



Friends of Davis Schneiderman

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RNA Candidate Questions

1. State your reasons for seeking a position on Highland Park City Council

Davis Schneiderman: I'm running for Highland Park City Council because I have a deep commitment to our city. I'm running because we have an amazing repository of cultural, historical, and economic resources, and **I know that we can together continue to build a community that is home for new families and lifelong residents, that puts sustainability first, that is green and inclusive, and that lets its residents know that their voice is truly heard.** I'm running because "character counts" is more than a slogan on a street sign.

I'm running for City Council because I've come to call Highland Park my home, and I've been continually impressed in my years of public advocacy just how much this community cares about its collective future. I have learned more from knocking on doors, participating in coffees and public debates, and talking with the people who make up our town than I ever could by merely sitting in a room.

As a Reconfiguration 2.0 Community Team Steering Committee leader, former

leader of CARE and community organizer, and parent of nine- and ten-year old daughters, **I have a perspective on Highland Park informed by the challenges facing our schools that expands well beyond those challenges.** I believe in active participation in the political process, and my work with NSSD112 is only a small part of my community engagement.

I advocated for the beach improvement with Friends of Rosewood, supported CLEAR in the second 113 referendum, volunteered at Ravinia School's annual Fun Fair, and I serve as a Ravinia Neighbors Association board member. I am passionate about historic preservation and architecture, and have served as the trolley docent for the Historic Ravinia tours. I lead the Second Wednesday Book Discussion group at the Highland Park Library, and will also lead this spring's discussion on the One Book, One Highland Park selection. Recently, I led a two-part history of the Grateful Dead at the library. As an author, married to an actor, I have dedicated my career to the arts. **As a professor and higher education administrator, I have dedicated my career to inclusion, critical thinking, and civic engagement.**

If elected, I will blend my passion for community with decades of professional experience as an administrator who knows that the most important voices are the residents of our city. When we work together, we will envision a collective future that we can take pride in.

And some of our best visions are the unexpected: the sunset looking west across the Skokie Valley, the ice frozen along the winter at Park Avenue Beach, the tiny majesty of Stupey Cabin standing against the backdrop of the Highland Park Library and of City Hall, the music of Ravinia Festival, the quiet moments just after the Metra Union Pacific has passed the Ft. Sheridan station.

My vision of government is based upon seeing the unexpected. It's consensus-based and citizen centered. I look for the strategic opportunities that can emerge from the community, and I work to build a shared vision around those opportunities. Whether the issue is the tax levy, historic preservation, the expansion of the library, pensions, affordable housing, or—yes—the all-important issue of our elementary and middle schools, I'll ask the questions that the community needs to know. I support sustainability and economic growth that preserves the historic character of our buildings and our sense of ourselves. **I won't hesitate to fight for what's right and to advocate for our most-**

vulnerable residents.

I'm a listener, but I'm also a fighter. It would be my honor to represent the City of Highland Park as a member of City Council.

2. Describe the skills, talents and experiences you would contribute to your position.

Davis Schneiderman: I was born and raised on the East Coast. My family lived for generations in New York City (hailing most recently from the Bronx and Brooklyn), and I was that first generation to be from elsewhere. For me, that meant Delaware and Pennsylvania, and later New York and New Jersey. I briefly attended the Culinary Institute of America, transferred to Penn State, and went to graduate school at Binghamton University (SUNY).

After earning a PhD in English at 26, I applied to jobs all over the country, and was hired as an assistant professor at Lake Forest College in 2001. **A graduate school advisor told me the North Shore was her “dream location,”** but I had never visited Chicago before.

My wife, Kelly Haramis, and I settled in Highland Park in 2005, ready to start a family (our daughters are now 9 and 10). In 2007, we became parents twice in six months, after adopting our oldest child from China. **We were home and we knew it.**

And home for me *always* means getting involved: I helped lead the "No" organization as we advocated for a better school reconfiguration plan. I engaged in public debates, wrote letters, and spoke with hundreds of neighbors on all sides of the issues. After the referendum, I was asked by 112 Superintendent Dr. Michael Bregy to serve as a launch team member for the Reconfiguration 2.0 Community Team. The team had six members, three who opposed the referendum and three who supported; I immediately said yes because I will always work with others toward as a solution. It was an honor to have been elected by the group of 31 as a member of the 2.0 Steering Committee, and I continue in my role of helping 112 find a solution that the community will support. My specific work with 112 has provided me with insight of how many parts of the community view

the interrelationship between the health of our schools and the strength of the greater community, and that perspective can help build additional bridges between both bodies.

My parents were school teachers, as was my grandfather. My mother taught elementary and pre-school everywhere from Harlem, NY, to rural Delaware, to industrialized Pennsylvania, and eventually, they settled in St. Louis as my father had long since entered the business world. When my father became sick with terminal brain cancer (he had the same condition and doctor as Ted Kennedy), he and my mother moved to Highland Park (the Highlands). He spent his last years here and he loved it. **My mother thinks Highland Park is the best place she's ever lived.** Kelly and I agree, and we've lived in Highland Park longer than we have lived anywhere else.

My father's illness also taught me a **most valuable lesson** about silence, and one I use as the base of everything I do, including this campaign: how to listen.

My Professional Background

At Lake Forest College, I am Associate Dean of the Faculty and Director of the Center for Chicago Programs, as well as Professor of English and Director of Lake Forest College Press. **I have chaired academic departments and programs, and I am involved in strategic planning and budgeting,** and I help manage relationships with multiple external cultural institutions. I have served as principal investigator for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant connected to the history of land-use and urban planning, and I currently administer a Chicago-focused digital humanities grant from the Mellon Foundation helping faculty use, in part, augmented and virtual reality.

Throughout my career, I have fostered a commitment to diversity and inclusion. I facilitate an undergraduate fellowship program that is part of an \$8.1 million grant to diversify the professoriate, and I coordinate an annual peace project competition with an international national foundation that funds global initiatives each summer.

I am the director of the college's press, and we have recently published books,

distributed by Northwestern University Press, on transportation and architectural issues including **Beyond Burnham: An Illustrated History of Planning for the Chicago Region** and **Terminal Town: An Illustrated Guide to Chicago's Airports, Bus Depots, Train Stations, and Steamship Landings, 1939 - Present**. **This broad perspective on urban planning provides me with a regional context for the issues facing Highland Park.**

I **blog at the Huffington Post** and often interview artists, thinkers, and public intellectuals as a way to expand my own thinking. I've had the good fortune to interview *Hairspray* filmmaker **John Waters**, autism advocate **Temple Grandin**, Edward Snowden's ACLU lawyer Ben Wizner, *The Third Coast* author Thomas Dyja, MIT professor **Sherry Turkle**, novelist and collagist and *New York Times* bestselling author **David Shields**, and novelist and MacArthur grant winner **Aleksandar Hemon**, among others. I've **published novels, edited academic collections**, edited and introduced the **last novel from Holocaust survivor Raymond Federman** (one my mentors), and collaborated with an amazing array of artists and thinkers including Paul Miller aka dj spooky, Roxane Gay (author, Marvel comics writer [!], and frequent New York Times contributor who generously remixed one of my stories!), **Regina Taylor** (actor and Goodman Theater associate), author Lance Olsen, poet Anne Waldman, and many others.

As a scholar of author **William S. Burroughs**, and a professor of English who has taught recent courses on podcasting, selfies and **drones**, remixes and mashups, the **Grateful Dead**, and, next year, emoji, I embrace new ideas and new ways of thinking (as evidenced by my counterintuitive college tips on *Chicago Tonight*.) I have learned that best way to lead is to listen, and the best way to listen is to step outside of one's comfort zone. **We won't always find consensus, but we will be collectively better off for trying as hard as we can to understand other perspectives.** My work has taken me all over the world, and I've spoken everywhere from the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington, DC; to Tangier, Morocco; to the Sorbonne; to the Chicago Humanities Festival (most recently this year with a drone-related video filmed at Olsen Park).

Put another way, my perspective is global, but my activism is local. (Highland Park's **Sister City** program lets us know our city gets this, too).

Public service calls for an articulated vision of community excellence and the shared understanding, and my experiences have allowed me to successfully

navigate challenges of limited resources, diversity and inclusion, and sustainable growth that our city faces in the coming years.

I've been involved in our community since I arrived, and if elected, I promise to represent you with integrity and intelligence.

3. Write a brief job description of your view of this position, including the time commitment required.

Davis Schneiderman: The job of a City Council member is to work with the Mayor, Council, and City Staff to collectively set direction and policy for the City. To do this, the Council member must keep at the fore the organizational chart presented in the City's annual budget, which puts "The People of Highland Park" above the Mayor and Council. **Accordingly, the ideal Council member must be a public servant with a primary emphasis on service.** The time commitment required involves preparing for and participating in bi-monthly Council meetings, as well as liaison duties with various city commissions and boards. This work is further informed by community engagement (as I describe below).

4. What do you feel are the most important issues facing 112/113/City/Park Board and how would you address those issues?

As the City continues to focus on its core priorities of fiscal stability, public safety, infrastructure investment, and community vibrancy, we must maintain emphasis on the interrelations among quality of life, property taxes, and our collective aspirations. We must provide value for residents, so that the city remains as attractive for those on fixed incomes as well as for younger families.

We must revitalize our business districts. To do so, we must promote smart business and housing development that respects our community history, values, and historic architecture and housing stock. We should improve senior services, fix aging infrastructure, and provide assistance to those most in need. The NSSD112 situation will require unprecedented collaboration with the school district, park district and the city. Our intergovernmental bodies are separate, but our fates are intertwined. It's time to work together. Most importantly, we need independent voices who are willing to ask tough questions. I am that independent voice.

5. How would you reach out and engage all members of the community?

Davis Schneiderman: Put simply, the most effective elected representative is one who can engage not only with those who are already willing and able to participate in the civic process, but also with those who have been underrepresented. My commitment to citizen-centered engagement extends to all city residents, and would take the form of direct availability to residents by phone, email, and through regular office hours at a selection of area businesses.

Elected officials must listen carefully, ask questions, seek clarifying information with city staff, and formulate opinions that are meaningfully informed by these investigations. Council members need to check egos at the door, recognize what they don't know, and use critical thinking when evaluating problems. This is the type of process that respects citizens and maximizes the effectiveness of community engagement.