

KEENE WINTERS - WAUSAU CITY COMMON COUNCIL DISTRICT 6

Key findings include:

- **Candidate Profile:** Keene Winters is a former Wausau City Council member who previously represented District 6 from 2012–2016 and is seeking a return to the council after several years outside elected office.
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** Winters has been a vocal critic of long-running TIF districts, arguing that decades of downtown TIF use have failed to deliver sufficient taxpayer returns and have constrained the city’s operating revenue.
- **Public Safety & Budget Framing:** Winters has opposed the public safety levy referendum, arguing that firefighter positions could be maintained through attrition and staffing reductions rather than a tax increase, a position that contrasts with candidates supporting sustained public safety investment.
- **Political Contribution Record:** Federal Election Commission records show that Winters has made consistent political contributions over more than a decade to Republican candidates and committees, including election deniers, Ron Johnson and Tom Tiffany.

Wausau is the core city of Marathon County in north-central Wisconsin. The city itself is competitive and somewhat more diverse roughly 40,000 people, with a notable Hmong/Asian community, but it sits inside a county that went solidly Republican for president in both 2020 and 2024 (Trump 58%–40% range, +18 R), so city officials operate in a red county but a swingy city environment. At the municipal level, races are officially nonpartisan, but 2024 showed they’re not nonpolitical, Republicans backed Doug Diny to oust Mayor Katie Rosenberg, and the council has been part of the same set of fights over drop boxes and city-hall process [[Data USA](#), accessed, 11/5/2025] [[Marathon County](#), accessed, 11/5/2025] [[WSAW](#), accessed, 11/5/2025].

BACKGROUND

Keene Winters is a longtime Wausau resident, born and raised in the city, which he has cited as a motivating factor for seeking public office again. Winters previously served two terms on the Wausau City Council representing District 6 from April 2012 to April 2016, giving him direct experience in municipal governance. He also mounted an unsuccessful mayoral campaign nearly a decade ago, signaling prior interest in broader city leadership beyond the council. In professional life, Winters worked as a financial planner and business owner for over 25 years, emphasizing experience in evaluating numbers and financial matters in public discussions [[Wausau Pilot & Review](#), 2/2/2026].

Keene Winters has made multiple individual contributions over more than a decade to Republican candidates and committees, including support for Marathon County Republicans, Ron Johnson, Tom Tiffany, Sean Duffy, Paul Ryan, Mitt Romney, Tommy Thompson, and Eric Hovde in election cycles dating back to at least 2010. Contributions were made both as self-employed and through Winters Financial Group LLC [[Fec](#), accessed, 2/3/2026] [[Wisconsin Campaign Finance](#), accessed, 2/3/2026].

Among the recipients Winters supported, Ron Johnson publicly pushed for investigations into alleged 2020 election fraud and continued to promote fraud claims after the election, according to [[WPR](#), 1/3/2021]. Separate reporting based on released Jan. 6 committee materials described Johnson discussing (and his staff attempting to deliver) a slate of “alternate”/false electors in Wisconsin, and noted he continued to question the 2020 election’s legitimacy [[AP News](#), 1/3/2021]. Tom Tiffany was

among the members of Congress who supported the Texas lawsuit seeking to invalidate 2020 election results in Wisconsin and other states, as reported by , and he is listed among the signers on the amicus brief filed in that case [[WPR](#), 12/11/2020].

ON THE ISSUES

Tax Increment Financing

In A December 14, 2025 Opinion Column, Winters Said Decades Of Downtown Tax Increment Financing Failed To Produce Meaningful Returns For Tax Payers And Diverted From City Services. “ After four decades of downtown TIF spending, Wausau still lacks clear evidence that taxpayers are getting a meaningful return on their investment. For 45 years, there has been a clarion call to “save Wausau” by investing in its downtown using Tax Incremental Financing (TIF). The TIF laws allow municipalities to create a geographically defined stream of property tax dollars and set them aside for use on economic development projects. The theory is that these segregated funds—if invested wisely—would generate sufficient new tax base to pay taxpayers back and leave the community in a better place. Has that worked for us? If not, how much money is it going to take, and how long before we see results? These are not rhetorical questions. They are a function of knowing how much public money was spent, how much private money was spent, how much new tax base was created, and how much new property tax revenue was created? [...]the district has generated almost \$42 million in new property taxes since its inception, but none of it has ever been made available for city services. Those property tax dollars remain “fenced-off” and have—by choice—been devoted to the repayment of TID #3 debt and other TID expenses.” [[Wausau Pilot Review](#), 12/14/2025]

Public Safety & Budget Framing

Winters Opposed The Public Safety Levy Referendum To Fund 12 Firefighters, He Argued That Staffing Levels Could Be Maintained Without A Tax Increase Through Hiring Freezes And “Reducing The City’s Headcount.” “What are your thoughts about the public safety referendum to increase the levy to pay for 12 firefighter positions on a long-term basis? If you support it, why? If you oppose it, what is the alternative? My answer to this question is going to be blunt. The so-called public safety referendum is a ploy to play on people’s emotions while picking their pockets unnecessarily. Let us look at the facts. The City of Wausau has 355.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. To the extent that it has reached the statutory levy limit and can only afford to pay 343.2 FTE starting in 2027, there is no good reason to single out 12 firefighter positions for the cuts. It could be any 12 positions. Firefighters have been presented as the sacrificial lambs only because the cynical, city hall backbenchers think that is the best way to market and sell you a tax increase. In fact, no one needs to be fired at all. The closure of TID 7 has returned sufficient funds to the city’s operating budget to pay for four of the 12 positions. That gets us down to eight. Every year, about two dozen employees quit or retire from the city. A modest and flexible hiring freeze could reduce the city’s headcount by eight positions without giving anyone a pink slip. We should take a serious look at reducing the city’s headcount. In the last ten years, Wausau has added 40 new positions – a 13% increase in staffing for a community whose population only grew 2%. It is time to take a step back. Also, know this, Wausonians have not been stingy with their support of the fire department. Our funding of fire and emergency medical services per capita ranks 75th highest out of 604 cities and villages in Wisconsin. It is hard to make the case that we are under-funding our fire department. Probably the most insidious part of this scam is that city hall has placed 12 firefighters heads on the chopping block and told them that unless they and their brother firefighters hit the streets and stump for this tax increase, they will lose their jobs. That is abusive. The use of firefighters as pawns in this manner is reprehensible. The answer to this question should be the

litmus test for the 2026 Wausau City Council election. It quickly tells you which candidates are willing to roll up their sleeves and make the hard choices to balance budgets and which ones have no trouble with being dishonest and manipulative to get what they want.” [[Wausau Pilot & Review](#), 2/2/2026].

VULNERABILITIES & ADVERSE FINDINGS OF NOTE

Winters Contribution To Election Deniers

2011-2022: Winter Contributed Nearly \$3,000 To The Campaign Committees Of U.S Sen Ron Johnson. [[FEC](#), accessed, 2/3/2026]

January 2021: Ron Johnson Publicly Pushed For Investigations Into Alleged 2020 Election Fraud.

“U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson doubled down on his calls to investigate allegations of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election in a heated interview Sunday that, at times, devolved into shouting. The interview, on NBC’s ‘Meet the Press,’ came a day after Johnson announced he would join an effort with 10 Republican senators to object to the certification of the Electoral College count when Congress meets to do so Wednesday. The statement, which U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., joined among others, called for the creation of a commission with “full investigatory and fact-finding authority” to conduct an emergency audit of the 2020 election returns, citing ‘unprecedented allegations of voter fraud.’ On Sunday, Johnson argued that an investigation into the election would not be harmful to the democratic process, but instead would instill trust in the process for supporters of President Donald Trump, many of whom don’t trust the results. ‘The fact of the matter is that we have a(n) unsustainable state of affairs in this country where we have tens of millions of people that do not view this election result as legitimate,’ Johnson said.”[[WPR](#), 1/3/2021]

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January 2021: Johnson Promoted Election Fraud Claims After The Election. “U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson doubled down on his calls to investigate allegations of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election in a heated interview Sunday that, at times, devolved into shouting. The interview, on NBC’s ‘Meet the Press,’ came a day after Johnson announced he would join an effort with 10 Republican senators to object to the certification of the Electoral College count when Congress meets to do so Wednesday. The statement, which U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., joined among others, called for the creation of a commission with “full investigatory and fact-finding authority” to conduct an emergency audit of the 2020 election returns, citing ‘unprecedented allegations

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2018-2022: Winters Contributed Nearly \$1,000 To The Campaign Committees Of U.S Rep. Tom Tiffany. [[FEC](#), accessed, 2/3/2026]

December 2020: Tom Tiffany Supported The Texas V. Pennsylvania Lawsuit That Sought To Overturn The 2020 Presidential Election. “Two Wisconsin Republicans in Congress are aligning themselves with President Donald Trump’s efforts to overturn the results of the November presidential election in Wisconsin and nationwide. U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, on Thursday signed onto a lawsuit filed by the Republican attorney general of Texas with the U.S. Supreme Court that would have thrown out Wisconsin’s presidential votes and instead had the election decided by the state’s Republican-controlled Legislature. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected the Texas lawsuit Friday evening.” [[WPR](#), 12/11/2020]

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