

## View results

Respondent

9

Anonymous

430:03

Time to complete

### 1. Name & office you are seeking \*

City Council, Ward 3

### 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 a Council Member, what specific policies would you pursue to address the community's housing shortage? \*

The City has had a strong start to implementation of our housing policy...setting up the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, making ADU's by right, commencing Code Reform, facilitating the development of Trinity I, II, and the Villagio, continuing to work on the Scott Street project, all help us move forwards.

Sometime Council sets policy...and the Missoula City Council has created many, many policies over the last few decades. Once those policies are in place, then we must implement them. That is under the Executive Branch. I see Council's role in implementation a being one of providing support, voting to fund, and sometimes just staying out of the way (which can be a challenge for 12 independent councilors!)

In terms of what I which policies I would pursue to address the community's housing shortage, I think we need to pursue all of the strategies in the Housing Policy. The reality is that we live in a state in which we do not have many tools to subsidize housing...so figuring out how to collaborate with the private sector seems to have greater potential for more impact. We will use the AHTF, TIF, and the other tools to help create housing, but I think that Code Reform could set up the landscape to have more private development which hits all the price points.

Personally, I sit on the AHTF Resident Oversight Committee, and provide input as to potential projects. Additionally, one item I like to support is traveling to Helena to provide testimony in front of the Montana Board of Housing for LIHTC funding for Missoula projects. I have done this twice already, and will go again on May 22. It is a small effort that can pay big dividends if a Missoula project is chosen.

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

So many things can be done with Code Reform...and I look forward to hearing what the consultants bring to the table in terms of tools to make development easier in Missoula, and also to develop more densely. A few priorities for me are:

Creating more staff discretion so they can help applicants for permits get to "Yes" faster...with less appeals, variances, etc. Staff is knowledgeable about the City's goals with development, both to create more units as well as maintain quality of life, and I think giving them the tools to balance this would be constructive.

Having simpler, more streamlined code, that is easier to work with, faster to review, is a priority.

Having new types of denser development that are an option, and that the community can embrace - i.e. mansion apartments, tiny homes, and other creative products...I have really appreciated the new developments coming into the Mullan Road area, which are starting to use the new code established in that area.

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 a member of the City Council what would you do to encourage people to live within the City? \*

I don't know that I would view that as a Council goal, to encourage people to live within the City. People live where they live for all sorts of reasons....cost, commute, neighborhood...if they really want to be in a rural setting, living within the City limits is not a good fit. I think our City goals as outlined in our Strategic Plan are our North Star, so to speak...created by City electeds, with input from the public, it is our vision for Missoula.

As to the issue of property taxes, it is true that folks living within the city limits are subsidizing those who live outside of the limits but commute to work or come to Missoula to play, eat, recreate, get services, etc. Ever since I first got on Council in 2016, I have discussed the need for a local option sales tax. I would like to see a "tourist tax" on items such as restaurants, alcohol, rental cars and hotels. It should not be regressive, but on luxuries that are a choice. I think that would go a long ways to get people to pay their fair share.

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? \*

Several years ago Council had a discussion regarding whether we should change our TIF policies. Ultimately we did not pursue any changes at that point in time, as we did not have consensus and also the math showed that if we capped TIF significantly, we would not be able to accomplish some of our priority goals within the community. A year later the pandemic hit...and since then our high Missoula real estate prices shot up more than anyone could have imagined. Now we find ourselves in a situation in which our one significant tool for affordable housing,(after CDBG and LIHTC) is TIF. Compared to most other Montana communities, Missoula is blessed to have a robust TIF program.

I think the genesis of the TIF criticism stems from property taxes....taxes are high, and pointing the finger at TIF a next step. However, in Missoula our TIF program comprises between 8-9% of the tax base. A portion of that is bonded, so already dedicated. If we gutted the TIF program, and immediately infused 4-5% of those TIF funds back into local govt, schools, etc...I think it might lower property taxes, at best, by a small amount. Given that all the taxing districts have growing costs every year with Collective Bargaining Agreements, etc...much less new programs...I think that 4% is easily wiped out in a year or two. But the cost to the community in not having TIF to invest, and to create the landbanking and infrastructure for more housing and affordable housing, is huge.

I think a community conversation should be had on perhaps refocusing our MRA program, and discussing extending v. not extending districts, etc. The 9 year exit plan for URD II is an excellent example of how councilors worked with MRA to articulate policy as to how the last 9 years of URD II should unfold.

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

Yes, I support the City's anti-discrimination ordinance, and I anticipate that Council will be reviewing it to see if it should be updated. Councilor Becerra and I spent a lot of time on this very topic during the spring and summer of 2022. However, the advocates who wanted it updated actually prioritized wanting funding for a Navigator...someone who could provide legal support for anyone who was denied their rights, and more specifically access to housing based on their gender, race, and other factors. We worked to establish this, and had collected information from Legal Aid and other quarters as to how much it would cost, and who should house it. Unfortunately the budget of FY 2023 was incredibly lean...all the City was able to do was honor our CBAs, but we did not initiate any new programs. I fear this summer's budget could be even worse.

The cost for a navigator was approximately 110k. After a navigator is established after 1-2 years, the plan was to have other large communities contribute 20K each or so, and the navigator could work across Montana. If MOR is interested in sponsoring this program for a couple of years, let's talk!

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? \*

This is a tough question that will become more prevalent with this summer's budget discussions, and into the future. We first have to fund all that we are legally obligated to fund...i.e. Courts, Human Resources, the administration of Mayor and Council, etc. Then, we have to honor our Collective Bargaining Agreements...which means we have increasing labor costs every year.

We currently are within 200k of our cap on mill levies. With this summer's DOR valuation numbers, that could change, but realistically we do not have a lot of capacity to raise taxes for the general fund. The Parks and Road District mill levies can be raised, as there is no cap for the Districts, but nonetheless that does translate to higher property taxes.

If we are forced to make cuts this year, I anticipate we will look to Department Heads to offer their priorities in cuts, and then evaluate that. My priorities for what I would like to see additionally funded for FY2024, if possible, are the Johnson Street Emergency Winter Shelter and the Mobile Support Team.

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

I would like to see a "tourist tax" on items such as restaurants, alcohol, rental cars and hotels. It should not be regressive, but on luxuries that are a choice. I am not in favor of taxing grocery stores, and necessities. I want to focus on taxing the wants, not the needs.

9. As a member of the City Council what do you believe should be the top three priorities for the City? \*

I have always advocated for tax reform, because I truly believe that if we had a more diverse tax base and ultimately more revenue, local government could do so much more...being on Council, we see the need every day. Since tax reform cuts across so many topics, though, I will specify that affordable housing, climate and equity are top priorities that impact our residents.

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

I look forward to seeing what the staff and consultants bring to us, how they explain it and what they perceive to be the benefits; the public, because they must live with it and we need a sufficient mandate to pass it; MOR, Developers, Engineering firms, Architectural firms, non-profit and for-profit affordable housing developers.

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

Barbara Berens, P.O. Box 131, Missoula, MT 59806 406 273-1243

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

☐ Yes

☒ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.