



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?

I am more familiar with this process through my previous role as a Missoula City Councilmember (for 12 years). The subdivision review process is important for addressing neighborhood concerns, but the downside is that it takes a long time and is therefore expensive. I want to hear from builders and local elected people about which laws could be refined. I consider Missoula's housing shortage (and cost) to be a crisis and I would be willing to carry legislation to address this.

Some of the power might sit with local government, for example, ending exclusionary zoning or at least requiring a range of zoning in new developments.

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?

It may be helpful for local governments to offer incentives for affordable/attainable housing. I am not sure if the City and County are able to provide any incentives at this time.

If strategies require funding, where should it come from? In the last legislative session, we passed funding for affordable housing through the State Coal Trust Fund. The city of Missoula is also (hopefully) setting up part of the Tax Increment Financing funding for housing. I am open to other suggestions too.

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 support TIF and URDs. I think they allow local government a flexible way to work with developers to improve public infrastructure and solve a wide range of problems. In response to citizen complaints about the program, I think many people don't completely understand what the actual expenditures are, and I think the city should do a better job of explaining each project. I also think that earmarking a portion for attainable/affordable housing is outstanding.

It would be worth discussing whether the percent allocation back to the taxing jurisdictions should change over time (as the URD starts to generate more taxable value). However I think these decisions are best handled at the local level. During the last legislative session we heard testimony from the five big cities and a handful of small towns about how helpful TIF/URD tools are for local problem solving.

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?**

This is one of my main motivations to run for state legislature, where I have served on the Tax Committee and the Interim Revenue Committee. The state's tax structure is out of line with our current economy, and local governments do not have the tools and flexibility they need to provide services. They just have property taxes (generally). I support and am willing to carry legislation allowing communities in Montana to decide if they want to have some sales taxes on certain items, for a certain period of time. This is called the Local Option Sales Tax, and it is currently used by resort towns across Montana who have a lot of tourists but a small year-round population. Towns that have the Local Option Sales Tax are able to fund public projects and offer property tax relief for residents. The Local Option Sales Tax is not imposed by the local government; it must be approved by voters, and after a period of time it expires if not renewed by a vote of the public. I think this is a tool that more communities should be able to use- not just the very small "resort towns" like Superior and Whitefish. I trust voters to participate in whether or not they want property tax relief.

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?**

I would be interested in working with the City and County on creative proposals. I am not a fan of offering tax incentives (although I did vote in support of tax credits for the film industry); I think people move their businesses here because they want to enjoy our quality of life. I would love to see more manufacturing jobs in our area, and I am proud that arts and culture are a large part of Missoula's economy.

We have also heard as legislators that businesses have trouble finding skilled workers. I will always support public education for trades as well as UM and K-12. I feel that too many young people have been encouraged over the years to attend college, and now we have a shortage of tradespeople and health care workers. I always vote in support of those programs.

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?**

Absolutely. I am proud that during my tenure on the Missoula City Council, I had the privilege to vote for Missoula's Non-Discrimination Ordinance, which was the first in Montana.