



2024 SURVEY FOR COLONIAL HEIGHTS SCHOOL BOARD

Candidate: Craig R. Skalak

1. Please tell us a bit about your background and involvement in the community.

I am a lifelong resident of Colonial Heights and graduated from Colonial Heights High School in 1978. After working for a local family-owned small business for approximately 10 years, Community Sporting Goods, I accepted a position with the City of Colonial Heights' Recreation & Parks Department in 1989. I served my initial 20 years as Recreation Superintendent and my primary responsibility was administering youth and adult athletic programs. I was promoted to Director in 2010 and led the department's seven divisions for the past 15 years (Recreation, Parks, Community Center, Building Maintenance, Horticulture, Youth & Human Services and Violet Bank Museum) until my August 1, 2024 retirement.

Additionally, I have volunteered or served in a number of capacities during my tenure to Include;

- Colonial Heights Kiwanis member and board member. Responsible for the Terrific Kids program at CHPS elementary schools and the annual City Cleanup.
- 2023 Kiwanian of the year.
- Previous Colonial Heights Food Pantry board member for 7 years.
- Former Old Brick House Foundation board member.
- Current and longtime Chamber of Commerce Turkey Trot volunteer.
- Served on the City's Beautification Committee and Senior Citizens Advisory Committee from 2010 through July 2024.
- Volunteer coach; baseball, basketball, football, softball and soccer. Led 45+ teams and approximately 500+ Colonial Heights boys and girls.

2. Do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent? If Republican, are you in accord with [The Republican Creed](#)?

While all of our council candidates are required to register as Independent, I am certainly a Republican and agree with the Republican Creed. As an example, I am proud to say that in my 15 years as director, we have consistently stayed within the department's \$3m - \$4m annual budget.

3. Please tell us why you are running for City Council.

While I don't have a particular agenda, I do want to have discussions with the City Manager and appropriate department directors regarding;

- Southpark Mall; the mall is a significant revenue source for the City and has outlived a typical mall lifespan. If/when the mall fails, what are the consequences and plan;
 - A. Increased taxes, reduced City services, a combination of both? I hope not.
 - B. Revisit a responsible mixed use concept to revitalize the mall and bring young professionals to Colonial Heights.
- Colonial Heights has a residential rental rate at approximately 35%. Let's discuss bringing back a rental inspection program that protects tenants, ensures single family dwellings are being occupied by single families' only, while enforcing code enforcement violations to assure neighboring residential property values are preserved.
- Maximize and enforce fines for illegal fire lane parking, handicap parking and littering.

That said, at the end of the day I'm running on my work record with the City, my years of volunteer service and my desire to continue working for our community. As Director;

- Worked closely with City leadership and A&E consultants with the Violet Bank Museum Historic Structure Report, Phase I renovation and the soon to begin Phase II preservation project.
- New Tennis/Pickleball courts at CHMS and CHHS (partnership with CHPS).
- New Lakeview Park Pickleball Courts (50/50 grant with National Parks Service).
- Maddie's Magnificent Play Park (partnership with the Maddie Mann Foundation for the all-inclusive/barrier free playground at White Bank Park).
- New restroom facility at White Bank Park.
- New playground equipment at Wakefield Park, Lakeview Park and Flora M. Hill Park.
- Shepherd Stadium revitalization (new sound system, scoreboard, in-ground dugouts, padded outfield wall and backstop, new brick backstop and exterior façade and ornamental fencing/gates, grandstand folding chair back seating and total playing field renovation.
- Took over management of the annual Christmas Parade and Fort Clifton Festival.
- Tri-City Chili Peppers; worked closely with team owners and City leadership with the agreement to bring the Chili Peppers to Shepherd Stadium.

4. What are two or three things that the City of Colonial Heights is doing well?

1. Strong City leadership to include City Council, the City Manager and the outstanding team of directors.
2. Continued strong financial standing and bond rating.
3. Strong and professional public safety departments; Police and Fire & EMS.
4. With the leadership and staff of the Public Works/Engineering Department, the City's ability to secure grants for expensive road projects at little to no cost to the City and our residents.

5. What are two or three things that the City of Colonial Heights need to improve on?

I will answer this as things that the City needs to be planning for;

1. Attracting younger people to visit and reside in Colonial Heights.
2. Again, what's the plan for Southpark Mall?
3. Improve the appearance of the City (business districts, residential neighborhoods and roadways).

6. How will you seek to be responsive to city residents if elected to City Council?

As I've always done, I think it's important and responsible to follow up with residents' inquiries as soon as possible and within 24 hours. Certain situations may require an immediate response. I will do so via email, phone call or in-person.

7. In your opinion, what is the number one issue facing the City over the next four years?

Two if I may;

1. Our landlocked city is eight square miles with a population of approximately 18,000. The lack of available land makes growing both business and residential areas difficult.
 2. Government legislative unfunded mandates, or non-guaranteed funding mandates where the City is required to make repairs or replacements to include stormwater and lead pipe water line replacement.
- 8. What role, if any, should the City have in ensuring the long term success of the Tri-City Chili Peppers as a team in Colonial Heights?**

The Chili Peppers are the biggest thing that has happened to Colonial Heights in recent memory; bringing visitors and families to the City. As stated above, I am proud to have been involved in the initial discussions with team ownership, lease negotiations and final agreement, ongoing lease amendments and of course daily operations at Shepherd Stadium.

The partnership with the City and Chili Peppers has been outstanding and should continue to be so. Both the City and the Chili Peppers have committed considerable funding and made significant improvements to the stadium. Moving forward, and with the increasing popularity of the Chili Peppers, this partnership should continue.

Dual funding improvements that should be considered include additional permanent seating, larger/upgraded locker rooms, additional storage, restroom facilities and LED field lighting.

Lastly, a concept has been discussed that includes the Chili Peppers' desire to add additional off season music and cultural events and to take advantage of the new Fall Line Trail (Ashland to Petersburg trail) where the trail route nears the stadium area. I look forward to continuing these discussions.

9. Is there anything else you would like to share that was not already asked?

Colonial Heights is certainly not the same small community that I grew up in. I am disappointed with the decline of sense of community, volunteerism and civic responsibility in our community. I encourage residents to get involved. Lastly, I want to thank all of the council candidates for their willingness to serve.