



APPLICATION FOR APPOINTMENT TO YPSILANTI CITY COUNCIL WARD #2 POSITION

Applicant Information

(Please type or print)

Applicant Name Benjamin Connor Barrie

Residence Address 1111 Westmoorland, Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Home Phone [REDACTED] Work Phone NA

E-Mail [REDACTED]

Cover Letter & Resume

Please attach a one page cover letter and a resume of no more than two pages to this application.

Supplemental Questions

Please respond to the following questions regarding your interest in the position of Councilmember for the City of Ypsilanti on separate pages using no more than 3 pages total:

1. Why are you interested in serving as an Ypsilanti City Councilmember?
2. What strength would you bring to the Council?
3. What are the three highest priorities and/or issues you believe the City needs to address? How would you propose to address these issues?
4. Explain your current and past community involvement and/or service on city, nonprofit, or public boards, committees, task forces, or commissions and how this has contributed to the Ypsilanti community. Address its relevance to the position of Ypsilanti City Councilmember.
5. What do you wish to accomplish during this appointed term as an Ypsilanti City Councilmember?
6. What is your vision for our City and community?
7. Is there anything else that you may wish to add that would help us get to know you a little better?

Please return (*in person*) this form, your cover letter, resume, and answers to the supplemental questions to the City Clerk, at Ypsilanti City Hall (1 S. Huron St.) **no later than 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 4, 2024.**

Applications received after 4:00 p.m. will not be accepted.

The application and any correspondence should be addressed to:

**Aaron Smith, Interim City Clerk
City of Ypsilanti
One South Huron Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197**

Dear Mayor and City Councilmembers,

I am writing to express my interest in being appointed to fill the vacancy for Ward 2. My wife and I have lived in Ypsilanti since 2013 and I have served on the Parks, Recreation, and Arts Commission since 2017. I love this city. I love exploring our parks, shops, and unique social happenings with my toddler and preschooler. I look forward to serving this city in a greater capacity as a city councilmember.

Ypsilanti is at a crossroads. We are a decade and a half past the recession and our municipal finances are in better shape. However, recent rent and home price increases threaten to displace vulnerable populations from our community. I want to serve on Ypsilanti City Council so that I can serve my community as we navigate these challenges.

I am passionate about helping to make our city a diverse, fun, healthy, vibrant place. I would relish the opportunity to serve the community as a Councilmember.

Thank you for your consideration,

Benjamin Connor Barrie

Benjamin T. Connor Barrie

Cell: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Education

MS, School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Natural Resources – Conservation Ecology

BA, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, MI
Major: Biology, Concentration: Environmental Studies, Honors in Biology

Experience

Sr. Engineering Program Manager, Duo Security, 2018-Present:

I own the engineering team’s high level goals and our team’s budget
Designed training and mentorship programs that have been expanded to Cisco’s 10k person SBG
As a cultural steward, I facilitate our team’s all hands and write our monthly newsletter
Built programs that reinforce important aspects of our team’s culture

Lecturer – Eastern Michigan University & Washtenaw Community College, 2016 – 2018:

Courses: Ecology, Genetics, Botany, Introduction to biology

Detroit Zoological Society – Education Specialist, 2015 – 2016:

I designed exhibits and interpretive signage for major zoo exhibits
Designed and lead educational experiences at the zoo

Ph.D. Candidate/Researcher – School of Natural Resources and Environment, 2009 – 2015:

Senior Graduate Student Instructor and Course Coordinator for Woody Plants for 5 years
Designed and conducted a multi-year field study of urban forest ecology in Southeast Michigan
Recruited, trained and managed students and undergraduate assistants during summer field work
Presented research at national conferences and published findings in peer reviewed journals
Used GIS to develop spatial model of anthropogenic impacts on forest fragments

Biology Teacher – Chicago Public Schools, 2006 – 2008:

I taught highschool biology at Gage Park High School on Chicago’s Southside
Designed and executed an ambitious curriculum that had students grow at 1.5x the rate of national peers

Volunteer Experience:

Ypsilanti Cooperative Preschool Board Co-President, 2023 – Present:

With my co-president, we facilitate board meetings and ensure all officers are executing their duties
Prepare communications with school community, and maintain documentation and licensing

City of Ypsilanti Parks, Recreation, and Arts Commission, 2017 – Present:

I work to improve the city’s parks, recreation, and public art opportunities
Worked to ensure an equitable distribution of parks and recreation resources across the city

Skills

Program Development, Leadership, Cross Team Collaboration, Mentorship & Coaching, Agile, R,
Exploratory Data Analysis, Meta-Analysis, Bayesian Modeling, GIS, Tree Identification, Teaching, Public
Speaking, Written and spoken Spanish

Answers to Supplemental Questions

1. Why are you interested in serving as an Ypsilanti City Councilmember?

I have served on the Parks, Recreation, and Arts commission since 2017 and through that experience, I have learned a tremendous amount about our amazing, diverse city and serving our community. I am seeking this role because it would allow me to serve the community that I love more and to effect positive change in our city.

2. What strength would you bring to the Council?

I have a strong analytic skillset, good knowledge of local government, and I'm great at engaging stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

Before I began my career in tech, I was pursuing a doctorate studying forest ecology at the School of Natural Resources and Environment at U of M. There I cultivated a strong analytical toolset. As a scientist, I had to attack complex problems with data. These skills have helped me tackle challenges in my current role within Duo Security's Engineering Department. My analytical mindset will help me tackle complex issues facing the city.

I have been covering local issues in Washtenaw County for several years, first through the website I founded, Damn Arbor as well as an occasional writer for Concentrate. Through my coverage of various City Council meetings I have learned a great deal about how local government works and the challenges facing municipalities across the state. I am also passionate about the way that local government can have a positive impact in the lives of residents. I will bring this passion to my service on Ypsilanti's City Council.

Finally, I have a great deal of experience building consensus and getting buy-in with diverse stakeholders. I built these skills through my decade of teaching in various educational settings, from the Chicago Public Schools, to EMU and U of M. I have been able to apply what I have learned through my volunteer work on the city's Parks, Recreation, and Arts commission. Additionally, in my current role at work, I am responsible for bringing together a diverse team across multiple countries to build and grow an outstanding culture.

These strengths will allow me to engage with the diverse stakeholders across our city and make good decisions on their behalf.

3. What are the three highest priorities and/or issues you believe the City needs to address? How would you propose to address these issues?

I think the three biggest issues facing our city are housing affordability, fiscal stability, and public safety, writ large.

One of Ypsilanti's greatest strengths is its diversity. Unfortunately, as our city becomes less affordable we risk becoming less diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the median rent in the city was \$703 per month between 2006 and 2010. Between 2018 and 2022, median rent was \$977. This represents an increase of about 40% and was faster than inflation during this time period. What's more, during this time period, median income in Ypsilanti only rose 20% (from \$34k to \$41k). Was one of the last affordable places in the county where you could live without a car.

Vulnerable people are being squeezed out of our community. I think it is important that the city do what it can to protect people from displacement. Specifically, if I were on council I would propose that the city leverage the sale of city owned land for the creation of subsidized housing. I also think the city should explore ways to increase the total amount of housing within the city through zoning reform.

Municipal financing in Michigan is broken. The combination of the Headlee Amendment and Prop A mean that property tax revenue can ratchet down quickly, but can only ever increase at the rate of inflation. Also, the state has not fully met its obligations for revenue sharing. The Water Street Millage and ARPA have led to a period of relative financial stability for the city. In the long term, the only real way the city can increase property tax revenue at a rate greater than inflation is through new construction. I think it's important for the city to explore ways to encourage new construction through zoning reform as well as the smart leverage of city owned land.

Public safety writ large is a sneaky way for me to talk about two things: road safety and bringing more opportunities to our city's underserved communities.

I've always been concerned with road safety, but since becoming a father, this has only become more acute. Ypsilanti has been doing good work getting MDOT to improve the highways within the city. I think it's important for the city to continue this good work and implement more traffic calming within the city. I dream of a city where people of all ages and ability levels can access our beautiful downtown, Depot Town, and riverfront safely and comfortably.

Finally, in the past decade, I've witnessed an influx of wealthy new residents into the city. Unfortunately, this has not necessarily meant increasing opportunities for all members of our community. I think it's important for council to proactively work to improve equity within our community.

4. Explain your current and past community involvement and/or service on city, nonprofit,

or public boards, committees, task forces, or commissions and how this has contributed to the Ypsilanti community. Address its relevance to the position of Ypsilanti City Councilmember.

I am currently a member of the City's Parks, Recreation, and Arts Commission. Serving on this committee for the last 7 years has taught me so much about our city and how it works. I've also got to meet a diverse slice of our city's wonderful residents. I also serve as co-president of the Board of the Ypsilanti Cooperative Preschool, a local preschool that my son attends. Through my service on these two bodies, I've come to learn a great deal about how deliberative bodies work and how to come together with diverse stakeholders to make decisions for the common good.

5. What do you wish to accomplish during this appointed term as an Ypsilanti City Councilmember?

I would love to leave a positive impact on the city. It would feel great to bring new development to the city and to be able to welcome new families into our amazing community. I'd also be very proud if I could work to improve the safety of vulnerable right-of-way users.

6. What is your vision for our City and community?

As our city continues to grow, I want to ensure that it remains a place that anyone can choose to call home. I see Ypsilanti in the future with a few more people, from all walks of life. I see new, local businesses and vibrant parks. I see Ypsilanti as a safe community for everyone. I see a vibrant downtown and Depot Town. I want to work on realizing this vision through my service on City Council.

7. Is there anything else that you may wish to add that would help us get to know you a little better?

I was not able to work this into any of the other responses but I feel like it is important. I worked as a public school teacher in Chicago before starting my graduate studies. I am passionate about Public Education. I know that Ypsilanti City Council has very limited direct impact on the Ypsilanti Community School District. Nevertheless, I am excited about the possibility of collaborating where possible with YCS.