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Respondent

6

Anonymous

3992:45

Time to complete

1. Name & office you are seeking *

Eric Melson, City Council, Ward 1

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? *

Forgive me for any misunderstanding here as I am relatively new to housing policy, but I have learned that housing is incredibly complicated and it is easy to end up with unintended consequences, which is why there are so many tools in our affordable housing policy.

Someone described it to me like a waterbed - you push a little on one side, it shifts a little on the other side...you get some positive results, but it's incredibly difficult to solve the problem with only one strategy or one tactic.

That said, I understand there are different strategies the City is examining - one is increasing inventory to help meet demand, another is subsidizing housing to create those lower income housing categories, and a third is the issue of buying and renting, which at a minimum, means being housed.

I think implementation off the Housing Trust Fund is a critical tool, but as I understand, it still needs a long term funding source.

I understand the City has also eased regulations on ADU's, and coupled with code reform which is a massive undertaking in and of itself, both of these strategies and ones mentioned above should help address the communities housing shortage.

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

Code reform is another growth area for me, something I am excited to learn more about, but as mentioned above - I think ADU permitting and enforcement is a big one that needs attention and if done correctly could strike a middle ground between increasing inventory while also raising a little revenue.

I also think a thoughtful approach to maximize funding and incentives from the Inflation Reduction Act could be captured and leveraged in code reform. Other than that, I look forward to learning more about code reform and its impacts to our community.

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 imagine that a portion of the percentage of people cited in this question choose to live outside Missoula for reasons of their own...aside from that, I think this question is getting at inventory and services and in that context I believe we should do everything we can to increase inventory and provide popular and necessary services that improve the quality of people's lives here in Missoula. I answer this in more detail in question 7...

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? *

It's my understanding that TIF is one of our biggest tools to use for affordable housing. The City has access to a small amount of federal funds, and we typically compete for Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), so having a TIF program is increasingly important to help create new housing opportunities.

It is also my understanding that in order to continue with strong TIF and LIHTC programs, we need the Legislature to act on tax reform because that is an underlying issue regarding TIF. We all want and need lower property taxes. Currently TIF in Missoula is 8-9% of the tax base...A portion, certainly, but not 40% - which would make a huge impact on property taxes.

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

Absolutely. Bias, discrimination, hate and bigotry have no place in Missoula. I believe the Neighborhood Council framework could be a useful tool to better engage in conversations about inclusive, diverse, and equitable housing with neighborhood residents to find opportunities to improve housing affordability across the community.

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? *

At a Montana League of Cities and Towns presentation in October 2018, officials from the Montana Department of Revenue emphasized a clear shift from business taxes to residential property taxes, and that the Legislature set the state's budget on the unsustainable trajectory we're currently on.

Property taxes have risen, not because of local spending, but because our tax structure is antiquated and has not evolved with our changing economy. Effectively, property taxes have become the work horse to fund local government. We need our tax structures to reflect our modern economy and we need the Legislature to recognize this problem and work with local governments on real solutions. That said...

I think we should invest in the services and infrastructure of greatest value to the greatest number of people in our community (as opposed to investing large amounts into niche 'amenity' wants).

I think we should make sure our city departments have plans to address deferred maintenance and future operational costs so that we know what our long-term and upcoming expenses are before they're emergencies and can allocate resources to avoid paying even more down the road.

I think public input is critical when spending public funds. I think this is something the City currently does really well through Engage Missoula - they offer numerous opportunities to respond to surveys and questionnaires, attend public meetings, and whenever we have consultants working on projects, there's a ton of effort put into public engagement. Robust outreach like this helps inform leaders about community priorities from diverse stakeholders.

I think Missoula has done well having an "opportunistic" mindset, meaning public dollars are limited and our ability to fundraise is limited by our Legislature and our tax structure, but there are also lots of federal funding opportunities about to come down the pipeline with IRA and IJA that could leverage existing city/county resources. A development project that might have been 4th or 5th in line on a long list of city priorities might get bumped up if federal funds are available to make it happen faster. It's important that we are aware, responsive and nimble to take advantage of these opportunities.

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

Our antiquated tax structure has placed more burden on local governments to manage a failing system. If local government is going to be the backstop, then local government should be allowed tools by the Legislature so we can broaden our tax base and raise new revenues. This means being able to decide, as a community, if we want a local-option tax focused on tourism and luxury spending, which could help stabilize budgets and provide property tax relief.

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

Property tax reform, climate change, housing.

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

The opinions and ideas of Ward 1 constituents, expertise from trusted advisors, and data from public engagement

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

Eva Roche, PO Box 811 Missoula MT, 59802. 770.503.4279

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

☐ Yes

☒ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.