



Michael Bell Profile

(Note: This profile is based on information obtained in meetings with Mr. Bell on 2/27, 5/4, 6/22 and 8/12)

Michael Bell is running for Mayor of Toledo for the first time and is doing so as an Independent. He held the position of Toledo's Fire Chief from 1990 until 2007. His most recent position was Ohio's Fire Marshall which he held until early this year.

Mr. Bell defines a good business climate as open communication and working through hurdles. He notices a disconnect among multiple groups in Toledo and people have not been allowed to be involved in building the business base. "If we don't have good businesses in Toledo we don't have a tax base."

Mr. Bell cited examples where he needed to bring people together to communicate and solve problems. One example was his management of bringing a coordinated radio system into Lucas County. Mr. Bell needed to listen to Fire Chiefs, Police and other emergency personnel throughout the county and had to set aside personal beliefs to finally get the radio system in place.

Mr. Bell feels that the strong mayor system in Toledo has never worked the way it was supposed to. If another four years goes by and the strong mayor form is still not working, Toledo should move away from that governmental system.

Mr. Bell describes himself as "mission driven" and that is the way he will work as Mayor. Communication will be imperative in his administration. Toledo, like Columbus and Indianapolis, needs to believe in itself.

Mr. Bell describes Toledo's budgeting process as mainly equipment and personnel, particularly in the Fire Division. Staffing is already set by contract with pay increases already built in. After overtime and unforeseen circumstances such as a major fire are built in, the budget is then submitted to the Mayor, who looks at all departments and revenue projections.

Mr. Bell feels that Toledo needs to figure out how to live within its means. There has to be a realistic look at the cost of doing business. Budgeting has to be very conservative and has to have a rainy day fund and an economic development component.

On the revenue side of the budget, Mr. Bell feels that both the payroll tax and the property tax need to be looked at. Maybe these two revenue sources need to be more balanced. He does not know if fees need to be raised, but there is a need to address adequate essential forces such as safety.

As mayor, Mr. Bell would approach the head of the Police Patrolman's Association and tell him that a certain dollar amount has to be given back. He would then let the PPA have the option on what to do to meet that dollar amount of concessions. The administration should have been "looking down the line" in budgeting and did not do that. Now the city is facing the situation of determining how benefits can be afforded.

Part of Toledo's budgeting woes, according to Mr. Bell, is that there is no credibility with the administration at present. One day it is said that the city will have to layoff 150 police officers; the next day the administration says only 75 need to be laid off. There is also no credibility at the negotiation table right now.

Mr. Bell notes that Toledo's accounting system is not functional at present; an internal audit needs to be done to make sure the financial figures are correct. He would like to see transparency in Toledo's finances, such as Portland, Oregon who puts its city finances on its website.

The priorities in a Bell budget for Toledo include police, fire, refuse and street repair such as potholes. After these four are addressed, lower priorities would be driven by the rest of the budget and how "useful" they are.

Mr. Bell does not sound in favor of putting Toledo's Basic Life Support system back into the private sector. His biggest concern is patient care; for the first responder to follow the case from the scene all the way to the hospital.

Mr. Bell feels the government's role in economic development should be to provide safety and make sure Toledo is clean, then government should get out of the way. Safety and cleanliness are intertwined with economic development. In dealing with limited funds, Mr. Bell emphasized the need to make sure Toledo is safe, citing the decision by one firm not to locate in Toledo after the recent riots.

Mr. Bell spoke of a strategic plan involving economic development groups in Toledo and the region. The region should include Southern Michigan and Northwest Ohio, with emphasis on a 30 to 40 mile diameter wide zone from Toledo. People need to be brought to the table from the region. What is the strategic plan? What are the time tables? These ideas would then need to be communicated to the general population.

Toledo's Mayor, according to Mr. Bell, should act as the coordinator between the city and various economic development agencies, such as the Lucas County Improvement Corporation and the Meta-Plan. The Mayor would not be the Economic Development Director; he would tap the expertise of Toledo and the region to create economic development plans.

Mr. Bell mentioned that Toledo and the region are moving into a knowledge economy. We have to deal with education, especially with struggling students. Retraining of workers to handle the knowledge economy should be done if need be.

The biggest economic opportunities in Toledo, said Mr. Bell, reside with the creation of the intermodal facility and doing something with the Marina District. There should also be a focus on green initiatives with the University of Toledo and with “green” companies that are located in Toledo and the region.

Mr. Bell wants to take a general approach to the water issue. He felt that water was probably used by Toledo as a means to prevent urban sprawl. Water revenue can not go back into Toledo’s General Fund accounts. Mr. Bell wants to wait until after the election, however, to examine how the water issue should be handled.

Mr. Bell stated that good things are happening in Toledo. There are two things at present that are creating perception problems for the city: 1) there is an “ego” in the Mayor’s office and 2) there is an inability by the administration, unions, etc. to sit down and be change agents for Toledo. The negative perception of Toledo has to be changed.

As part of working with municipalities in the county, Toledo needs to set up a Joint Economic Development Pact which will market Toledo, Northwest Ohio and Lucas County. As part of the Pact, business ready sites, with accompanying infrastructure, need to be available no matter where they are in the county. If all in Lucas County benefit, it doesn’t matter where economic development is located in the county.

A Bell administration would create a Business Advocate position (also known as a Deputy Mayor) which would be “one step” from the Mayor. The best candidate to be a Business Advocate could be a City Manager who is credible with the business community. There would be two Deputy Mayors, with the Business Advocate handling “outside” issues and reaching out to the business community while the second would be responsible for Toledo’s “inside” issues.

Part of Mr. Bell’s plan to save and create jobs includes “Neighborhood Business Centers” in the “tipping areas” of the city. These centers would work to develop small businesses in the neighborhoods. The idea behind this concept is to bring successful business people in to the neighborhoods to help local small business. Small business is the backbone of the city. Toledo has not listened to its small businesses.

Responding to a question about why so many safety officials seem to respond to one call and if there is any way to be more efficient with the safety system, Mr. Bell mentioned that there are national standards to emergency responses; if a certain call requires twelve members of the safety forces, then twelve need to be called out. Mr. Bell also mentioned that Toledo is one of the few cities of its size that have both accredited Police and Fire Departments.

Mr. Bell does agree with the “Safety First” issue for now, but feels there has to be a determination of where the finances of Toledo are at present. He would, however, vote no for “Nine is Fine”, citing that there may need to be more at-large representation on Council than at present.

Mr. Bell sees his administration and the Chamber would be part of a team, building partnerships for economic development. He stated that he is against anything that does not promote the growth of Northwest Ohio.

[Mr. Bell's position paper given to the Chamber can be read here.](#)