



# 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](mailto:deaston@missoularealestate.com).

## **BACKGROUND**

Name: Amber Shaffer

Office You Are Seeking: Missoula City Council Ward 1

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 17601

City & Zip Code: Missoula 59808

Phone: 406.370.1559

Email: [amber.shaffer@gmail.com](mailto:amber.shaffer@gmail.com)

## **CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION**

Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number:

Linda Shaffer P.O. Box 17601, Missoula, MT 59808 406.240.3251

Will you accept PAC contributions? Yes

## **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?**

The housing trust fund model has been used to build a handful of housing projects around town. I support keeping these housing projects at affordable prices long term. My only concern is how promising the possible future funding resources are. If a bond is required to support the fund, then I would not support it.

I support creating incentives for developers. The incentives need to be valuable enough to ensure continued participation and designed not only for out of state developers but also our local builders.

Developing a system to track and analyze our progress is necessary and will also allow us to adjust as needed once we have data from implemented policies.

- 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?**

I do not support mandatory inclusionary zoning. From the research I've done the costs are often passed onto the other homes of the development. I think benefitting a few at the cost of many is not worth it. One of the only success stories I could find for inclusionary zoning was Aspen, CO which has a much more affluent economy than ours here in Missoula.

- 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?**

From the builders I've spoken with a common theme is the amount of red tape they must go through to get a project off the ground. From permitting to subdivision proposals being continuously sent back to committee we aren't making this process easy. Simplifying the current processes would be an excellent starting point.

Something I would not support would be any more open space bonds. We are blessed to be able to look around us and see all the wonderful open space we've already secured but we must remember we live in a valley and space to build is limited.

- 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?**

We have not struck the right balance. We have tied up tax revenues in TIF districts and then bonded some of them into the max term of forty years. Those funds that are being handed to the MRA should instead be going to our schools, infrastructure, and emergency services. Although TIF can be a beneficial development tool, we need to find a way to regulate the MRA.

- 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?**

I support the BUILD grant request because I support our community going out and finding alternative funding sources for any project that addresses the needs of our citizens. If an infrastructure can be completed without increasing taxes, I'm in full support!