-- I look forward to answering your questions today.

[zimmerman](#): Do you think we need a new public library? If so, do you believe we can afford it? If so, which of the proposed plans do you support?

Boog Highberger: I support an expanded public library downtown, subject to a public vote. Compared to other Kansas cities, our library has been underfunded for a long time. A new or expanded library with additional parking and expanded meeting space could add a great deal to the vitality of downtown. I am not committed to a particular site at this point, but expanding on the current site has a lot of appeal to me.

[Souki](#): What is your view of the proposed domestic partnership registry?

Boog Highberger: I support creation of a local domestic partnership registry. I share the view of former Attorney Phill Kline (as reported in the Journal World) that a domestic partnership registry would not conflict with the recently passed Marriage Amendment. A domestic partnership registry could help give a lot of Lawrence citizens access to health care benefits that they are not eligible for now.

[lawrencian](#): Boog, what are your views about transit in Lawrence? Do you support the "T"? On the "T" website there are reports from a study about possible coordination of services with KU on Wheels -- what do you think about this idea?

Boog Highberger: I support moving toward consolidation of the T and the KU transit system. I support the option that has been presented to us that would consolidate some routes and extend evening hours on some routes.

[cowboy](#): What is your opinion of the efforts by the C of C and the various economic development groups to bring decent jobs to Lawrence, what are the concrete steps you would recommend to improve the results.

Boog Highberger: While we always hope for better, our job creation efforts have been fairly successful. Jobs created by new & expanding businesses in Lawrence have increased steadily from 2003 through 2006. During my term as mayor we concluded an agreement for the largest

private investment in this city's history. All the jobs created by that investment will pay a living wage. As part of the negotiation for that investment, I helped secure an additional payment of \$120,000 to the school district to make sure it was financially beneficial to them. I serve on the board of the Lawrence Douglas County Bioscience Authority and I think we have a great opportunity here to turn KU research into high-paying local jobs.

Meatwad: I attended some of the Placemakers presentations and I feel they have some great suggestions for our city. Their zoning ideas been successful in many other cities. What are some of your thoughts on their suggestions?

Boog Highberger: I was elected to stop sprawl, not stop growth. I think the local Smart Code that we will be receiving from the PlaceMakers group very soon will give us the tools we need to grow without sprawling. The Smart Code will help us build great new neighborhoods, places where kids can safely walk or bike to schools and neighborhood parks, and it will help us make older neighborhoods better, too.

abby: Do you agree with the statement made by the consultant from Placemakers that Lawrence's planning process is broken in that developers "don't know what to do, don't know what the City Commission wants, and it takes forever to get anything approved" and that the level of distrust in this community is "striking and more than in most communities"?

Boog Highberger: I don't think it was a surprise to anyone to learn that there is a high degree of mistrust here. I think that stems at least partly from a long history of people proposing projects here with little or no consideration given to the impacts on the neighborhood and the community. What I'm hoping that we can get out of the Placemakers process and a new Smart Code is public confidence that our development rules will give results that almost everyone can agree is good for the community, and that will allow us to make the development process smoother and more predictable, so that every has fewewr meetings to go to and that we get great new & revitalized neighborhoods that we can all be proud of. Pardon me for tooting my own horn a little here, but it has been very important to me not just to oppose things I don't like, but to put forward solutions to our problems, and I think that encouraging people to consider a traditional neighborhood design code is one very important contribution I have made during my term on the commission.

just another bozo on this bus: Should growth and development be required to pay their own way for the increased infrastrucure and services that they necessitate, or is the future growth of the city so important that rest of the city needs to continue subsidizing these costs?

Boog Highberger: Bozo-- I love your on-line name, by the way-- I see you are another Firesign Theater fan-- I think basic principles of equity suggest that new growth ought to pay its own costs, considered over the long-term, rather than shifting those cosats to existing usinesses and homeowners. I won't go into all the details here about the different opinions about whether new growth pays for itself, but if anybody tells you that new growth pays for itself, ask them to pay the increase in your sewer bill for the last few & next few years. Two-thirds to 3/4 of that increase is growth-related, but this is one instance where the current commission decided that the health of our community in the future required a significant expenditure, in this case on construction of a new wastewater reclamation facility.

Raider: Boog, what do you feel you have done during your time as commissioner for affordable housing and job growth? What should we expect from you along these lines if re-elected? Thank you,.

Boog Highberger: One great development over the last four years is the creation of a local Community Land Trust to create a permanent stock of affordable housing. The city made a

significant contribution to this program through its Housing Trust Fund. (Many of our previous housing efforts subsidized purchase of houses that then were sold at market rate when the family moved-- this doesn't happen with the land trust model). During my term as Mayor, I appointed a Housing Needs Task Force, which recently recommended adopting an incentive-based inclusionary zoning ordinance, which would provide density bonuses or other incentives for a developer to either include affordable units in each new project or to contribute to a fund for rehabilitating affordable housing in older neighborhoods.

Thats messed up: are you for or against the SLT and why. If you are for the SLT then what will you do to make it happen?

Boog Highberger: There is currently no funding available for construction of the SLT, and there won't be any money available until we find a route that most of the community can agree on. The federal Highway Administration uses a process now called "Context Sensitive Solutions"-- under this approach a 32nd Street route would never have been approved in the first place. I have proposed building a southern connecting road around Lawrence on existing right-of-way that would connect to the existing interchange east of Lawrence on K-10. This route would have far fewer environmental concerns and could have a lower cost than a route straight through the Haskell/Baker wetlands.

I3roy: Why should Lawrence Firefighters vote for you, instead of other candidates? Thank you.

Boog Highberger: I think the city should be a good employer, and I have worked to ensure appropriate cost-of-living increases for city employees during my term on the commission (although I regret not being able to do so in 2003, when we unexpectedly lost over a million dollars in state transfer funds). I have supported changing our benefit package to be competitive with other jurisdictions, and I supported former Chief McSwain's plans for construction of Fire Stations 4 & 5 to better serve our community.

Moderator: We still have more questions, but that's the last one we have time for. Boog, thanks for joining us today.

Boog Highberger: Thanks for your questions, and I hope to have a chance to answer all the ones we didn't get to today. You can find more information and contact through our campaign web site, www.voteboog.com. It has been a real honor to serve as a commissioner for the last 4 years and as your mayor last year, and I hope to have the opportunity to continue to serve this great community.

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