



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 believe that simplifying the review process is the first step. Missoula has created the current housing market by complicating the process and therefore limiting supply. In the legislature I would like to see us pass laws restricting local government's ability to abuse and complicate the subdivision review process. Supply and demand appropriately drives the market without government interference.

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?**

I think that regulating the government is the first step. We need to limit the ability of local governments to abuse the regulatory process. The regulatory process is meant to make sure that everything is above board not for picking "winners and losers".

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?**

The TIF program is beneficial when used as intended. The first change that needs to be made to the TIF program is to redefine and tighten the requirements. There are currently 15 criteria and only 3 need to be satisfied to be eligible to use TIF. I would like to see us reduce it to 5 well defined criteria that still needs to meet 3 for eligibility.

“Blight” is a word that is open to many interpretations and therefore has opened the program to rampant abuse. This abuse has led to unelected officials using the funds for pet projects and treating them as a personal slush fund. I would like to re-write the statute to require that funds only be authorized by a majority vote of elected officials. This would allow for the public to have a greater voice and also to hold decision makers accountable for their actions.

During the review process I would like to see the legislature examine the length of time each district is in place and also the renewal process. It is a disservice to our students to prevent them from benefiting from the tax revenue in these districts for exorbitant lengths of time.

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?**

I would like to return to property value assessments being done every 4-6 years rather than every year. This will allow the market to stabilize and also offer relief to homeowners.

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?**

Rather than giving TIF money to investors that are bringing low paying and entry level jobs, I would like to see us allow people and businesses to build out instead of up. I would like to streamline and limit the regulatory process to make Missoula more attractive to potential new businesses moving in. With a smoother building and approval process we can attract a more diverse industry, they will bring higher paying jobs with them.

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?**

Employees should be judged on their work performance and applicants should be judged on their background. I oppose discrimination and bullying of any kind. We need to be careful that any policy written makes sure that individual and property rights are protected while prohibiting all forms of discrimination.