



# 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?**

Affordable housing is an important focus for me. I am very concerned about sprawl and loss of agriculture land. I believe we need to look at ways to allow more density through urban renewal and still provide homeowners with a quality lifestyle. Growing smart is essential to our community. Consistent policies and modeling best practices from other communities to allow for development of housing is essential to making choices that help all.

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?**

Prioritizing affordable housing is important to me. I am interested in investigating options.

### 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?**

I would be willing to explore some reforms of the TIF statues through the legislative process including a review of the definition for blight and discussing issues around capping the tax base.

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?**

State and local governments' revenue need to be balanced so that revenue is produced in a reliable manner and must rely on a balanced variety of sources. All should be treated equitably by implementing similar tax responsibility on people in similar situations. Low income individuals should not be taxed unfairly. A taxation structure must be understandable and accountable. There are many improvements that could be made to our Montana tax system. Since 2003, lower-income taxpayers pay a larger portion of their income in taxes compared to those with higher incomes. I would support returning to income tax brackets that more fairly assess those with the higher incomes to help balance the high dependency on property taxes. I would also support an assistance program for property taxes based on the reality of the taxpayer's income.

### **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?**

Safe workplaces, good paying jobs, and a high quality of life are essential to helping our communities grow. Expanding apprenticeship opportunities in both rural and urban areas will encourage businesses to invest here knowing they have a ready and able work force. Providing childcare support, a universal public pre-K and adequate funding to our public-school system will encourage businesses to locate to Montana. Keeping our public lands in public hands and protecting our natural environment makes Montana a place to call home and attract businesses to our communities.

### **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! I would support legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Thank you for this opportunity to reply to your questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Representative Connie Keogh