



At EQuality Downers Grove, we have always viewed Downers Grove as an amazing place to live, work, and raise a family. Our elected officials are crucial allies in combatting hate groups and extremists that threaten the integrity of our community, we would like to understand the positions on these critically important issues from village council candidates in the upcoming April 1st election.

All candidates were asked to participate in this questionnaire and all candidates were asked the same questions. Candidate responses will be shown in alphabetical order by last name for each question. This is not an endorsement of any candidate.

Question	Page
1. What concrete steps will you take to effectively combat hate speech and online harassment targeting members of our community?	2
2. How do you balance the protection of free speech and access to diverse educational resources, including LGBTQ+ books, while addressing community concerns about content in schools and public spaces?	5
3. In light of efforts at the state and local levels to roll back LGBTQ+ rights, along with other civil rights and liberties, please describe specific action steps you would take to support and protect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups.	7
4. How do you plan to engage with LGBTQ+ community leaders and organizations to better understand their needs and concerns and to work with them to address challenges?	9

1. What concrete steps will you take to effectively combat hate speech and online harassment targeting members of our community?

Candidate: Thomas Cawthorne

First of all, I am not a fan of “feeding the beast” and providing fuel to the fire. I have learned in the past that those who act as trolls online hiding behind a keyboard do it in a way to get a reaction. Trolling and spreading hate online is like a drug to some. There have been numerous times in the past 23 years when I first moved to Downers Grove to defend the truth and to dispel nasty rumors. That includes the days of when Elaine Johnson used to run her Village Blog in the late 2000’s. I have many friends who are employed by local businesses. One example is at Ballydoyle, where they will display the pride flag and paint their windows during Pride Month. Far too often, they get threatening phone calls. There was one time in November on Veterans Day, where a member of the staff took a call from someone asking why weren’t the windows painted? When the staff member replied that they don’t do it, the poor young lady was harassed. There is no place for this type of behavior. I too have recently been the subject of nasty lies and innuendo. I attempted to reach out to some of those people to meet over a coffee to explain who I really am and was shut down. In fact one member of our community blocked my facebook request, wrongly believing that I subscribe to some far right agenda (which I DO NOT). A very dear left leaning friend of mine who I have known for years was shamed by members of our community after she shared one of my posts promoting my campaign kick off because I was planning on attending a certain meet the candidates forum. I did attend a meet and greet where I was to introduce myself to fellow Downers Grove residents. In no way do I endorse or subscribe to the beliefs held by some in the room (including the hosts and one of the other invited candidates). As a candidate for the entire village, I will attend any forum hosted by any group in order to introduce myself and to share with them on why I feel I am the best suited for the position. As a commissioner, it is vital that everyone from all sides of the political spectrum are heard. Once a group feels that they are being marginalized, chaos will ensue. That goes for all sides of the political spectrum. If I was invited to the event at Cadence that occurred in January, I would have attended in a heartbeat. But, I was not invited. It’s a shame, because many in the room could have seen that my beliefs actually align with theirs. Furthermore, I would have been able to share with them my extensive knowledge of the day to day operations of the village. A knowledge that first started in 2007, when I first served on the Downers Grove Liquor Commission and has continued as I follow the weekly meetings. I have a deep knowledge of all of the good things and bad things that have occurred in the past that has allowed the village to provide award winning, highly rated services (police, fire, public works, library, etc) at a low tax burden to stake holders.

Candidate: Paul F. Drabik

I think that my job as a public servant is to carry myself with dignity and integrity. If elected I will have a platform on the dais in which I will be speaking on public record. I think it's my job to lead by example. I would seek to engage in respectful dialogue, even when encountering disagreements or difficult topics.

Candidate: Chris Gilmartin

As a Village Commissioner, I see my role as more than just overseeing municipal operations. I consider it my responsibility to foster a community where all residents feel welcome and valued. This is why I have spoken out publicly against the hate and vitriol aimed our LGBTQ+ community displayed at Council and Library Board meetings. I have no tolerance for attacks on marginalized groups and have consistently stood up for the LGBTQ+ community in the face of discrimination.

When it comes to online hate speech, calling it out is essential. I actively challenge harmful rhetoric when I see it and encourage others to do the same. If re-elected, I will continue to use my position as a community leader not only to combat harassment but also to highlight and celebrate the positive contributions of our local LGBTQ+ residents. By amplifying their voices and recognizing their role in shaping our Village, we create a stronger, more inclusive community.

Candidate: Matthew J. Novak

I think the most important thing we can do is set a good example. The way we talk and the words we use are meaningful and if elected, I will work to be an ally to those who may be impacted by harassing conduct. I'll work to ensure that those who are targeting members of our community are referred to the appropriate law enforcement agencies to take appropriate action.

Candidate: Rob Roe

I have no tolerance for any form of hate speech or online harassment. The most direct response I can give you is acknowledging that I believe we as a society have a continued problem with hate speech and online harassment. The level of civility in which we treat each other since 2020 has gotten worse. I know this has been an issue for the council and the library board. I think it is important to recognize this problem, agree we can do better, and my concrete solution is to simply acknowledge this problem. I believe collaboration with the Police department and the village social worker is the first step. One issue I hope to address, if elected, is to increase the visibility of the

social worker and social services as well as the village services available to residents. I would work directly with the Police department and village hall to make sure anyone experiencing any form of hate speech or bullying has an outlet and a starting point and that any victim has a voice that will be heard. Additionally, I will call out any bullying, hate speech or harassment that I witness as a Commissioner.

Candidate: Tammy Sarver

I ran for the Commissioner seat in 2023 (but did not win) primarily because of the hateful and violent reaction to the planned Drag Queen Bingo at our library at the time. Never in my life did I imagine becoming an elected official, as I have dedicated my life to education. And part of that education is bringing awareness to my students and the greater community about the discrimination that many marginalized communities continue to face in our country - including the LGBTQ+ communities. I will use my voice, if elected, to continue to speak out against hate – in all forums, including online, and to promote inclusivity in all these forums where I can make an impact. Harmful speech and rhetoric against the LGBTQ+ communities should never be tolerated - “tolerate” is a word that at best means a tacit acceptance of hate, and at worst, a downright promotion of hate. While I refuse to sink to the level of those spewing hate against marginalized communities, I will instead use my voice as an elected official and my strengths as an educator to combat misinformation and harmful rhetoric.

2. How do you balance the protection of free speech and access to diverse educational resources, including LGBTQ+ books, while addressing community concerns about content in schools and public spaces?

Candidate: Thomas Cawthorne

In no way do I support book banning. I have faith that the current library staff knows the difference between art and pornography. However, in discussions with an LGBTQ+ advocate in Michigan, she shared with me that some advocates of her cause try to shove issues into the less informed in a far and too aggressive way, and actually do more damage to their cause. Both of my daughters were very active in the Downers Grove North theatre program. They each earned their respective Class Thespian award during their Senior years. DG North put on many shows that featured “gender bending” rolls that enhanced the shows and LGBTQ+ themes and characters. My eldest daughter is a huge fan of drag shows having attended many since her college days and when she lived in New York City. She has introduced me to the art form and I am not against the art being performed in private locations. However, we must take baby steps in using taxpayer funds in introducing new forms of art that might not be understood by some.

Candidate: Paul F. Drabik

I would support the use of free speech by anyone to either oppose or support their positions on any perceived issue within the community.

Candidate: Chris Gilmartin

I am a firm believer in free speech as it is a fundamental cornerstone of our democracy. While my role as Commissioner does not extend to selecting books and educational materials for schools or the library, I strongly support the inclusion of diverse resources, including LGBTQ+ books, as they reflect the rich diversity of our community. Access to such materials provides representation, fosters understanding and demonstrates a commitment to learning from different perspectives.

There are books in the library that may not interest me personally, but that does not mean they should be unavailable to others. Public institutions should provide a wide range of materials so that everyone can access information relevant to their experiences and interests. Where I do have an impact is in the appointment (and, if necessary, removal) of Library Board members. If a board member sought to ban books or censor materials, I would not hesitate to investigate and take action

to uphold the principles of free speech and intellectual freedom. Our library's mission is to serve the entire community, not just a select few, and I would work to ensure it remains an inclusive space.

Candidate: Matthew J. Novak

Free speech is the most fundamental of rights and its protection is critical to our society. I respect and will defend all members of our community, and I can also appreciate the concerns that others may have. Empathy and respect are traits that I believe I have that can help build bridges and heal divisions. It would be my goal to bring people together in respectful dialogue to find solutions that respect both free speech and parental oversight. It's not only possible, but essential that we grow in respect for one another, and I want to help that growth.

Candidate: Rob Roe

I do not believe in banning books. There is a difference between reading requirements and basic accessibility. I believe that this difference needs to be addressed. Diversity and giving options, resources and outlets to all should be encouraged. That includes all educational resources, not just LGBTQ+ literature.

Candidate: Tammy Sarver

I balance the protection of free speech and access to diverse educational resources with community concerns about content in public spaces, by educating the public on the protections promised under the First Amendment of our United States Constitution. This right of "free speech", while not absolute, is a broad and important right that is crucial for a thriving democracy. The First Amendment protects LGBTQ+ content in ALL public spaces, including public schools and public libraries. The government (at any level) should not be in the business of regulating what citizens read, listen to, etc. in the public realm. It is an individual's private right to read, view, or hear what they choose in their own home or other private spaces, but not in a protected institution like a public library. If a community member does not wish to view or listen to certain materials, they can decide not to on their own.

3. In light of efforts at the state and local levels to roll back LGBTQ+ rights, along with other civil rights and liberties, please describe specific action steps you would take to support and protect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups.

Candidate: Thomas Cawthorne

The term DEI has currently come under attack for the wrong reasons. DEI is not a program to hire under qualified individuals based on certain traits. DEI is a tool that is used to provide the less advantaged an equal chance to perform to the best of their abilities. From ramps and sidewalk cuts, to the beeps on the walk sign to cross the street, to large print reading materials, etc. The village must be active in not cutting these initiatives. The village can attract the very best employees by taking advantage of these programs. We must provide the necessary tools to our staff that will allow them to excel. Furthermore, we must provide the police with all of the necessary training and tools to address hate crimes. Especially to crimes targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

Candidate: Paul F. Drabik

I am a champion of civil rights and liberties. If rights are being prioritized to certain groups over the whole of society as a means to make things unequal for all individuals, I will be the first to oppose such abuses.

Candidate: Chris Gilmartin

While it is deeply troubling to see LGBTQ+ rights under attack in various parts of the country, I am proud that Illinois continues to lead in supporting the LGBTQ+ community through protections such as the Illinois Human Rights Act, access to gender-affirming care, open serving and other anti-discrimination measures.

At the Village level, I have actively supported DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) training for our municipal staff and backed Pride proclamations and events that affirm our community's commitment to inclusivity. Beyond my role as a Commissioner, I have personally donated to organizations like Youth Outlook and supported initiatives such as the Library's Legacy Wall exhibit, which highlights LGBTQ+ history.



Creating an accepting and equitable environment for LGBTQ+ people through education, support, social action and advocacy.

I firmly believe that threats to rights often stem from a lack of recognition and understanding. By supporting initiatives that promote visibility and education, I aim to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community is acknowledged, respected, and protected in our Village. If re-elected, I will continue advocating for policies and programs that safeguard these rights at the local level.

Candidate: Matthew J. Novak

As a village commissioner, my focus is on the VODG and those that live, work, or play in our town. I would be an advocate for the marginalized groups and LGBTQ+ communities by continuing to support inclusion initiatives in Downers Grove, and lead by example. I will ensure that your municipal government takes to heart its obligation to defend and protect the rights of all and treats every resident or guest in our community with dignity and respect at all times.

Candidate: Rob Roe

One role of the Council in our Village is to discuss policy. I consider myself an ally. I won't make decisions rooted in hate or ignorance. I am willing to listen to the residents and make decisions that promote civil rights and liberties. We need to promote inclusion and diversity whenever possible in an effort to build each other up and promote progress. If I am elected to Council, I will collaborate with EQDG and any other organizations to develop a specific action plan to promote inclusion.

Candidate: Tammy Sarver

I am strongly against any governmental efforts to roll back on civil rights and individual liberties. And while most of those attempts do happen at the state level, we are lucky in Illinois that our legislative bodies have not taken actions doing so - and we must all continue to work hard (vote, activism) to make sure it stays that way. I feel that any discrimination or roll back against marginalized communities is more subtle at the local level where our policy making roles are limited. However, I do believe that the members of the village council and other elected officials must be aware of biases, unconscious or otherwise, that may be built into policies and try to check those at the door.

4. How do you plan to engage with LGBTQ+ community leaders and organizations to better understand their needs and concerns and to work with them to address challenges?

Candidate: Thomas Cawthorne

I have attempted to reach out to LGBTQ+ leaders in recent weeks. I look forward to hearing back from them, meeting with them and addressing any concerns that may have of me. In closing, I do want to share a story to prove to you that I am supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. One evening in the early summer I encountered two of my eldest daughter's former classmates at a local establishment. I knew the female, but did not know the male. When talking to him, I asked if the two of them were dating and he informed me that he was gay. Our conversation evolved into him sharing how difficult it was to come out to friends and family. In many ways it was very sad in that his parents are very religious and were not comfortable. All I could really do was to hug him and tell him how proud I was of him. In conclusion, I am open to providing a forum to help the LGBTQ+ community engage more with the council. For example, a coffee in order to make sure that they are being heard.

Candidate: Paul F. Drabik

I think an open door policy is best. I would say my favorite pastime is communicating with people. I would encourage open dialogue and discussion.

Candidate: Chris Gilmartin

I consider myself an ally to the LGBTQ+ community and maintain an open-door policy for anyone who wishes to share their concerns or challenges. I am fortunate to serve alongside another strong ally on the Council, which helps keep me further connected to the needs of LGBTQ+ residents.

I actively seek opportunities to educate myself on the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in our community. For example, I attended an LGBTQ+ forum at our library that addressed the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth in schools and public spaces. Events like this are invaluable in deepening my understanding, and I would welcome the opportunity to participate in more forums and discussions.

As a Village Commissioner, I can use my platform to elevate voices, facilitate connections, and advocate for an inclusive community. I remain committed to learning, listening, and working

collaboratively with LGBTQ+ organizations and leaders to ensure that our Village is a place where all residents feel safe, supported, and valued.

Candidate: Matthew J. Novak

If elected, I would ensure that my office is always open for all community members and groups. I will regularly reach out to LGBTQ+ community leaders to better understand their issues and concerns as it is my goal to ensure that everyone feels welcome, wanted and included in our community.

Candidate: Rob Roe

Relationships. While I am an ally, I understand there is more to learn. I am willing to listen with an open mind and discuss the challenges the LGBTQ+ community faces. I will strive to ensure the LGBTQ+ community is considered in village council decisions.

Candidate: Tammy Sarver

Listening. Listening is key. I know that I am not an expert on understanding what the needs and concerns of the LGBTQ+ communities are, but I am an ally and humble learner.

I would like to add that I am a trained "Safe Space Ally" and serve in that capacity at my University. I also believe (as I said above) that education is key, as it is often things unknown or not understood by humans that drive them to fear and irrational behaviors. I would offer to bring in certified "Safe Space" trainers to speak at public events in order to help people understand and thereby provide the tools necessary for them to support marginalized communities like the LGTBQ+ communities.