



2017 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

The Missoula Organization of REALTORS® is the voice of the Missoula real estate industry. Our more than 600 members would like to know your thoughts on important issues that affect them. We thank you for being specific in your responses.

MOR has endorsed candidates in past elections, and may do so in these elections. If we consider an endorsement in your race, we may ask you and your opponent(s) to each meet with us for candidate interviews. Endorsement decisions are made by the Board of Directors.

Please return the questionnaire by **Friday, July 28** to Sam Sill at ssill@missoularealestate.com.

BACKGROUND

Name: **Heather Harp**

Office You Are Seeking: **City Council, Ward 3**

Mailing Address: **345 Burlington Avenue**

City & Zip Code: **Missoula, MT 59801**

Phone: **406-550-0786**

Email: **harpy17@gmail.com**

CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number: **Barbara Berens
3010 St. Thomas Drive Missoula, MT 59803 406-273-1243**

Will you accept PAC contributions? **Yes**

ISSUES

- 1) The median home price in the Missoula urban area increased from \$209,700 in 2012 to \$255,000 in 2016. Over that same period, the median income for a four-person family in Missoula decreased from \$62,800 to \$61,600. As a result, homeownership is increasingly out of reach for many Missoula families. This rapid increase in home prices is primarily because of a shortage of homes in affordable price ranges. This shortage is due in part to increasing costs of land, lot development, infrastructure, and building costs. To address this lack of affordability, the City of Missoula formed the Office of Housing and Community Development and intends to formulate a city housing policy. For this policy to be successful, it must be arrived at through private and public sector collaboration, and focus on both regulatory reform and development incentives. **As a member of the City Council, which specific policy changes, if any, would you support to help increase the affordability of housing?** **Through public and private partnerships,**

the Housing and Community Department [HCD] began compiling data that helps draft an affordable housing tool kit that takes into consideration our tax base, our culture, and our economy. Rather than increase regulations, we can focus on incentivizing good development projects that align with the City's Growth Policy. For developers, their worst night mare is unpredictability because it costs them more time and money as various departments weigh in on the proposed projects. I propose that Development Services provide developers a check list of measurable targets (density, affordable housing units, design standards, bike racks, lower parking requirements, green space, etc.), then they can plan their designs knowing that the more targets they hit, their projects are moved to the top of the list for approval. Essentially Development Services will be implementing the Growth Policy by empowering the developers with the tools to streamline their projects thereby reducing costs, while providing the quality housing stock necessary to entice more companies to relocate to Missoula and bring good paying jobs with them.

- 2) How to best preserve agricultural land continues to be a subject of debate. In 2016, Missoula County Commissioners unanimously rejected a proposal to require developers of lands with soils designated as important to agriculture to pay a per-acre mitigation fee or set aside one acre of similar land for each acre developed. A coalition of the development community, business community, farm families, and a conservation group opposed the proposal because it would create an undesirable development pattern, hurt farm families, worsen housing affordability, and jeopardize voluntary conservation of agricultural land. Consider how such a policy would fit the urban fringe area where we have already invested in schools, parks, trails, roads, sewer, and other infrastructure. **Should the City of Missoula adopt regulations similar to what was proposed for the county in order to preserve agricultural land? Or should the city focus on supporting voluntary conservation efforts?** As Missoula has lost 29,000 acres of farmlands and ranchlands since the 1980's it is evident we cannot rely solely on volunteer efforts of conservation protections. Upon reviewing those reports and comparing them to the environmental impacts, it became evident that the proposed regulations would have created a checkerboard of land types that would be difficult to preserve, farm, graze or develop. We need a holistic approach to planning efforts that preserve agricultural land. The coalition identified prime fertile lands that need protecting, but had difficulty identifying solutions that were fair and reasonable to all sides. Relying solely on voluntary efforts won't get us where we need to be if our community's long-term vision is preservation. Compromise must happen. Implementing a balanced strategy to securing the legacy of the farmers and ranchers of Missoula requires courage to forge ahead and make policy that effectively preserves prime fertile land. Today, many countries practice some form of land value capture. I believe that policy must be built upon the ethical principle of fairness of who gets what and why. Land value capture acknowledges that the value of land is affected by many forces that are outside the control or effort of the landowner. When municipalities create value with more infrastructure and services, there should be some mechanism in place that allows the public to share in that land value increase. In summation, I would support some of the recommendations certainly, but not all.

- 3) Inclusionary zoning is a controversial policy tool some local governments have used to try to increase the supply of affordable housing. Essentially, a jurisdiction changes its zoning to require that a certain percentage of housing units within a proposed development are affordable for lower income consumers. In some cases, the developer may be granted a density bonus or other regulatory incentives in return. Critics say that while inclusionary zoning may create affordable housing units for a few, the cost of these affordable units is passed on to consumers of market rate housing. Consequently, in the eyes of its critics, inclusionary zoning may not help or may even worsen the housing affordability issue it was designed to address. **Is inclusionary zoning an appropriate policy tool for addressing Missoula's lack of housing affordability?**

The facts state we have 5-7 years before Missoula cannot reverse trend and close the income gap for affordable housing. We don't have much time to act. The City adopted a thoughtful Growth Policy in November 2015, but we haven't adopted any tools to implement that policy. I don't think we should rely on one sole tool to bring about that change, but rather a quiver of arrows that we can provide to staff and developers alike so that we have situational options. Let me also state that there are tradeoffs with all tools, so we can't insist on using one when it isn't appropriate. Communities across the country struggle with a lack of affordable housing but here is a list of tools that are working: tax increment financing; land banks; land swaps; a capital absorption framework that identifies shared priorities, establishes a pipeline of deals, and creates an enabling environment; and yes, inclusionary zoning (or density bonuses) is one additional arrow in our quiver we can utilize.

- 4) Property taxes are the primary source of funding for Montana cities. The City of Missoula's property tax rate has steadily increased since the end of the recession. Consider the balance between providing services and infrastructure and city taxpayers' ability to pay. **In your opinion, has the City of Missoula struck the right balance?**

Though not perfect, I believe we get good value for the property taxes we pay. Unfortunately we have only property taxes to fund City government which limits our revenue options significantly. I am concerned with expansive budgets, but the reality is that in 2008 our tax base was at its highest when Stone Container was here. They shuttered their doors, and along with it was a tax pool that disintegrated. Despite our population growth of 1.5% per year, we haven't returned to that full pool of 2008. But back to the question you asked: is what we pay in tax fair? Yes. Dating back to 1926 inflation has averaged 3% per year (that includes the deflationary times of the Great Depression as well as the high inflation rates during 1969-82). Since taxes are simply a means to pay for maintenance, infrastructure and services I expect them to rise to keep pace with inflation. Likewise, anyone who purchases a home has a responsibility to mow and water the lawn, pull weeds, paint it occasionally, repair fences and chimneys, fix broken windows, and shovel snow. We expect our neighbors to uphold the feel of the neighborhood, and we shouldn't expect less from our local government.

There are those who view taxes as wasteful spending. I get it. There are things my taxes go to that I don't agree with, but I believe that we all can agree on 80% of what

our taxes provide: that is a super majority! The reality is that government provides services at an economy of scale that we individually could not afford to do ourselves. From the moment I wake up and brush my teeth, flush the toilet, drive down tree-lined streets to work, walk home at night feeling safe from violence, I know I can rest easy knowing that emergency services are available to me simply by pushing 9-1-1 on my phone. Without these services, my typical day would be a whole lot more stressful.