



## 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 Sherrill

Office You Are Seeking: Missoula City Council Ward 4

Mailing Address: PO Box 3003

City & Zip Code: Missoula, M 59806

Phone: 406-531-7052

Email: amberrsherrill@yahoo.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? No

### **ISSUES**

- 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 support the effort to close the gap between housing and wages. I feel like the housing policy is a good start but will require more specific plans including a proposed funding mechanisms for the trust fund and policy changes to support it. I would like to see some changes to the ADU restrictions in order to preserve neighborhood character as we increase our density.**
- 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?**
- **My understanding of IZ is that the only housing markets it has been effective in are places like Jackson Hole, Aspen, San Francisco. Basically places that are already off the charts in an effort to keep some level of workforce there. These are areas that have already had their middle class priced out of the market. I think there are other strategies outlined to try before we jump to this.**
- 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?**

- **I would support density within the city limits and working with the county on planning. Since the city does not have purview over the outlying areas, most of this would not fall under our jurisdiction. I believe balancing growth with the many other important competing factors is critical.**
- 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?**
- **I think our state changing from a resource to a tourism and recreation based economy, has left our tax system outdated. Residential property taxes have grown in their share of the total tax revenue while expenses have increased for local government. I believe the city is attempting to provide the level of services we are accustomed to and create economic growth with an outdated tax system. If elected I will advocate for reform at the state level. A local option tax that we apply to items more heavily used by visitors rather than residents is something I am particularly interested in pursuing.**
- 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 think this is 18 million dollars for our community. It is an area that some level infrastructure already exists so makes sense as development. It will also alleviate serious traffic issues in that area. As a growing city that is within a county, I makes sense for the city and the county to communicate and collaborate when beneficial to our community.**