



State Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

The Missoula Organization of REALTORS® advocates for REALTORS® and consumers. Our members would like to know your thoughts on priority REALTOR® issues. We thank you for being specific in your responses.

ISSUES

Home prices in Missoula County have increased rapidly since the end of the economic downturn and incomes have not kept up. The median sales price of a home in 2019 was \$315,000, making it challenging for many Missoulian's to buy a home. The rapidly increasing price is due in part to a shortage of housing, particularly in more attainable price ranges. As a state legislator, you will evaluate policies that will impact housing and economic development in Missoula County.

Housing Development

State law broadly outlines the process by which local governments must review subdivisions of land. Subdivision is the primary vehicle for creating lots to be developed into homes for sale. Subdivision review policies attempt to balance communities' housing needs with protecting the environment, agriculture, wildlife habitat, public safety, and other interests. **What changes to Subdivision law do you support to encourage needed development of housing while balancing other community values?**

Answer: I was lucky to grow up in Missoula, with everyone having a yard, and walking to school until the 8th grade... I did walk/bike to school to Hellgate (2 miles) as well, as I lived one block over the bus line. It is hard to see the loss of yards in my district, and also the change to the neighborhoods that multi-plexes create. This transition is one that causes significant heartache for many, and loss. As we build housing without enough parking and no yards, we must (improve, enhance, include) bike lanes, parks and sidewalks.

Regulatory reform may be one strategy for promoting housing affordability through state law. **Are there non-regulatory strategies that the legislature should pursue, so please enumerate? If strategies require funding, where should it come from?**

Answer: Everyone has a right to housing, healthcare, education, and a job that pay enough to live. Many of the changes we have made in society combine to make it unaffordable for most people to buy a house now. The median income in my district is \$35,000. And frankly we continue to make everything more expensive for those who can least afford it. This is taxes, but also the compromises we made on Medicaid expansion, etc. There really is no one thing that will fix it...it is a picture that needs wholesale revamping...as the American dream is becoming more difficult to achieve.

Tax Law

State Law provides for tax increment financing (TIF) and urban renewal districts. TIF is used within urban renewal districts to combat blight and promote economic development. However, critics of TIF say that these urban renewal districts can be in place for many years, and TIF diverts property tax revenue away from schools and county governments. Supporters respond that TIF grows the property tax base and creates jobs, and that once the urban renewal districts sunset, the taxing jurisdictions have significantly more revenue than they would have otherwise had. **What changes to TIF statues would you recommend responding citizen complaints and improve the program?**

Answer: I understand incentives pay off in the long run. However, this is still a very difficult questions, as it is hard for a homeowner, particularly one who lives in the oldest part of Missoula, for example, and still does not have the benefit of walk-able sidewalks, if sidewalks at all --- and a bank is given \$1.5 million tax break and sidewalks, when they appear to have so much money to build..... And another was, why is a chain coffee shop given money to build/remodel when it competes with three already existing coffee shops within the same block. This seems to prioritize big business over small businesses. This is the kind of complaints I hear, and it does seem odd that a bank / or a world-wide chain who wants to build anyway needs such incentive to do so.....I guess, I think the time has come to recognize that rules for big business no longer benefit small businesses, and we may need to rethink how we bestow benefit to businesses, maybe based upon size, etc....

Property taxes are the primary revenue generator used to fund local government services. Recently increased mil levies multiplied by increasing property value assessments have left many homeowners asking for relief. **What are your thoughts on the current taxation structure for local government? What changes, if any, would you propose/support?**

Answer: There was a time when more federal money flowed to the states, and therefore, more federal money flowed to the local government. Montana is a big state, yet is still very rural and relies on infusion of federal money to its basic infrastructure....the call for no new taxes as just meant that the cost of everything flowed to those with the least ability to continue to pay....and this means, our Montana home-owners are often hit the hardest. I advocate for increased taxes at the national level on those who have the most and yet do not pay their fair share.

Economic Development

While the unemployment rate in Montana has been quite low for several years prior to the COVID pandemic, growth in wages has remained relatively stagnant compared to increases in housing costs. **As a state legislator, how would you propose to help grow and attract good paying jobs in Montana and specifically Missoula County?**

Answer: We need to start paying a living wage for all our "jobs". As we see clearly from COVID, many of the most essential workers are the least paid, with the lowest benefits, if any. Montana is a great place to live, to play, and needs to pay all it's workers living wages, and bestow the benefits of society with more equity.

Fair Housing

The National Association of REALTORS include sexual orientation and gender identity anti-discrimination language in their code of ethics. Montana does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity. **As a state legislator would you support legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity?**

Yes, absolutely and I have already voted to do so!