

Candidate name: Michael Polensek

Ward: 10

1. In 2024, more than 600 people walking or biking in the city were struck by drivers. In 2022, the City adopted Vision Zero, committing to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2032—yet there is still no dedicated annual budget for traffic calming. During budget season, would you advocate for increased funding for

Yes. However, what is really needed is additional traffic enforcement in the city. I see motorists repeatedly driving thru bike lanes and on top of it, going through red lights, stop signs and ignoring traffic speed limits in the city. I have repeatedly asked the Safety Director to request the Ohio Highway Patrol to come into the city to implement a crackdown on speeders and those disregarding traffic laws including bike lanes. It has to be all hands-on deck if we are to protect cyclists and pedestrians. We also have to re-evaluate funding options to address the ongoing issues.

2. Last year, the City adopted Cleveland Moves (our city's new Mobility Plan) and, with that, committed to building 50 miles of low-stress bike facilities over the next 3 years. Protected bike lanes are a proven safety countermeasure for not just bike riders, but people walking and driving as well. Will you support upgrading existing bike lanes in your ward to be physically separated from car lanes?

Yes. However, the challenge is funding and the lack of equipment to maintain the dedicated bike lanes. Too often folks forget we have snow and ice and if we put up physical barriers between cars and bikes, we need specialized equipment to sweep and plow the dedicated lanes. On the northeast side, out of the Glenville Service Garage, we do not have that type of equipment, at this time. So, we have to take a common sense approach. You can put up barriers and then have significant issues as a result because of weather related conditions. I have supported existing bike lanes but once again, the city's department of public works has to come up with a more aggressive maintenance plan for the lanes already in existence.

3. In 2022, City Council changed the name of its Transportation Committee to the Transportation and Mobility Committee. Still, the vast majority of legislation that this committee sees is related to the airports and the Port of Cleveland. What role do you see this committee playing going forward?

The issue is there is still not enough legislation pertaining to mobility that warrants a stand-alone committee. Could a sub-committee be formed, yes, but that is the call of the Council President. I, myself, would not have a problem with a sub-committee that could be comprised of members who really are engaged or dealing with issues of mobility, ie bike lanes.

4. Last summer, the city upgraded coin-operated parking meters to accept online payments and has continued adding new on-street paid parking zones in Ohio City, Downtown, University Circle, and Detroit-Shoreway—creating a new revenue stream for the city. Surface parking lots in Downtown and other neighborhoods are also taxed, with much of that revenue currently directed toward stadium funding. Would you support dedicating this money to mobility and safety improvements instead? Why or why not?

At this, you could not reallocate the funds going to the stadium for another uses. That was a part of the original agreement, which, by the way, I did not vote for. After, Jan 2029, you could then utilize those funds for other purposes unless there is an extension on the Brown's lease. At the end of the day, the allocation of funds is a discussion and a partnership between the Council and the Administration. I believe the majority of Council members are in favor of seeing additional funds for mobility and safety improvement projects. However, it is a balance act with other city priorities, especially those "quality of life" issues.

5. Historically, community engagement around street projects starts after design is well underway, leaving little room for meaningful feedback. Even now, public meetings often happen on short notice and promotion for these meetings is limited. How do you plan to collect feedback from constituents and ensure they know about opportunities for input on projects?

I cannot speak for other neighborhoods, but at present there are 21 groups in the present Ward 8. I always seek their input and thoughts. In the case of Lakeshore Boulevard bike lanes we had several neighborhood meetings at the Collinwood Rec. Ctr. and even had a neighborhood survey seeking additional input. As a result, the community requested the bike lanes to be installed on the majority of the Boulevard.

6. Cleveland's ability to deliver safer streets is limited by staffing levels that fall short of many peer cities. Would you commit to support funding additional mobility positions – including a dedicated crew for installing traffic-calming measures like speed tables and more engineers – to bring Cleveland in line with similar cities and accelerate street safety improvements?

Yes. I have even suggested on numerous occasions that speed tables be installed when we are resurfacing residential streets to be more cost effective. I am glad to see that the Department of Public Works and the Mayor's Office of Capital Projects have taken my suggestions seriously and have started doing just that. Here is the challenge, though, not only do we need more staff in Public Works and MoCAP, we need more health inspectors, we need more Building & Housing inspectors, and more police officers. So, again, it is a balancing act as to where our priorities should be.

7. What is your experience with public transit? Do you ride the RTA?

At this point, very little since I only use public transit if I am unavailable to use my car and/or hearing from constituents as I did most recently regarding the need for bus shelters on East 140th Street.

8. The 2025 Cleveland Health Survey found that unreliable transportation prevented 20% of residents citywide from getting to medical appointments, work, or other essential needs over the past year – with even higher rates in some wards. What role should public transit play in ensuring residents can meet their daily needs, and how would you support RTA in making that happen?

The challenge here again is funding. I do not see any additional help coming out of the Federal or State government. In fact, I see just the opposite. I just recently said to a recent RTA appointment, that the Council and the RTA Board need to have more engagement around this issue. We never collectively meet; that is a big problem. We need to hear, point blank, their challenges and the County should be involved in that process, as well. We all know that transportation, especially for low-income residents, is extremely important.

9. GCRTA will be broke in a couple years once they run out of federal COVID relief dollars. If that happens without finding new sources of operating funds, the transit authority will be forced to drastically cut service and raise fares. We are already seeing this happen across the country. As a legislator in a city where 20% of the population doesn't have access to a car, how will you ensure we don't face the same fate? Do you support a countywide sales or property tax levy to fund public transit? What other local funding opportunities would you explore to fund transit?

I will tell you right now, to support a County wide sales tax or property tax levy would be extremely difficult. I hope everyone has recently seen that Cuyahoga County now has the largest dollar amount ever in delinquent or unpaid property taxes. Homeowners are already stressed in the city. So, again, we need to look at other potential revenue streams especially as the Brown's leave town.

10. Public transit infrastructure, from shelters to bus lanes, can conflict with the desires of motorists and real estate and business owners. How will you approach the needs of public transit riders to conveniently get where they need to go in the face of opposition to new or existing public transit infrastructure?

I have had very little conflict in this area. I engage property owners and RTA. However, one of our ongoing problems is that RTA, too often, takes action, without engaging members of council especially with the relocation of bus stops. I have always been accessible to RTA, and that is a factor, as well.

11. What does being a good partner with GCRTA look like to you as a city councilor?

Being accessible, open to dialogue, and willing to engage the transit riders in the community if necessary.

12. How would you ensure that the needs of all citizens are represented on the city council?

I can only speak for myself. I am a full-time councilman and have been elected 12 times, overwhelming, because I listen to my constituents and engage my colleagues across the city. In today's world, those of us in public office, need to listen more than ever before and that is what I do.

13. How do you stay informed about current events and issues affecting the city?

Look at my emails and phone calls per day. That speaks for itself. Besides, watching news reports and engaging the Administration and other public officials and agencies.

14. What will you do to increase the availability of affordable, integrated, safe, and accessible housing for people with disabilities?

I do this now as I work with non-profits and have been engaged with Habitat for Humanity on new affordable homes in the community. However, the County needs to be more engaged for there are many abandoned tax-delinquent properties which could be put back into productive use if we could get them pushed through the system.

15. What do you know about the crisis facing the disabled community in regard to availability of transportation and employment opportunities? And what will you do to mitigate these barriers?

In Ward 8 we have been engaged with Senior Transportation to assist disabled and seniors. This is a city-wide challenge for all of us. I am open to any ideas and suggestions as to how city council can be more engaged in this issue.

16. How do you see the impending changes to both State and Federal programs impacting your community? And what solutions can you offer in your community to combat the loss of these programs and funding?

I, like most, am greatly concerned as to what I see coming out of Columbus and Washington DC. We are all seeing cuts to critical programs and services. I believe we haven't seen the worst yet, unfortunately. I am reminded that you get the government you deserve. Too many of our residents sit on the sidelines and do not let their voice be heard to State and Federal officials. This must change. If residents and voters do not express themselves, we can only expect more negative impacts coming. I fought, as most know, for the Greater Cleveland Foodbank, and worked to get them to locate in the present Ward 8 and to see the financial hit they have already taken is absolutely outrageous, in my opinion.

17. Why does Cleveland not currently have contracts with Uber and Lyft to provide wheelchair accessible vans options at a fixed rate like larger cities such as Chicago and New York? Can you assist with this?

I just learned of this several weeks ago. According to the Dept. of Aging - they told me that some residents already have the ability to use Uber and Lyft depending on their Medicare/Medicare Insurance for medical transportation purposes. The question is, do individuals know they have that coverage. Could the city promote this to the carriers of Medicare and Medicaid better? Yes. Outside of that, who would pay for that and how? If the city needed to pay for this, where would the funds come from? Quite frankly, this is more a county service than city. However, we need to engage the County on this to better understand and see what we might need to do.

18. Cleveland will be hosting the Special Olympics in 2030, bringing more than 5,500 athletes and coaches and over 125,000 fans and family members to our city. How will you work to ensure Cleveland is a welcoming, accessible place for people with diverse disabilities, not only through trained volunteers, but also by encouraging accessibility across restaurants, stores, rideshares, museums, casinos, theaters, and other public spaces?

The City is already working with David Gilbert and the Sports Commission. We expect this to be a major shot in the arm to the local and Downtown economy. It demonstrates Cleveland's support for those participants with diverse disabilities. We are ready to assist in any way possible for we are well aware of the importance of this event.