

View results

Respondent

5

Anonymous

22:50

Time to complete

1. Name & office you are seeking *

Andrea Davis, Mayor of Missoula

2. New development activity has an impact on home cost, access and ultimately affordability. In 2019 the City of Missoula Office of Housing and Community Development presented a city housing policy outlining several private and public sector regulatory reform and development incentives. As Mayor, what specific policies would you pursue to address the community's housing shortage? *

First, I will continue to find ways to fund, deploy and measure the impacts of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF). This fund is essential because it offers our community the flexibility to fund projects that advance locally defined goals (we are not hamstrung by federal income targets, for example). Money in this fund leverages additional public and private investment, and it must be a priority. We must pursue local partnerships and methods to fund this pool. This could include taking proceeds from the sale of city owned land that is either banked for that purpose or has been identified as least essential for other purposes and sold to generate funding. With the goal of the AHTF to provide revolving funds when feasible, we could prioritize proceeds from land sales as a loan to ensure that money generated from the land sale revolves back into the fund in order to fund future projects.

Second, a strategy that is already underway is the Our Missoula – Updated Growth Policy and Code Reform. This strategy is foundational to making a difference for the entire continuum of Missoula's housing market (from homelessness to market rate homeownership). A Place to Call Home specifically mentions opportunities to incentivize tiered affordability for rentals and homeownership through amendments to the City code and it's clear these will be considered as part of that process as the Housing Policy is a listed resource for Our Missoula. As Mayor, I will ensure this extensive and comprehensive process continues to get the support and resources it needs to deliver on the Goals of Our Missoula.

Third, housing incentives, in addition to those afforded by code reform, via financial contribution to incentivize the private market should be evaluated. A particular example is the Financing of Infrastructure for Affordable Homes listed on page 34. Via HB 819, \$100 million will be made available to local governments and private developers for the purpose of providing low-cost loans for infrastructure.

A fourth policy I will pursue is to expand private-public partnerships, such as innovative financing tools used by Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFI's). I serve on the Board of Directors for NeighborWorks Montana (NWMt), a statewide CDFI, who is undertaking a Bozeman specific loan pool fund. This is a new fund strategy for NWMt as their loan pool has been traditionally statewide. We will have the chance to learn from their experience to evaluate if it's a plausible strategy here in Missoula. The loan fund is resourced by local lending institutions contributing Equity Equivalent Investments to be used for community driven priorities. This can include building new and preserving affordable homes, bridge financing and manufactured home park land loans.

Fifth, I support expanding City support for Housing Services. Currently serving as the Executive Director of Homeward, a housing counseling agency, I am keenly aware of the value of this organization to delivering critical education, and connection to resources for people buying their first home.

Sixth, I highly support preservation of existing affordable homes. We cannot lose affordable homes, whether it be rental or homeownership, from our housing stock.

A final policy I will pursue is to support the already existing policy of donating city-owned land for affordable housing development. Each city-owned parcel needs to be examined for best use.

3. Missoula is currently undergoing zoning "*code reform*"; what three changes would you propose for the update? *

This is complex question to answer as all things are systemic and interconnected – pulling on one, pushes another. Simply put, changes in density, setbacks, and parking would likely make the biggest difference for private market building, and certainly help reduce development costs for all homes, but in particular homes for sale in single, duplex/triplex configuration.

Overall, the revised code should be streamlined and simplified. This would improve the workability of Missoula's development code, and improving staff capacity and ultimately, making for a more enjoyable job – an area many municipalities are struggling with finding workforce.

4. A quarter of Missoula's workforce lives outside Missoula County. It is estimated that the lost property tax from commuters is in excess of \$6.6 million per year. As Mayor what would you do to encourage people to live within the City? *

First, it's worth saying that not everyone commuting into town wants to or can live in town. That said, many people "drive until they qualify" so live outside of City limits and work in the City. Expanding access to homes people can afford would encourage and enable people to live in Missoula. My response to question #2 identifies policies in our existing Housing Plan that would result in more homes for rent and for sale.

Missoula's growth and existing infrastructure has resulted in increased traffic barriers so tackling this issue this is essential. One area I would like to pursue is stoplight optimization – partly because it's my pet peeve, but I witness the lack of efficiency created when the turning signal isn't active long enough but for a few cars to turn. This would move traffic flow more efficiently and reduce car exhaust air pollution from idling cars.

Results from the policies deployed via the Housing Policy and the Code Reform will impact overall livability in Missoula, and for those wishing to live in the city, there will be greater opportunity.

Next, while not directly encouraging people to move from outside of the City limits, to the inside, partnering with other jurisdictions to establish park-and-ride facilities could increase the use of public transportation inside the City, reduce car congestion, improve air quality and overall community satisfaction. These park-and-ride facilities could benefit neighborhoods that are challenged with access to public transit, such as Miller Creek and Grant Creek.

Lastly, the annexation policy should continue to be used as a tool to manage the City's service area and growth boundaries.

5. State Law provides for tax increment financing (TIF) and urban renewal districts. TIF is used within urban renewal districts to combat blight and promote economic development. However, critics of TIF say that these urban renewal districts can be in place for many years, and TIF diverts property tax revenue away from schools and local governments. What changes to TIF statutes would you recommend, if any, to respond to citizen concerns? *

I do not have any statutory recommendations to make however I believe it is essential to respond to citizen concerns by listening and evaluating current practices. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is complex, as is the tax system in general, but that should not stop us from clear, transparent communication to ensure we can evaluate the benefits and impacts of this important tool.

TIF offers Missoula a unique local tool to carry out an urban renewal plan by addressing blight and increasing economic vitality in areas at risk or already seeing declining property values. The increase in value of properties allows the generation of taxes to target infrastructure needs such as sidewalks, curbs, gutters, parks and trails that improve the functionality and value of these neighborhoods, thereby attracting private investment. TIF also delivers on other community goals, such as supporting housing development (Affordable and Workforce) and providing dislocation assistance for manufactured homeowners when TIF is used in a project displacing those residents (goals identified in the Housing Policy).

I recognize the maximum time period for a district of 40 years is a long period of time that other taxing jurisdictions do not receive an increase in taxes over the baseline established when the URD was created. When the district expires, it's like a retirement account has been released for all taxing jurisdictions and the overall tax base is larger than if the URD hadn't been created because of this targeted investment. Still, discussion among our community is essential to ensure we're administering a fair and balanced program.

6. Do you support the City's anti-discrimination ordinance? How would you support Fair Housing for all in Missoula? *

Absolutely! Supporting Fair Housing for all is something I have steadfastly promoted during my 22 years as a housing professional. Homebuyer education and counseling and financial skill building are two direct ways we have helped those impacted by the growing income gap achieve economic prosperity. Additionally, as an employer, we expanded Homeward's anti-discrimination policy beyond state and federal requirements around the same time the City of Missoula adopted its anti-discrimination ordinance. A friend of mine who is nearly 80 years old described to me how she was turned down for professional jobs because she was single mother. She lost out on years of earning power as a result of that discrimination and now lives in a deed-restricted affordable apartment, fortunately, but has limited means to pay for her basic needs and cost of living.

The efforts of Our Missoula, Growth Policy Update and Code Reform has a real chance to deliver equitable home opportunities and enhanced quality of life by changing land use regulations that produce segregation and increase cost of living for some Missoulians.

The commitment made in the joint City-County Justice, Equity, Diversion and Inclusion Resolution and Advisory Board development is progress that will also promote and support Fair Housing for All.

A Place to Call Home recommends expanding City support of housing services and increasing community awareness and access to services. There are opportunities for the City to partner with existing Housing Counseling Agencies to expand awareness around discrimination in the Appraisal process and risks associated with modern day redlining through bias built into algorithms and technologies marketed as artificial intelligence, exclusionary conduct by mortgage lenders, including those by nonbanks. A coordinated effort by the City and local housing agencies to call attention to discrimination using financial predation and credit exploitation of targeting predatory products to certain groups or neighborhoods is a low to no cost way to support Fair Housing for All.

The City must maintain, if not increase, its support of local housing counseling agencies as they are the conduit to housing and financial education, awareness and empowerment of low and moderate income earning Missoulians. BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ are disproportionately represented among low-income earners, and access to this free or low-cost education and counseling is essential to gain economic prosperity for all.

Both developing new and strengthening existing partnerships will expand awareness, understanding and accountability for housing policy. The City has a partner with the Missoula Organization of Realtors in work they may be promoting as part of the national Accountability, Culture Change, and Training (ACT!).

7. Property taxes are the primary source of funding for Montana cities. The City of Missoula's property tax rate has steadily increased over the last decade, putting additional financial pressure on the cost of housing. Given limited funding opportunities how would you prioritize city services? *

In order to prioritize City services, we must establish a balanced budget, evaluate the City tax structure to ensure fiscal sustainability and deliver critical services.

The City budget is comprised of property taxes, revenues from special districts, enterprise funds and levy's – all of which come on a property owners tax bill. The start of each City fiscal year starts with a beginning balance in the checking account and concludes with an ending balance.

Maintenance of critical municipal services is the core job of the city. I believe the City Departments are all necessary functions for the health and vitality of our community. The question posed is, how would I prioritize city services? I would prioritize the operations of core city services, for example Public safety (inclusive of Fire, Police, the Crisis Intervention Team and Mobility Support Team), Utility Operations & Maintenance, Street Operations & Maintenance, Parks & Recreation and Community Planning, Development & Innovation. The ending balance I referred to is likely used for capital projects each of these departments need to keep functioning. Unprecedented inflation is impacting every family, business and government budget. And just like any family or business, the City will evaluate what its current needs and wants are, and decide what it can do and what it has to save up for. I see City budgeting as an exercise in restraint because there are more needs and wants than there is funding.

It's critical we are moving several important initiatives forward at the same time. Community Planning, a sister department to Development Services, is undertaking the Growth Policy and code reform project that will impact the service delivery of each of the priority city services residents expect. The issues and demands on the City budget are growing and we need to work together and work smarter to deliver on plans, like the growth policy update and code reform, to effect City goals and initiatives such as access to more attainable homes, sustainability goals such as reducing air pollution and limiting reliance on fossil fuels (walkable neighborhoods help drive down consumption of energy and fuel) and expanding opportunity to support our workforce including access to childcare.

8. What, if any, local option tax(es) would you support? *

Let me start by saying a local option tax is, at once, both helpful and difficult. It is helpful because we can direct the revenue from it to local priorities, but it's also difficult because someone will end up paying more. I'm answering this question assuming it means "new" local option taxes. I have no specific proposals to suggest but I am open to considering options to ensure we can have a sustainable budget going forward. Many community members and elected officials talk about the need to do something where we generate local funds from other sources, other than property taxes. If I am elected, I'm hopeful I could work with people smarter than I am to help make this topic more transparent, and dare I say, interesting to our community members so we can have thoughtful dialogue about priorities now and into the future. Afterall, our budget is our moral plan and where we put our resources highlights our priorities.

Where the bulk of our property tax burden was formerly on the commercial and industrial sectors, it is now on residential property owners. A local option tourist tax is something many find plausible because it would shift some of the burden of infrastructure and utility maintenance to those visiting who using those services and are here to enjoy our recreation and cultural amenities. Much needs to be discussed to ensure a policy like this doesn't inequitably impact some people and we need to chart a path for effective policy with the legislature.

9. As Mayor what do you believe should be the top three priorities for the City? *

1) An inclusive community: A core initiative to achieve greater affordability and access to home, equity and inclusion, and health for Missoula's citizens is a successful Growth Policy Update and Code Reform. Completing this extensive project is essential to relieve the pressure we are feeling from the rapid growth in Missoula and throughout our region. The approach to accomplish this has the potential to be inclusive of more voices and be nimble for the changes we are absorbing. This will alleviate several pinch points such as an updated and streamlined code that is efficient to implement and will create more home types and opportunities for all. Predictability should increase by both the code itself as well as the implementation and will reduce costs, and risks, to creating more homes that Missoulians can afford. This is our opportunity to make certain our essential and critical workers live in the communities they serve, to expand opportunities for people who are being left out of the real estate market and establish a vibrant community where kids can safely bike and walk to school. Importantly, this effort addresses more than residential but also commercial and industrial planning and permitting allowing business and job growth that can support equitable wages.

2) A sustainable community: I am convinced by my daily conversations with other Missoulians that we have the capacity to address large, looming issues that are both global and at our doorstep at the same time. We can take local actions that help us tackle the threat of global climate chaos, while building a prosperous and strong community. Missoula and other Montana cities are demanding access to renewable energies. We have to work on multiple strategies simultaneously such as finding solutions for renters and homeowners to affordably access renewable energy and negotiate with large utilities that are delivering the power to our communities. We must use the opportunity that has arisen through federal infrastructure investment to help build Missoula's future. Rising cost of living is impacting everyone's budgets, and the Mayor has an important role of management of City departments by leading optimization of our city services. We can evaluate our existing work processes and flow but also consider the use of technology to deploy alternative operating models to meet our community's growing needs. Lastly, sustainability is building resiliency for the future and that includes Missoula's budget and our tax structure. A priority is to establish Missoula's economic sustainability through evaluation, innovation and partnership with those in other communities and at the state level.

3) A connected community: Livability issues of growth, rising costs and fraying social bonds impacting our citizens are also impacting our City staff and the City's ability to deliver on its mission and core services. We should evaluate how to improve staffing levels, increase internal training and hiring opportunities, pay equity, and family friendly policies like childcare opportunities that help our workforce get to work. Missoula is not the only City in Montana facing worker shortage, retirement of experienced staff and burn-out and we should be working arm in arm to support a resilient staff. Public safety is a growing concern and a high priority. Furthering the work already established through the Crisis Intervention Team, for example, offers Missoula the opportunity to prevent conflict and help deliver solutions for our members of our community. We can deepen partnerships with other Montana communities to find ways to reduce the rising cost of property taxes on our residents. That necessitates working at the state level with the Legislature to find solutions that will help our communities deliver for our citizens. It will take a lot to cut through the noise of national politics, but Missoula has always found innovative ways to make changes that have lasting impact for future generations.

10. Given the upcoming zoning code reform project, what are the two to three resources that you will use to make informed decisions? *

Honestly, the entire Our Missoula Resource library needs to be considered to make informed decisions. To pick the highlights, I'd utilize the updated Growth Policy, the Housing Policy and expert advice from great city staff. See my note in #9 about supporting staff as a priority in order to improve on the City's delivery of core services. I'm reading the book Arbitrary Lines and am only halfway through so no opinion on it, other than I find it helpful to get multiple sources of information to make informed decisions. FYI – it lists a lot of great resources in the back of the book. As the Mayor, I will help establish a shared vision that brings together our communities' top priorities. I see a future where we have a more inclusive, sustainable and connected community that provides for opportunities and prosperity for all citizens. I trust the competent staff will work on specifics to deliver a good working development code.

11. Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number *

Lisa Swallow (406) 370-8102

12. Will you accept REALTOR® Political Action Committee campaign contributions? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.