



## 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: Elizabeth Weaver

Office You Are Seeking: Missoula City Council-Ward 1

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City & Zip Code: Missoula, MT 59802

Phone: (607) 382-1748

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### **CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION**

Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number:

Beth (Elizabeth) Hayes  
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Will you accept PAC contributions? No

### **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 support the whole of the A Place to Call Home housing policy, but I recognize that an entire policy cannot be implemented at once and aspects need to be prioritized. As a member of City Council, the top two policies I would prioritize from this policy would be: Preserving existing affordable housing and supporting affordable rental development. I do believe that monitoring and analyzing these policies post implementation is key and should automatically be included as part of any policy implementation, rather than a policy of its own.

I would also support the New Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) tools. These tools would allow Missoula to provide services not offered through traditional financial institutions but available through community lending opportunities. It extends the scope of homeownership to individuals and families who might currently not have the opportunity. All housing should be affordable and no one should be paying over 40% of their income on housing, no matter which income bracket they belong to.

- 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, in my opinion, is one tool in the toolbox for addressing a housing shortage. However, our elected officials and numerous Missoula housing organizations have voiced concerns and hesitations over adopting IZ policies because right now, it is not a good fit for Missoula's market. I respect their decision and would uphold their verdict to hold off on mandating inclusionary zoning. Once Missoula starts to implement the new housing policy, some of the issues IZ aims to address will automatically improve. Before jumping to policies that can have a negative effect on both building housing and attaining it, we should work to implement the strategies created to fit Missoula's specific needs, first.

- 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?**

One of the first policy changes I would look into making upon joining the council is updating the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations that allow and promote infill through mother-in-law style rentals on existing properties. Adjusting these regulations to change the building code and allow more properties to be eligible, while hopefully keeping those building costs down. Adjustment in regulations would also pave a natural way to start educating the public on what ADU's and if this is a possible option for their property

Proposing policy to establish an affordable housing trust to help promote the building of affordable housing with loans that the Public/City leverages is another way to increase development. Projects still must go through a competitive process but the housing trust helps ensure efficiency and innovation get funded as well. A housing trust, in my perspective, seems like a viable option not just for development but also in place of mandating inclusionary zoning as we talked about in question 3.

- 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?**

It is difficult to say the City of Missoula has struck the right balance between providing services/funding infrastructure and a taxpayer's ability to pay. As mentioned, so much of property tax assessment is out of the hands of City Council and in the hands of the state Department of Revenue, who sets the tax rate. Although some of the annual increase in property taxes is due to a reassessment in rates at the state level, another portion of increases is due to voter passed levy's and bonds to pay for amenities and services in Missoula.

Although these are all needed and important service, I don't think the public fully understands the implications of what voting "yes" means for their property taxes. Greater understanding and education to the public about how their property taxes are assessed, as well as what they fund and how/why the increase, is key in making sure our voting constituency understands that direct correlation between decisions they make on the ballot and the amount they can expect to see their property taxes increase.

- 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?**

From my understanding of the BUILD grant program, it is a good way to attain federal dollars for infrastructure projects sponsored by local and state entities. In a city where our infrastructure is need of multiple upgrades, any extra money that Missoula can secure in this realm is good.

Although the proposed project in the Mullan to Broadway corridor was not unanimous with either the City or residents in the England Blvd neighborhood, I believe it to still be a worthwhile project. We need to implement more through crossing and better ways to accommodate traffic in that area. Development on Mullan Road keeps expanding as do neighborhoods off Broadway, like the Westview Park development by AT & T. Industrial development is also big and residents commuting between work and home need more options to get to work rather than the Reserve Street gridlock. From the quick sketches of what the project would look like, it seems the project utilizes some currently empty space, land that is not even being used for farming purposes.

Due to the complex nature of the City-County intersect on this project, and as our city expands beyond its limits, I do believe the Council should take in coordinating growth policy with Missoula County. It will save us headaches in the long run and with the overlap for land use and development affecting both city and county governments, it seems like most efficient and effective way to plan for continued growth. If one currently doesn't exist, a joint committee to address land use in Missoula (county & city) could be one way to improve coordination. Another good improvement might be a joint Communications Coordinator for planning and development.