

Candidates respond to Chamber's questions

Aiken will elect a new Mayor for the first time since 1991. The candidates, Rick Osbon and Lessie Price, agreed to answer written questions on topics relevant to the November 3 election. Below are the unedited responses submitted by each candidate.

1 What do your first 100 days in office look like? Be specific.

Osbon: We need a culture change in city government. I will immediately conduct policy reviews with an appointed committee of community and business leaders where we will review and streamline the way the city does business. Aiken government must adapt to become more efficient. Additionally, the city's comprehensive plan review will commence in January and should include citizen input to become effective. Our city has to remember who our #1 customers are – the taxpayers.

Price: Meet with City Manager and Asst City Manager to discuss goals of the city
Host 4 community meetings to gain input from citizens. Include participants from the Aspirational Tour
Create a Business Council as an arm of the city to provide input and recommendations on economic development opportunities and leveraging assets to create jobs
Review & Update Aiken's Comprehensive & Strategic Plan but also remove policy barriers that hinder success of current businesses

2 What is the toughest hurdle Aiken has to overcome in order to move forward?

Osbon: Our biggest threat has been letting diverse personalities continue to get in the way of collective common sense solutions. We need to have a vision and a strategic plan to adapt and grow or we will be left behind. We must have a leader that will bring people together from various backgrounds with a common goal to improve Aiken. Putting personal agendas aside, we can overcome any obstacle.

Price: Establishing clear goals for our city and being united to achieve the set goals
Helping citizens understand that Aiken has to grow to be successful while preserving and protecting Aiken's unique charm
Constructing reasonable priced housing in the Central Business District for Young Professionals and Families
Understanding the need to create incentives for small business startups and have a support system

3 If there is one big idea that could be implemented that would make a major difference in this community for generations to come, what would it be?

Osbon: For years, many different voices have suggested many differing opinions on how to revitalize Aiken's downtown. We must maintain the charm and character of Aiken, but we need to begin to move the process forward. As Mayor, I will bring many diverse and independent voices together to start the discussion and work collaboratively on a framework of a plan to ensure a prosperous, vibrant, and attractive downtown. A new focus on downtown will guarantee our city's prosperity for generations to come.

Price: Replacing our infrastructure and begin placing our power lines underground—a 20 year plan
More housing in the downtown area
Identifying affordable incubator space for business start-up with support systems in place
Creating jobs
Making downtown Aiken more attractive

4 After your first term as Mayor is complete, what are the three initiatives you will have successfully implemented that will make a major impact on the ability of business to grow and thrive. Please be specific and list accomplishments that are measurable.

Osbon: First, I will oppose any new effort to raise taxes. As a business owner I'm acutely aware of how an increase in taxes impacts my ability to expand, hire new workers, and reinvest in my community. Second, I will work directly with regional and state economic development professionals and area business leaders to promote our city, to encourage more private investment and expansion, and to recruit new industry here. Third, I want to make Aiken the safest place in South Carolina to live, work, and raise a family. To accomplish this, I will meet regularly with local law enforcement to ensure that these heroes are getting all the resources they need to do their job. Additionally, we must collectively develop and enact aggressive strategies to prevent crime.

Price: Create a Mentor Protégé Program for small-small businesses-I managed a successful program at SRS. In 4 years our small business growth should be 25 percent
Promote a greater appreciation for the arts, the equestrian community and leveraging resources to support work at the SRS as we work with our college and university. Having created an International Exchange Program with Sellafield in the UK and SRR which required identifying funding, job placement opportunities and the involvement of multiple partners from Aiken Tech, USC-A DOE-NNSA and Hampton University. I have also managed school-to work programs that involved placement of high school and college students from Ga and SC that exposed them to careers in the nuclear field- I will continue to pursue this.
Aiken will be recognized Nationally as the best place to raise children and families—this will be done through promoting Aiken's business growth and improved performance in our schools.

5 What steps will you take to develop a clear vision for Aiken's future?

Osbon: Aiken needs a unified positive vision for our future. As a business owner, I understand how important it is to bring in new voices, to develop new ideas, and to work towards consensus. As your next Mayor, I will lead an aggressive effort to strategically grow our community, with an emphasis on new private sector jobs and investment, while always maintaining Aiken's unique charm. A downtown revitalization is already occurring, but fresh ideas coupled with new private investment will help energize our economy and foster an environment that will allow our downtown to flourish for decades.

Price: Meet with stakeholders to gather input that would be inclusive of civic organizations, young professionals, public officials, clergy, business and educators and establish a clear plan for Aiken's future.
Develop a clear business plan to create jobs with incentives and recruit investors. Meet with leaders in neighboring towns to discuss regional planning for economic development and growth including Ft Gordon officials to determine how we can leverage resources with cyber security.
Leverage the SRS to structure the RFP to focus on small-small disadvantage businesses