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Respondent

4

Anonymous

04:42

Time to complete

1. Name & office you are seeking *

Jordan Hess; running to retain my position as Missoula's Mayor

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? *

The policies needed locally are spelled out in Missoula's housing policy, A Place to Call Home: prioritizing existing scarce funding resources like CBDG and HOME, continuing to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund at increasing levels, reducing barriers to new supply through sensible regulatory reform and by allowing and promoting quality infill, and partnering to preserve and increase the stock of affordable rental units. I support aggressive action by the city to continue to implement A Place to Call Home and increase housing stock.

I was a member of the City Council that adopted A Place to Call Home. I also worked with Mayor Engen and members of the City Council to create the state's first housing office and the state's first affordable housing trust fund. As Mayor, I lead these teams and I'm highly invested in their programs and their success. In short, I support the entire plan, but after four years of experience operationalizing the plan, I see value in reassessing and refining the policy.

A Place to Call Home takes a broad view of the City's role in our housing challenges with over two dozen strategies designed to make housing more attainable. The policy calls for land banking of city-owned land, cultivating innovative financing options, assisting with acquisition and establishment of resident-owned communities, adequately planning city parks to provide for public spaces that support a diversity of housing types, supporting thoughtful infill development, making development of ADUs easier, among other things. This "all of the above" approach allows us to be flexible and nimble and employ different strategies in different contexts.

Our team is working on a suite of programs to incentivize development of workforce housing. This incentives framework hinges around offering development incentives like reducing parking requirements, allowing more units per acre, or modifying setbacks in exchange for an affordability commitment from the developer. Other possible incentives include a contribution to a project's infrastructure needs: waiving water and sewer connection fees or contributing to street or sidewalk infrastructure.

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

The Our Missoula Growth Policy Update and Code Reform process is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reframe how we develop in our community. It's our chance to plant a flag on what kind of community we want to be and to get to work updating our regulations to match. I was the chairperson of the Land Use and Planning Committee from November 2018 through September 2022 and encouraged Mayor Engen to embark on the code reform effort. I worked closely with staff in selecting a consultant and designing a process. Code reform is the single most important thing we can do to promote a liveable built environment and to promote the construction of quality, attainable homes. One of the primary reasons I want to continue to serve as Missoula's mayor is that I want to see the multi-year code reform process through to completion.

I'm seeking three fundamental changes from code reform:

- Vision. Our growth policy is a visionary document. It articulates our desired growth patterns for the community and lays out the values we want to uphold through growth and development. It was adopted with input from a few thousand Missoulians. Unfortunately, our regulatory code does not match our vision, and the City Council has to consider piecemeal rezoning requests for developments throughout our community that meet our vision but aren't supported by our archaic regulations. This process should align regulations with vision and eliminate costly, challenging rezoning processes. We should proactively rezone the city to match the growth policy through this process.

- Regulation. Our land use code, in Titles 12, 15-18, 20 and 21, is clunky, out-of-date, and rife with conflicts. The code reform effort endeavors to repeal some or all of these titles of city code and replace them with a Unified Development Ordinance. This UDO will be more readable and easier to interpret and use for all code users. Under our current code base, nobody is satisfied: developers are led through a lengthy, clunky process with outdated requirements that places public involvement too late in the process to be useful; neighbors lack predictability about what could be built next to them and how they can advocate for their neighborhood character; staff must interpret and apply code that sometimes conflicts with itself and limits flexibility, and elected officials need to render a decision, often with several dissatisfied user groups and no ideal outcome. A well-designed UDO can improve predictability and outcomes for all these user groups.

- Process. The code reform project includes a process audit to conduct a wholesale assessment of project review procedures. Through this process audit, we're looking at internal and externally-facing processes. We'll assess intake forms and checklists along with submittal requirements. We'll evaluate customer service metrics. We'll look at fees and cost recovery. We'll also look at ways to increase the number of administrative approvals by reducing the number of items that need to go to Council. Through all of this work, we'll aim to streamline our procedures with a goal of simplifying and speeding up most development review processes.

All these improvements—to vision, regulation, and process—need to reflect our community's strategic goals and our decision-making lenses: climate, equity, and housing.

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? *

People live outside the city limits (or outside the county) for a variety of reasons. This answer is intended to address those who wish to live in the city but cannot or do not for some reason.

Supporting the development of homes people can afford is the best thing we can do to draw exurban residents into the city. We accomplish this through our housing policy and through land use reforms as discussed throughout this questionnaire. The reverse side of the coin is that we need to support quality economic development—the creation and retention of good-paying jobs. I'll continue to work through the Missoula Economic Partnership to implement the recommendation in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Finally, I'll continue to support infrastructure and services that make it cheaper to live in the city. For example, a family living near a high-frequency Mountain Line route might be able to transition from a two-car household to a one-car household, saving thousands of dollars per year. Similarly, a household may choose to live in an infill development with a small yard at a lower cost because they have convenient access to a park or open space.

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? *

Tax Increment Financing is the single greatest tool we have in the state of Montana to invest in infrastructure and promote economic development. TIF is a targeted investment in our community: just like a homeowner might add a bathroom to make their home more functional and add resale value, a community can invest in itself to grow its tax base and contribute to the quality of life of its citizens. TIF is the single greatest tool we have to shape our community for the better, and I'll continue to support its responsible use.

In the 2021 MOR Endorsement Questionnaire, I outlined several reforms and suggestions for how to improve the utilization of TIF. I'm pleased to say that I've supported or worked to implement several of these.

First, I believe that communication and education is key to the success of TIF. Some opponents of TIF have deliberately created a false narrative about how TIF is used in Missoula. A vacuum will always be filled, and I suggested in 2021 that the City increase communication and community engagement. The Missoula Redevelopment Agency has completed a communications plan and has increased community engagement dramatically to help ensure that TIF projects are understood and supported by the community.

The MRA has also started more in-depth lifecycle planning, as I requested in 2021. Just as an individual contributing to a retirement plan would make different choices at age 35 than at age 60, our TIF districts should initially make choices that grow the tax base significantly. As these districts mature, investment can shift to supporting community goals: housing, childcare, land banking, safe routes to schools, bus stops, etc. TIF cannot be used to make the late-stage investments that provide community benefit without first making the early-stage choices to grow the tax base. We've conducted thorough planning for URDs II and III to make sure we're winding down these districts with the greatest public benefit possible.

Lastly, the MRA and City staff have been working on a policy to invest in workforce housing with TIF as enabled by the 2021 Legislature. A policy will be ready for Council's consideration this summer.

I do not believe the TIF enabling statute needs significant modification, but I stand at the ready to be a productive part of a statewide conversation in advance of the 2025 Legislative session.

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

I support the City's non-discrimination ordinance. There is no place for hate or intolerance in our community, and as a City, it is incumbent on us to make systemic reforms that push our community to be a place where every person has the opportunity to thrive. Both the 2021 and 2023 Legislative sessions had many setbacks to civil liberties in Montana. I'm committed to working with staff and partners to evaluate ways to strengthen our NDO in light of the recent Legislative session.

Discrimination frequently rears its ugly head in housing situations. The city, through an updated NDO, could better track fair housing violations and refer infractions to the County attorney. Unfortunately, we lack tools locally to regulate or enforce fair housing violations and need to look to the Legislature for modifications to the Landlord-Tenant 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? *

First, the property tax system in the state of Montana is fundamentally broken. It is based on an extraction economy that doesn't exist anymore, and hasn't been meaningfully updated in decades. In the 1980s, Missoula had low residential property values, scarcely any tourists and several lumber mills running around the clock. Today, tourism is one of our biggest economic drivers, our property values are through the roof, and we don't have the industrial base we used to have. We can't talk about property taxes without talking about tax reform.

I approved nine budgets during my time on the City Council, and I'm currently working on my first executive budget as Missoula's mayor. Our general fund property tax levy is capped at one-half the rate of inflation on a three-year rolling average. This has the effect of creating a structural budget deficit where ongoing needs cannot be met through the general fund. This will be a challenging and austere budget year.

As mayor, I'm focused on maintaining and strengthening our core services—the bread and butter of local government—and strategically investing in new initiatives when appropriate and feasible. My budget will reflect this commitment to the core. We're wrapping up a strategic planning process that will inform priorities for the next three years; this plan, developed with broad staff and Council involvement to prioritize the City's myriad adopted plans and policies, will provide a roadmap for prioritizing budget requests.

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

Montana's tax structure has two legs of the traditionally three-legged stool: income tax, which is the primary funding source for state government, and property tax, which is the primary funding source for local governments. Sales tax—the third leg of the stool—is missing in Montana. This creates challenges in funding local government. According to the Legislature's own report, 96.5% of local government general fund tax revenue comes from property taxes. In other states, this number is closer to 70%. The problem with being so highly reliant on property taxes is that there is not a direct connection between property values and ability to pay.

In 2020, I worked closely with MOR to pass Missoula County's voter-approved local option fuel tax. This tax was designed to alleviate property taxes and provide a meaningful alternative for funding local infrastructure. Unfortunately, the 2021 Legislature preempted this voter-approved diversification of revenue sources. As Missoula's mayor, I've been working to build and strengthen statewide coalitions to propose meaningful property tax reform at the 2025 Legislative session. We need to be having conversations about reform as we look to prioritize locally.

We need a diversification of revenue streams for local governments in the state of Montana in order to relieve property taxes. There has never in history been so much wealth in the state of Montana—the state had a multi-billion dollar surplus this year—yet local governments around the state are struggling across the board. I support the exploration of a variety of tax reforms—including statewide reforms or the establishment of local option taxes.

The most logical local-option tax options would be based around tourism. I favor removing the population cap for the local-option resort tax. Currently, resort communities under 5,500 people are allowed to levy a local-option sales tax on tourism-oriented goods and services with voter approval. In Whitefish, the resort tax results in a property tax credit for local residents and businesses and offsets the impacts tourism has on local infrastructure.

I'm eager and enthusiastic to explore other options as a community and as a state, including a local-option income tax or restoration of a local-option fuel tax, but any local option discussion requires a willing Legislature. If authority is granted by the legislature, any local option tax should be approved by local voters.

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

The City should remain a financially responsible, well-run organization that provides value to the taxpayer.

The City should be a leader in solving national and regional challenges that impact Missoulians: housing, climate, and equity.

The City should continue to invest in programs, infrastructure, and services that improve the quality of life of current and future generations of Missoulians.

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

We designed the code reform effort to engage deeply in the community in a new way. I recently convened a community advisory group with expertise from a variety of fields—builders, real estate professionals, for profit and nonprofit developers, architects and engineers, business owners, land use attorneys, and housing advocates. This team will be my eyes and ears throughout the process. I will rely heavily on frequent code users—those who design, develop, build, sell, and occasionally litigate—to ensure the code reform results in a code that is simpler, more efficient, and easier to implement than our current code. These frequent code users have a critical voice that I'll elevate throughout the process. I'll simultaneously rely on the feedback of people who are impacted by code downstream—those who own or rent a home, those who want to own or rent a home, those who have a stake in the form of our community—to ensure the code results in better access to housing and a community that is designed with liveability in mind. Lastly, I'll lean heavily on our consultant team. We selected a team with a broad range of experience in the public and private sectors. The team brings sophistication in planning, development, economic modeling, and community engagement. I'll rely on their research into best practices in housing, climate, affordability, and other community goals. My general approach as Mayor is to surround myself with smart people with a diversity of opinions and listen a lot. This process will be no different.

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

Co-treasurers: Commissioner Dave Strohmaier, (406) 529-5580, and Councilwoman Amber Sherrill, (406) 531-7052. P.O. Box 3, Missoula, MT 59806.

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

☒ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.