



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?**

Streamlining the permitting process at the local level is a much-needed start. Those responsible for permitting appear to make the process more odious than necessary. Our county subdivision rules, and the associated price tags, add thousands of dollars to the cost of building while adding far less value than the costs paid for development. The mentality of local government needs to be one of serving, not being served.

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?**

State laws and rules attempt to give local government greater control over local issues, using subsidiarity as the chief tool. Creating a greater focus on service at the local level is an imperative. Burdensome local regulations, once again, create artificially higher than necessary development costs. Increasing the impact and involvement of government is much of the problem. I see little reason for more state involvement. If other Montana communities can promote increased development at a fraction of the costs seen in Missoula, Missoula should emulate their processes.

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?**

Limit a jurisdiction using TIF to a fixed period (10 – 20 years), without the ability to extend through bonding or other means and limit the funding to no more than 5% of the tax base in that district. Does Missoula truly have blight? Many with whom I've spoken are not convinced, nor am I. I would also advocate for elected members overseeing TIF funds, as the current "crony capitalist" system encourages "quid pro quo", and leaves taxpayers without the ability to remove persons who misuse or abuse these funds.

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?**

Montana has only 3 options for taxation – sales / income / property. At any level, government typically doesn't have a revenue problem – it has a spending problem. Prioritizing those **Constitutionally** mandated services that are of highest importance, finding efficiencies in the current departments and eliminating outdated or unworthy activities would be a start. Let's make government handle only that which is Constitutionally required.

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?**

Government does not grow jobs. Growing government is much of the problem. The purpose of government is to protect private citizens and their property. Eliminating stifling regulations, reducing taxes and making the operation of businesses easier and less challenging are simple ways to grow our economy. Any person or entity, whether private or public in nature, that restricts the creation and/or operation of business, should be held accountable. Again, other communities perform better than Missoula. Why not mirror 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?**

Sexual orientation / gender identity are recent social constructs. Where does the creation of “protected” groups end? I personally don’t care if a person is gay, straight or has some other as yet uncreated lifestyle “factor”. If they live up to their required expectations, we shouldn’t discriminate. We have sufficient rules / laws / statutes governing discrimination. Does discrimination exist? Certainly. but it’s not institutional nor as widespread as we’re being told it exists. There is no end to reasons people seem to be “offended” today and further balkanizing our citizenry to the point of being unable to conduct typical daily affairs is onerous.