

VOTER GUIDE

Find out what key issues that impact Naperville this candidate supports or opposes in the Naperville City Council Election 2025.



Dr. Benjamin (Benny) White

Naperville City Council Candidate Candidate

Status: Incumbent

Campaign Website: bennywhite.org

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KEY QUESTIONS

Do you support or oppose the Grocery Tax Proposal?

Do you support or oppose the creation of new tax incentives?

Do you support or oppose plans to build the Nichols Library Parking Garage?

Do you support or oppose the redevelopment of the 5th avenue area?

Do you support using city resources to help small businesses recover and stay competitive in Naperville?

SUPPORT	OPPOSE	ABSTAIN
	✓	
	✓	
✓		
✓		
✓		



Candidate Biography and Priorities

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CURRENT OCCUPATION

I have worked my whole life as a public servant, leader, and educator. As a member of the Naperville City Council since 2017, I played a key role in shaping policies that foster economic growth, public safety, and community development. My leadership experience extends beyond governance as a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel serving 22 years as a Field Artillery Officer, leading and mentoring soldiers in high-stakes environments. In addition to my public service, I am committed to shaping future leaders as a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) instructor at Joliet West High School, also serving as the department head. In this role, I work to instill leadership, discipline, and civic responsibility in young cadets, preparing them for success in military and civilian careers. My extensive experience in leadership, education, and public service enables me to continue making a meaningful impact in Naperville.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

DBA, Values-Driven Leadership, Benedictine University

MBA, Webster University

MS, Kinesiology, Indiana University

BS, Management, United States Military Academy at West Point

I believe my strong academic foundation complements my leadership experience. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Management Studies from the United States Military Academy at West Point, one of the best possible places to develop the critical thinking and leadership skills that later shaped my military and public service career. I earned a Master of Science in Kinesiology from Indiana University, focusing on leadership, performance, and human development.

Following that, and knowing that it would serve me well both in the military and beyond, I obtained an MBA from Webster University, acquiring financial and organizational that I've been able to put to use on the City Council. I earned a Doctorate in Values-Driven Leadership from Benedictine University because of my dedication to ethical decision-making and community service.



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RELEVANT BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

During my 22-year career as an Army officer, I managed budgets at increasingly larger levels, set measurable goals, and maintained operational readiness. I was responsible for budgets in the seven figures, working on bases in the U.S. and overseas.

I earned an MBA at Webster University while I was serving as an officer in the United States Army, aware that business knowledge would be useful in military leadership as well as my work after retirement. Since being elected in 2017, I've been a member of the board of the Naperville Development Partnership to the present, and also serve on the Downtown Advisory Committee. Those roles have allowed me to collaborate with local business leaders, attracting new investments and supporting economic sustainability.

Those experiences, in addition to the day-to-day decisions that affect businesses in Naperville made by the City Council, have kept me knowledgeable about Naperville's business environment. The addition of a second Costco, very unusual for a suburb, and the development of Block 59 were directly tied to how well the business community could work with the City. My roles as on the Indian Prairie School District 204 Board of Education and the Naperville Board of Fire and Police Commissioners also strengthened my expertise in financial oversight, strategic planning, and policy implementation.

ELABORATE ON YOUR POSITION FOR THE ABOVE KEY QUESTIONS.

Naperville currently has only one TIF (Tax Increment Financing) example, the Water Street District, which has worked well. What kept it working was that the money available could only be used for public improvements that can last. TIFs have a poor reputation in Illinois because of their overuse and bad management in the city of Chicago, depriving their school district of the tax dollars they need for decades. Entities that receive property taxes from a TIF, most importantly school districts, which rely on real estate taxes and do not benefit from sales taxes, have to sign off on a TIF, and they only do so if they think they will pay off in tax dollars in the future. Naperville was careful to require the money available to the developer to be spent on brick and mortar public improvements that benefit all the residents. Now Water Street is a thriving area, featuring restaurants, a hotel and banquet facility, and small shops. It does exactly what it was designed to do from the City's point of view, which is to create a continuous flow from Naper Settlement to the Municipal Center, Water Street, the Riverwalk, and the downtown. It takes advantage of the riverfront and even incorporates public art in the mosaics along the river. TIFs are serious business, and this example of one that worked so well shows that any request for another would have to demonstrate a huge benefit before being approved, so I think additional ones are unlikely.



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WHAT ARE THE TOP CHALLENGES FACING NAPERVILLE'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

Naperville's business community faces significant challenges that are common to many urban and suburban communities in the post-COVID era: (1) Workforce shortages—local businesses, especially restaurants, struggle to find skilled workers due to shifting labor trends where many people can still work from home (2) Commercial space affordability— potential businesses complain of rising rents that make it hard to continue to make a profit or establish a new business. (3) Regulations —business owners often have to navigate complicated permitting and licensing requirements. That is something the Council can definitely work on. (4) Changing consumer behavior—increased online competition is a challenge. After considerable lobbying, Naperville now receives a share of online sales tax. You'll notice that when you make an online purchase, local tax is added when previously that was reserved for in-person purchases, helping to level the playing field for brick and mortar stores (5) Transportation and infrastructure—traffic congestion and parking concerns affect accessibility. We have been going through some growing pains as the Washington Street bridge improvements have dragged on and we all look forward to its completion. The sidewalk improvements have made our streets safer and more walkable for pedestrians. These challenges are critical because a strong business climate drives economic growth, creates jobs, and sustains Naperville's reputation as a thriving economic hub.

WHAT IS YOUR ACTION PLAN FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH?

Addressing workforce shortages requires partnerships with schools, including encouraging internships and connections to our high schools, and supporting and hosting job fairs. To support small businesses, I propose reviewing zoning laws and incentives for affordable commercial space. Simplifying regulations and streamlining permitting will ease the burden on entrepreneurs. We have accomplished some of this with the online permitting functions that are helpful for businesses and residents. Infrastructure investments, such as smart traffic solutions and increased downtown parking, will enhance accessibility. The Chamber is key to providing a robust marketing strategy promoting Naperville as a business-friendly city to continue to attract investment and sustain economic prosperity. Although their missions are not exactly the same, I would like to see the Chamber and the Naperville Development Partnership to work together on encouraging businesses to locate and thrive in Naperville. That would be a win-win for the City.



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HOW WILL YOU COLLABORATE WITH THE NAPERVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

City elected officials are already very tuned in to the Chamber's calendar and events, and the Council pays a lot of attention to NACC, both publicly as we attend ribbon cuttings and luncheons and hear their comments at City Council meetings, and behind the scenes doing our homework, reading their correspondence and talking with Chamber members to get their input. Many of the members of the Chamber are very small businesses and non-profits, so important to the social and economic fabric of the City. I support joint initiatives like workforce development programs, networking events, and business mentoring. (I have spoken several times at Chamber events.) I also propose creating an advisory council with Chamber representatives to streamline policies that affect our businesses. In addition, we can enhance promotional campaigns that highlight Naperville's business advantages, leveraging the Chamber's resources to attract investors and entrepreneurs.

WHAT ARE YOUR BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR BUSINESSES?

Since I've been on the council, the city's financials are in the best shape they have been since the recession. We have maintained our AAA /aaa bond rating, and reserves are at 40%, far exceeding the initial goal of 25%. Naperville has always prioritized infrastructure and public safety, factors that all businesses consider when deciding where to locate. Since we have our own municipal utility and are facing decisions about whether to extend the IMEA contract or go in a different direction, we must keep the business community in mind when we make that decision, since their utility bills can be a significant expense.

A balanced budget should prioritize infrastructure, public safety, and business development. Maintaining well-funded roads, utilities, and public transportation ensures businesses remain accessible. Supporting public safety keeps Naperville attractive for investment. Economic incentives, such as tax abatements for new businesses and grants for innovation, should be considered. Cutting unnecessary bureaucracy and investing in digital transformation will make it easier for businesses to operate efficiently. Ultimately, responsible fiscal management that keeps taxes low while investing in growth is key to a thriving economic ecosystem.



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WHAT ARE YOUR REVENUE AND TAX STRATEGIES?

Naperville has sought for a long time to balance its tax structure so that it is not too dependent on any one revenue stream. That is one of the factors that has allowed us to maintain an AAA/aaa bond rating. Sales tax, residential real estate tax, real estate transfer tax, gasoline tax, shares of state taxes, and fees for permits and services all provide funding to support the City's budget. By the way - the City cannot impose a grocery tax even if it wished to, to make up for the shortfall caused by the suspension of the state grocery tax. Any increase would have to be an across-the-board home rule sales tax increase, not just for groceries. Strategic investments in tourism and events will drive additional revenue without raising taxes, encouraging sustainable economic growth. Our SECA (Special Events and Community Arts) programs offer many events, including parades and festivals, that draw thousands of visitors to Naperville every year. I believe Naperville already has created tax policies that do not overburden businesses.

To avoid overburdening businesses, we should diversify revenue streams by expanding public-private partnerships and attracting high-value industries. Encouraging mixed-use developments will boost property tax revenues while maintaining a balanced commercial-residential tax ratio. Reviewing local business tax structures to ensure competitiveness without compromising city services is essential. I support tax incentives for small businesses and startup.

HOW WILL YOU HELP BUILD A STRONG WORKFORCE PIPELINE FOR NAPERVILLE'S EMPLOYERS?

Building a strong workforce pipeline starts with supporting education-industry partnerships, and Naperville is fortunate to have outstanding institutions leading the way. Districts 203 and 204, along with North Central College and the College of DuPage, are already deeply focused on preparing a 21st-century workforce. Partnerships with healthcare institutions, like our local hospitals, are also key to equipping students with the skills needed for careers in health care. As a councilman, I will work to support these efforts by encouraging programs that expand internships and apprenticeships, giving students real-world experience while helping businesses address talent gaps. I will also advocate for initiatives that promote STEM education, vocational training, and upskilling programs to ensure Naperville's workforce stays adaptable to emerging industries. Excellence in education is the foundation of Naperville's reputation as a premier place to live, work, and start a business. By strengthening connections between our schools, colleges, employers, and community organizations, we can continue to sustain and grow our local economy.



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HOW WOULD YOU HELP BUSINESSES ADAPT TO ECONOMIC CHANGES, NEW TECHNOLOGIES, AND WORKFORCE CHALLENGES?

Businesses must evolve with technology and market trends to stay competitive, and we've seen how adaptability can lead to success. Shopping centers that were once dominated by big box stores surrounded by massive parking lots are no longer what consumers find desirable. Businesses must adapt to shifting preferences and market demands, just as Barnes & Noble did. After leaving its large space (although it was not its choice), the company returned to a smaller location on Jackson Avenue, recognizing that while the digital-book era has changed how people shop, Naperville residents still value the experience of a brick-and-mortar bookstore. To support this kind of evolution, I believe Naperville should strengthen partnerships with universities and tech incubators to ensure our local businesses stay ahead of industry trends. Offering business education workshops on market shifts, cybersecurity, and sustainability will provide businesses with the tools they need to remain competitive. By fostering innovation and encouraging businesses to adapt to changing consumer needs, Naperville can retain its vibrant business community and continue to attract forward-thinking companies that strengthen our local economy.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE NAPERVILLE'S BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE, AND WHAT PROJECTS WOULD YOU PRIORITIZE FOR GROWTH?

Priorities include upgrading roads to reduce congestion, expanding parking in commercial districts, and enhancing broadband access to support tech-driven businesses. Revitalizing older business corridors with streetscape improvements, as we have done downtown, will attract new development. Investing in green infrastructure, such as energy-efficient buildings and smart traffic systems, will create a modern, business-friendly environment.

Among the most important aspects of infrastructure are maintaining a reliable and reasonably priced electrical grid, which we have managed to do successfully for decades. We will be looking for the voice of Naperville businesses when it comes to decisions about how to supply Naperville with power in coming decades. IMEA would like to secure Naperville's continued participation as the supplier of electricity, but we will have options other than signing onto another contract. Naperville's existing electrical system infrastructure, with the majority of power lines underground, helps secure its reliability.



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HOW HAVE YOUR ACTIONS BENEFITED NAPERVILLE'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND WHAT'S NEXT IF RE-ELECTED?

During my time on the Naperville City Council, I have championed initiatives that directly benefit our business community. I've supported policies that streamline business regulations, making it easier for entrepreneurs to start and expand their operations. Recognizing the importance of infrastructure to business success, I've backed investments in road improvements, parking solutions, and other projects that ensure businesses remain accessible to customers and employees. I've worked to strengthen partnerships with the Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce and local organizations, ensuring that business owners' voices are heard and reflected in policy decisions. Key projects like Block 59, Heinen's, and SSA developments in the downtown area show the results of collaboration between business and government. Revitalizing infrastructure and beautifying public spaces help create a vibrant environment for business. I've supported efforts to lower the property tax rate and maintain a low-cost business environment, making Naperville an attractive place to do business. Initiatives along the I-88 corridor have encouraged new business growth and development in the area. As a member of the Naperville Development Partnership, I will continue to support initiatives that bring new businesses to Naperville, help existing businesses expand, and foster an environment where businesses of all sizes can thrive.