

Greater Omaha Chamber 2026 OPPD Board of Directors Candidate Questionnaire

Instructions: Please answer each of the following questions. Please keep each response to 150 words or fewer. Responses will be shared with Chamber members as submitted.

Candidate Name: Christian Mapes

OPPD Subdivision: 1

Occupation/Background (Limit to 200 words): I'm an Omaha native, Creighton Prep graduate, husband, and father of two daughters, and my family and I live in Bennington. After graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2016 with a degree in Systems Design and Management, I served for over five years as an Army officer, including with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, and deployed to Afghanistan.

I left active duty in 2021, returned home to Omaha, and built a career in the energy industry. I've worked at Voltus and GridBeyond and now serve as Director of Power Markets at Giga Energy. My work focuses on wholesale electricity markets, including the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) that serves Nebraska, demand response, and helping large industrial and commercial customers reduce or shift consumption when it benefits grid reliability and cost.

I understand how utilities plan for peak demand, buy and sell power, and manage the financial risks of serving large new loads. I'm running to bring that experience and a commitment to disciplined, transparent governance to a public power utility whose decisions will shape our region for decades.

Questions

Each question includes a short background note in italics to help readers understand the issue.

1. Planning for Growth

Background: *OPPD is updating its long-range plan (the 2026 Integrated System Plan), which forecasts how much electricity the region will need in the years ahead. If that forecast is too low, new and expanding employers may not be able to get power when they are ready to open.*

Greater Omaha is competing with other regions for major employers, including advanced manufacturing and technology projects that need large amounts of power. How would you make sure OPPD plans for enough electricity to support that growth, and how would you manage the risk of building too much too soon?

I want OPPD to plan for growth, not gamble on it. OPPD has already tightened its large-load forecasts after customer-provided demand projections outpaced actual metered use. That's a good step. The 2026 Integrated System Plan should continue testing multiple growth scenarios and show the cost and reliability implications of each.

Some investments, like replacing aging equipment, improving system resilience and securing key transmission corridors, make sense in nearly every scenario. Those should move forward. Larger investments driven by a single customer should be staged around verified construction milestones and supported by financial commitments if the project changes course.

I would also compare new generation and transmission against demand response, qualified customer-owned resources, and flexible service options. The goal is to have power ready when new employers need it without asking families and businesses to finance infrastructure built for projects that never materialize.

2. OPPD as an Economic Development Partner

***Background:** Site selectors often rule out communities that cannot promise reliable, affordable power on a fast timeline. A utility that works closely with economic developers can be a deciding factor in where companies invest.*

What should OPPD do to help Greater Omaha win new business investment and jobs? How would you work with the Chamber, local governments and site selectors while treating all customers fairly?

Affordable, dependable electricity is one of Greater Omaha's biggest competitive advantages. OPPD should be an active economic development partner, not just the utility a developer calls after selecting a site.

I'd support regular coordination with the Chamber, local governments and site selectors to identify areas with available capacity, anticipate industrial demand and offer realistic timelines for service. Where the economics support it, OPPD should get ahead on studies, permitting and transmission planning rather than starting from scratch after a customer commits.

But partnership does not mean preferential treatment. Every project should face fair and consistently applied rules on studies, rates, financial security and infrastructure costs. We should judge projects based on the long-term value they bring to existing customers, not just the headline dollar amount of an investment announcement.

We can be competitive and welcoming without shifting a new project's costs onto today's customer-owners.

3. Serving Large New Customers

***Background:** Data centers and large manufacturers bring significant investment, jobs and tax base, but they also need large amounts of power and new infrastructure.*

What principles would guide how OPPD serves very large new customers? How would you keep OPPD competitive in attracting these projects while making sure existing homes and businesses are not left paying costs that belong to someone else?

Data centers and manufacturers can strengthen public power through jobs, investment and electricity sales. But they create financial exposure if projects are delayed, downsized or canceled.

My test is simple: Is the project credible, does it pay for the costs and risks it creates, and will existing customer-owners benefit?

That means appropriate rates, construction milestones, deposits or guarantees, minimum billing commitments and protections against stranded infrastructure. Nebraska's new large-load law strengthens these safeguards and requires public power suppliers to develop procedures for procuring demand response and flexibility from large customers.

I'd also ask how much of a customer's load must be firm and how much could be interruptible during grid emergencies. Any discount must reflect actual value that is measurable and enforceable. We should compete on reliability and predictable rules, not by transferring developer risk to existing ratepayers.

4. Building the Grid Ahead of Demand

***Background:** Transmission lines and substations can take years to plan and build. Communities that wait until a project is fully committed can lose it to a competitor whose sites are already powered and ready.*

When should OPPD invest in transmission, substations and other grid infrastructure before a customer has signed on? How would you manage the financial risk of those investments?

We can't wait until a factory breaks ground to begin planning a transmission line that takes years to build. But we also shouldn't ask existing customers to finance speculative development.

I would separate investments that benefit the broader system from those driven mainly by a particular prospective customer. Improvements that address existing reliability needs or unlock several credible development sites can justify investing ahead of demand when the economics work across reasonable growth scenarios.

For customer-specific projects, OPPD should require meaningful milestones, financial security and agreements that protect ratepayers if demand arrives late or never materializes. We can also move faster by doing early engineering, studying potential sites and coordinating right-of-way work with SPP and local governments before committing the biggest capital dollars.

That's how we improve time-to-power and attract employers while staying disciplined about whose money is at risk.

5. An All-of-the-Above Energy Mix

***Background:** OPPD produces power from a mix of sources, including natural gas, coal, wind, solar and purchased power. Relying too heavily on any single source can increase costs and reliability risks.*

Do you support an all-of-the-above approach to power generation? How would you balance natural gas, coal, wind, solar, battery storage, nuclear and other resources, and which factors (such as reliability, cost and speed to build) would carry the most weight in your decisions?

Yes. To me, "all of the above" means evaluating every viable option, not giving any technology a blank check.

Natural gas and existing coal units can provide dispatchable capacity, but they also have fuel, maintenance and environmental risks. Wind and solar can provide low-cost energy, but their output doesn't always line up with peak demand. Batteries can shift power through critical hours, although duration matters. Nuclear deserves serious long-term consideration, and demand response can reduce some of the capacity OPPD needs to build.

I would compare resources based on full delivered cost, seasonal accredited capacity under SPP rules, transmission needs, fuel security, construction timing, environmental impacts and financial risk. We shouldn't retire dependable capacity until we know how its reliability contribution will be replaced.

The goal is a balanced portfolio that keeps power reliable and affordable, not a political preference for any particular technology.

6. Keeping the Lights On

Background: *In February 2021, extreme cold across the region forced rolling power outages in OPPD's service area. Reliable power around the clock is essential for employers, hospitals and families.*

What should OPPD do to make sure the power stays on during extreme weather and periods of record demand? What role should always-available ("dispatchable") generation play in that plan?

The February 2021 outages showed why an electric system has to be prepared for the worst days, not just average conditions.

OPPD needs dependable dispatchable generation, secure fuel supplies, transmission capacity, purchased-power options and qualified demand response. We should stress-test plans against prolonged winter cold, summer heat, generator outages and regional shortages, rather than assuming neighboring utilities will have excess power during the same emergency.

Dispatchable generation will remain essential, but a plant being dispatchable doesn't automatically mean it will be available. Fuel delivery, winterization, maintenance and performance matter. I'd want regular board reporting on seasonal capacity, emergency readiness and the condition of critical infrastructure.

Just as important are the skilled lineworkers, plant operators and technicians who keep the system running. Reliability isn't only about new power plants. It's also about maintaining what we already own and supporting the people who operate it.

7. Nuclear and Emerging Technologies

Background: *Advanced nuclear, including small modular reactors, could provide around-the-clock power with no carbon emissions, but these technologies are still early in commercial development.*

Should OPPD pursue advanced nuclear and other emerging technologies as part of its long-term plan? What would you need to see on cost, timeline, safety and regulatory approval before supporting a major investment?

Yes. OPPD should study advanced nuclear and other technologies that could deliver dependable, carbon-free electricity. The Great Plains New Nuclear Consortium is a sensible way to share research before construction commitments.

But researching a technology isn't the same as committing billions to build it. Before supporting a major project, I'd want independent cost estimates, a realistic construction and licensing schedule, a proven safety case, clear waste-management responsibilities and a full understanding of who bears the risk of delays or cost overruns.

I would be particularly cautious about exposing OPPD's customers to the full financial risk of a first-of-a-kind project. Partnerships and phased commitments could make sense.

Advanced nuclear may eventually be an important part of our energy mix. We should explore it seriously without making our near-term reliability plan dependent on technology that isn't yet commercially ready.

8. North Omaha Station

Background: OPPD's current policy allows North Omaha Station to keep operating as it does today. OPPD's long-range plan assumes the plant's three oldest units (Units 1, 2 and 3) will eventually retire and its two newer units (Units 4 and 5) will be converted from coal to natural gas.

What conditions must be met before OPPD retires or converts any North Omaha Station units? Please address replacement power, transmission readiness, reliability, cost, environmental impacts and impacts on the surrounding community.

North Omaha should be a decision about reliability, costs, public health and community trust, not a symbolic deadline.

I support transitioning the station away from coal, but first OPPD needs to demonstrate that replacement resources can provide the dependable capacity and local grid services the existing units supply. Required transmission upgrades must be ready, SPP reliability obligations satisfied and natural gas deliverability confirmed before conversions proceed.

The board also needs a transparent comparison of continued operation, conversion and retirement costs, including maintenance, fuel, customer bill impacts and environmental effects. Residents near the station deserve clear information about emissions and a meaningful voice in the transition. Employees deserve honest workforce planning and safe working conditions.

I don't support postponing the transition indefinitely. I support clear, publicly reported milestones for completing it without compromising reliability or placing avoidable costs on customers.

9. Balancing Environmental Goals with Reliability and Growth

Background: OPPD has set a goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. At times, that goal may compete with keeping power reliable, rates affordable and capacity available for new growth.

If meeting the 2050 goal on its current schedule would threaten reliability, raise rates or limit OPPD's ability to serve new customers, how would you set priorities? Would you support adjusting the goal's timeline or approach?

Reliability and affordability have to be conditions of OPPD's energy transition, not afterthoughts. I support reducing emissions and pursuing cleaner technologies where they provide long-term value. The 2050 goal can help guide planning, but a target date cannot replace a workable engineering and financial plan.

If credible modeling showed the current pathway would threaten reliability, impose unreasonable costs on families and employers, or limit responsible growth, I would first look at changing the approach and, if necessary, the timeline. OPPD's existing policy already anticipates setting future interim emissions targets after the 2026 planning process.

That isn't abandoning environmental responsibility. It means evaluating generation, transmission, storage, nuclear, efficiency and demand response together and measuring actual emissions reductions alongside costs and reliability.

OPPD's obligation is to deliver dependable, affordable and environmentally responsible electricity, not optimize for one goal at the expense of everything else.

10. Rates and Affordability

Background: *Competitive electric rates are a key advantage for Nebraska employers and households. OPPD will need major investments in new generation and grid infrastructure to keep pace with growth.*

How would you keep OPPD's rates competitive while making the investments needed for growth? How should rate impacts factor into the timing and scope of major projects?

Affordable electricity has been one of Nebraska's great competitive advantages. Keeping it that way will take discipline as OPPD expands.

Before approving an investment, I want to know the problem we're solving, the alternatives, the full lifetime cost, the expected impact on bills and what could cause the project to go over budget or become unnecessary. We should compare building generation, buying power, making better use of existing infrastructure and acquiring qualified demand response on a consistent basis.

Large customers should make financial commitments that protect existing households and businesses from stranded costs. Once projects are approved, the board should track schedules, spending, performance and customer impacts against what was promised.

Affordability isn't just about this year's bill. Putting off necessary maintenance or reliability upgrades can create even bigger costs later. The board's job is to make those tradeoffs visible and hold management accountable.