



## Coalition for Responsible Growth in Avon, Inc.

### Town Council Candidate Survey 2023

## ROBERT POPE

**1. Avon’s residential growth has been exponential in the last 20 years. How would you define “responsible growth” as it relates to Avon? What challenges do you see for Avon in the near future and long term? How should we address them?**

I believe responsible growth in general can be defined as growing in population and the livability of a community, while taking care to balance both and being financially sustainable. You can’t press too hard on any one lever when growing a community or things can get out of balance quickly, especially with property tax caps. As it relates to Avon specifically, we grew exponentially in population over the last two decades, but our livability seemed to lag behind- a lack of jobs, transportation options and congestion, property tax diversity, recreation opportunities, dining options, shopping destinations, etc. In my first term, we have made a concerted effort to pull different levers and “balance our tax base”. This means we focused economic development efforts on other than residential with the intent to bring some balance to our livability and to position us to be more responsible with it as we grow into the future.

Some examples of that work can be seen on 100S and along parts of Ronald Reagan Parkway. It can be seen with the long list of new dining options and shopping destinations, especially those around the new Costco warehouse. Of course we can’t talk about new developments without mentioning the restaurants participating in the Chicken Wars. But there’s also Rural King, Cooper’s Hawk, Bubba’s 33, RISE of Avon, Swenson’s, Hollywood Feed, First Watch, Crumbl Cookie, Total Wine & More, and Academy Sports. These businesses have helped us balance our tax base to relieve some of that property tax pressure on the resident while also bringing in some of the things that make a community highly livable. That’s not to mention the projected \$800M+ investments and projected 500+ work here/live here jobs from industrial investments made in the last few years. A big, recent success you may have heard about- we’ve acquired Avon Junior Athletics Association. Our intent is to smartly invest in it to grow Avon’s youth sports programs into the #1 youth sports programming in the state. The teamwork and leadership that youth sports instills is a worthy investment in our community’s future. All of that to say- we are working diligently to rebalance that livability with the growth in population.

As for the challenges I see for Avon in the future- the lack of community identity as well as the imbalances created by that explosive growth need addressed. I’ll speak to correcting some of those imbalances in a later question, but for now I’ll speak to our identity. This community has let us know on many occasions that they want a downtown or town center. I believe this lack of central gathering harms our community’s identity and its livability. Right now, it feels like the only geographical identity for Avon is US36. I am extremely excited to say that will be changing soon. In the coming weeks, shovels will begin moving dirt on one of the very first projects I’ve had the



opportunity to work on for you- Easton Grey. This development will bring a “town center” feel, with walkable commercial, trail access to nearby parks, a large gathering space for community events, meeting spaces for local groups, and a central location for your Town and Schools administrations. I cannot stress enough how much of a game changer this project will have on our community’s future.

**2. Discussion and recent newspaper articles address the governmental reorganization combining Town of Avon and Washington Township into one unit. Do you support / not support this concept and why?**

I believe that good government is efficient, effective, responsive, and easy to navigate. It’s my opinion that our current overlapping local government structure is the opposite of that. It does not allow many residents the right to vote for those elected officials who make the most impact on the community- Avon Town Council. It creates inefficiencies in the distribution of services. It creates confusion on which government is responsible for a particular service. It creates financial waste and wasted opportunities with five competing visions for community growth and development. I support the Town of Avon and Washington Township following the state’s process for considering a reorganization of government. I believe the best path forward is to unify us as one community, but we do not know all the variables in this process. The only way to understand them fully is to walk through that state defined process completely. I believe anything short of those full studies is irresponsible and likely to lead us nowhere.

**3. Rapid growth in Avon combined with mostly two-lane roads creates significant traffic congestion, especially as it relates to entering and exiting neighborhood during busy times. How do we improve this frustrating situation? What would you suggest to alleviate these problems?**

Here’s where I’m calling back to an earlier answer about correcting some of those imbalances created by our community’s rapid growth over the last twenty years. Traffic congestion is one of the biggest headaches for our average resident. This is partly a problem created by multiple jurisdictions approving developments as they each envision. We have neighborhoods that have entrances very close to each other, for example. We have neighborhoods that put up gates to stop their neighbors from passing through to a connected subdivision because each is in a different jurisdiction. It is the goal of our thoroughfare plan to address these issues in two ways. First, to rethink traffic patterns by utilizing roundabouts where appropriate. Roundabouts are literally lifesavers. They’re also fuel savers, tax dollar savers, and traffic savers. They may be frustrating at times, but the evidence is clear- the advantages far exceed their disadvantages. Additional lanes and roads will help disperse that congestion as well, again where warranted. The second objective is to provide alternative transportation methods around our community.



This is in the form of multi-use paths on one side of the road and a standard sidewalk on the other. It is our goal to have every neighborhood connected by these paths and for those paths to connect to every community amenity. The goal being to allow everyone to safely ride a bike, skateboard, or even silly walk your way to everywhere else in the community.

It wouldn't be fair if I didn't address why we don't have these improvements in the works already everywhere. First, I imagine every resident would be wringing my neck right now if we improved every road/intersection at the same time. In all seriousness though- I cannot stress this enough- Roads are expensive! In order to be financially sustainable we have to focus on making road improvements in a financially strategic way. One of the greatest financial tools we have for improving roads are matching grants from the State and Federal governments as well as making developers pay for their portion of the traffic congestion when they begin to build. These grants and developer fees save us local taxpayers millions of dollars. The downside to these financial tools is that we oftentimes can't build when or before the traffic needs exist. So for now, while we're working to bring our road infrastructure into balance, I ask us to all have patience with our neighbors. I promise that we want to reduce the congestion wherever we can, but we also want to make sure we don't break the bank.

**4. Avon's last comprehensive plan was adopted in 2017 and is currently under review. What changes do you want to see in Avon's new Comprehensive Plan? What parts would you leave as is?**

I believe the most important change that's needed is the land-use map. We have pockets of undeveloped land that currently have no recommended land-use. We have developed areas that aren't aligned with either the land-use map or what's developed around them. This makes it challenging to navigate and difficult to bring desirable projects to the community for developers, but also makes it difficult for residents to understand where we're headed as a community. This creates ambiguity and confusion as to the vision and intent of the Town Council to responsibly grow our community. Our comprehensive plan also needs to reflect the recent inception of our Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). We spent nearly two years working on and improving our building standards while listening to feedback from residents and developers alike to remove that confusion and ambiguity. It was well worth the investment as we have already seen a decrease in Planned Unit Development (PUD) rezone requests, to nearly zero in the last 18 months. This doesn't mean the standards were decreased to allow developers to continue unchecked. Quite the contrary. We were able to improve building standards to include monotony, color, and texture, as well as limiting building materials that reduce the color palettes available for our homes. We also connected subdivision home density to amenities and building standards, so the higher the density, the higher the standards. All these had the intent to make sure our community maintains a high standard of housing options. The UDO brought Avon to the present with how residents wanted homes and developments now. The Comprehensive Plan is the plan for our future and should reflect where our residents want us to go. I'm looking



forward to working on this for our community's future to make sure we keep a healthy balance for at least the next twenty years.

**5. Avon recently had issue of single-family neighborhood housing developments being approved as individually owned, but after construction, they have been converted to rental housing by developer. This has happened without a mechanism for public input to consider how the change could affect adjoining properties. How can the Town Council legally address this issue to prevent it in future?**

Indiana state law does not currently allow local governments the authority to prevent a landowner from renting out their property. I think many of you would agree that, if you so choose, we shouldn't be able to stop you from renting out a spare bedroom. I think the same thing if you wanted to rent out a second home you owned. I can understand there's a large gap between a spare bedroom or second home and a complete neighborhood owned by a corporation renting them out. Unfortunately, the State of Indiana does not see that difference and has written state law to that effect. I want to make it clear that I am wholly opposed to corporate owned housing en masse. I believe it is predatory in nature and stands to only drive individual owners out of the market. However, local governments lack the authority to base a decision on that fact. I can attest to this because we receive annual training from our legal team regarding this and other similar issues. In fact, Indiana Code 32-31-1-20 is very clear on this issue. It states we may not regulate leasing terms and conditions, applications, or the rights of the parties to a lease in regards to privately owned real property. In other words, we are not allowed to regulate renting/leasing of property in any way, to include during the rezone process. Any candidate for local office who says otherwise is pandering to your frustrations for votes. While I'm as frustrated as you at how the law is currently written, that doesn't mean we can't lobby our lawmakers to bring about necessary change. I have presented my objections to corporate owned housing en masse to our community's lawmakers. And I would implore each of you to write State Representative Steurwald and State Senator Crane to consider modifying state code to allow local governments the ability to regulate leasing agreements for corporate owned property.