



2019 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

The Missoula Organization of REALTORS® is the voice of the Missoula real estate industry. Our more than 700 members would like to know your thoughts on important issues that affect them. We thank you for completing the survey.

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 MOR Board of Directors.

Please return the questionnaire by **Friday, July 26** to Dwight Easton at deaston@missoularealestate.com.

BACKGROUND

Name: John Contos

Office You Are Seeking: City Council

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CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number:

Derrick Dodson, 113 Grandview Drive, Missoula, MT 59803 406-360-7379

Will you accept PAC contributions?

ISSUES

- 1) Between 2014 and 2018 the median home price in the Missoula urban area increased 28.9% from \$225,000 to \$290,000. Over that same period, the median income for a four-person household in Missoula increased 8.6%, from \$64,800 to \$70,400; however, the affordability index declined from 122 to 93. 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. The City of Missoula Office of Housing and Community Development recently presented a city housing policy. The policy outlines several private and public sector

regulatory reform and development incentives. **As a member of the City Council which specific policy changes would you support?**

I will support regulatory reforms such as reduced setbacks, increased density where appropriate, reduced parking requirements, and any other reforms or ideas that allow builders and developers to bring more supplies to the market. I am less likely to support policies that simply subsidize housing but don't actually affect affordability because those policies are not sustainable.

- 2) Inclusionary zoning (IZ) 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 be offered at below market price for lower income consumers. In some cases, the developer may be granted a density bonus or other regulatory incentives in return. Proponents argue that market-based incentives are not effective in creating affordable housing units and cities must mandate IZ to increase stocks. Critics say that while IZ may create affordable housing units for a few, the cost of these affordable units is transferred to consumers of market rate housing. Consequently, in the eyes of its critics, IZ may not help or may even worsen the housing affordability issue it was designed to address. **What is your opinion of inclusionary zoning and is it an appropriate policy tool for addressing Missoula's lack of housing affordability?**

Inclusionary zoning has proven to be a failure nearly everywhere it has been tried. Forcing the middle class to subsidize low income housing and creating zoning regulations discourages growth will not solve our housing affordability crisis.

- 3) Physical and regulatory constraints on developable land including flood hazards, the Airport Influence Area, slopes greater than 25%, farmland of importance, public land, land under conservation easement, managed land, and developed land, leaves approximately 6% of land in and around the city that is suitable and capable for residential development. Providing over 60,000 jobs, Missoula is an employment anchor in western Montana, but a quarter of Missoula's workforce lives outside Missoula County. Having a large percentage of Missoula's workforce that commutes causes monetary and social costs. These costs include fuel and vehicle maintenance, road maintenance and replacement, congestion, pollution, long commute times, quality of life and community character, health and environmental concerns, and worker productivity. Further, it is estimated that the lost property tax from commuters who live outside of the county is approximately \$6.6 million per year. **As a member of the City Council, which specific policy changes, if any, would you support to increase development in Missoula?**

Missoula is a challenging place to do business for builders and developers. The townhome exemption has been a good tool to bring more housing to market, yet the city is now talking about further restricting its use. As a member of the City Council, I will support streamlining subdivision review, reducing the townhome exemption regulations in order to make the tool more useful, and having our zoning policy better

reflect our growth policy. It doesn't work to just say we need more affordable housing. Our policies must reflect that need. I believe local government continues to be one of the biggest barriers to affordable housing.

- 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 and recently Missoulians have expressed surprise at increases in property tax assessment values by the Department of Revenue. 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?**

No, the city of Missoula is the highest property tax burden in the state. The city needs to reign in its spending and focus on the core responsibilities of local government like public safety and infrastructure.

- 5) City Council recently passed a resolution in support of Missoula County's federal BUILD grant application to help fund streets and infrastructure west of Reserve Street between Mullan and Broadway. Support for the resolution, at the committee level, was not unanimous and there was discussion regarding where development infrastructure should be targeted. **What is our opinion of the BUILD grant request and how much involvement do you believe the council should take in coordinating growth policy with the County?**

Securing a BUILD grant for the Mullan Road area will be very positive for the city in terms of bringing in new businesses and housing developments. The new housing supply will most certainly help put a dent in our housing affordability issues. Because city infrastructure is present in the area, it makes sense for the city to take the lead on growth in the area. It's important that the city takes a pro-growth attitude towards the area and supports higher density development, as the Mullan Road area is one of the last developable pieces of significant acreage in the urban area, and it should not be squandered.