

# 2021 Omaha Voter Information Packet

UNMC Student Delegates  
UNMC Chapter of American Medical Association

## Omaha Mayoral General Election

Jean Stothert



### Healthcare:

- "My priorities for COVID recovery include advocacy and support for vaccine distribution and an extended mask ordinance. As a former critical care nurse, I know how important the vaccine is, and I encourage you to get the shots when you can."

### Climate:

- No direct stance stated
- Worked to negotiate new trash and recycling contract

### Public Safety:

- "One of our initial goals was to add nearly 100 new police officers for a total of 902 budgeted officers. We have now met this important milestone and we've done it without increasing the city property tax rate."
- Wants to "[expand] the department's mental health co-responder program so more resources are directed at mental illness and its impact on illegal behavior."
- Looks to "[hire] a more diverse police force"
- Wants to "[provide] the best equipment possible, like body-worn cameras, so officers can do their job effectively and with greater transparency"

### Workforce Development:

- Plans on "enhancing the appeal of Omaha to young professionals who want an exciting urban setting that offers entertainment, retail services, social and recreation spaces, and low-cost transit options."
- Wants to "[expand] support for job training programs and work transition efforts led by many of our local non-profit organizations"
- Works to "[become] an even more welcoming city for all people and all lifestyles. Our younger workforce is especially focused on a more inclusive and open city that welcomes everyone, and where everyone feels at home."

RJ Neary



### Healthcare:

- "Appoint a pandemic czar who will provide key metrics for Omaha's COVID recovery and coordinate with UNMC, federal government, public health officials, academic institutions, employers, and other key stakeholders to provide all Omahan's with access to resources for COVID-19 recovery"

### Climate:

- "Implement a Climate Action Plan for Omaha in my first 12 months"
- "Appoint a Sustainability Officer to my cabinet"
- "Become a member of Climate Mayors - a bipartisan network of mayors showing climate leadership"
- "Join OPPD's net-zero carbon goal for electricity generation and work with them to set goals for carbon reduction, responsible growth, and waste reduction by 2050"

### Public Safety:

- "Adopt a preventative approach that addresses the reasons that people come into contact with law enforcement such as poverty, mental health, and access to city resources"
- "Increase evidence-based de-escalation and anti-bias training, and incorporate it into the police academy education"
- "Create a civilian oversight board with investigative powers and authority"

### Workforce Development:

- "Empower and appoint younger people to boards that will shape the future of Omaha"
- "Identify and support key driving sectors for retaining/attracting talent, and report on metrics"
- "Mitigate/remove structural impediments/barriers to attracting talent"
- "Integrate these efforts with Cabinet-level Equity Officer to ensure growth of young professionals of color and LGBTQIA professionals in Omaha"

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## Omaha Mayoral General Election Questionnaire

Jean Stothert

1. What is the single greatest challenge you see in helping small businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic while also protecting the health of the general public?  
A. No response received
2. Apart from addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, what will be your top public health priority for Omaha if you win the election?  
A. No response received
3. What is the main way you plan to support the Douglas County Health Department's ongoing efforts to prepare for future public health crises?  
A. No response received
4. What critical investments do you plan on making within the city to retain and recruit public health and medical professionals?  
A. No response received
5. How do you plan to improve access to healthcare in low-income areas in Omaha while you're in office?  
A. No response received

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## Omaha Mayoral General Election Questionnaire

RJ Neary

1. **What is the single greatest challenge you see in helping small businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic while also protecting the health of the general public?**

A. "The single greatest challenge in the recovery of small businesses is getting money in the door. The effects of the pandemic are going to be around for years and will continue to affect how businesses operate. They need to make money but need to take responsible steps as the situation changes. We need leadership that understands what it is like to work at different sizes and stages of a business and who can balance both public health and the health of our community's homegrown industries. Money that is spent at local businesses stays in our community and helps make us a stronger, more prosperous city. This is why I will develop a small business recovery task force that will build a city-led partnership between Greater Omaha Chamber, Omaha financial institutions, and Omaha's commercial property landlords that will support the growth of local restaurants, start-ups, family businesses, and more. We can't let local businesses be left behind and need to ensure that they thrive in 2021 and beyond. I will also direct an additional \$4,000,000 of the restaurant tax to the Omaha Convention & Visitors Bureau to help bring outside dollars into our community over the next two years."

2. **Apart from addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, what will be your top public health priority for Omaha if you win the election?**

A. "A top public health priority is making sure that everyone in Omaha has a home that is safe and affordable. It is unacceptable that children go to sleep in apartments filled with mold, rodents, and worse. Thousands of families are evicted every year from homes that are not on the Omaha landlord registry and that are not up to code, and many more families feel trapped in bad conditions because they can't afford to move. If we don't improve our housing stock we will have the situation with the Yale Park apartments repeat again and again. Even in housing stock that is up to code, rising prices push families out of their neighborhoods and schools. This has massive downstream effects on public health, education, and safety. My plan for housing calls for creating 1,600 new units within my first term alone and will work to create a mix of affordable options for all kinds of families across Omaha. We will work with realtors to identify and renovate key portions of our housing stock to keep people in their homes and will initiate innovative city-led programs that provide second mortgages to boost home ownership."

3. **What is the main way you plan to support the Douglas County Health Department's ongoing efforts to prepare for future public health crises?**

A. "I will appoint a cabinet-level COVID-19 manager to help manage the workload resulting from the pandemic, collect relevant health metrics, and coordinate with key public health stakeholders. The Douglas County Health Department has done an incredible job working to keep our city safe but we need all hands on deck to push through the end of the pandemic and get our city back on track. This manager can help us compile data and learn lessons from the past year, and transform that information into actionable steps for the future. Investing in this would ease the burden on the Health Department and allow them to do what they do best. It will also free up space to collaborate on the equity-focused actions being taken in areas like housing, transportation, and the environment. Each of these play a role in the overall public health and preparedness of our city, and while there is a lot of work to be done by the Douglas County Health Department we can't let them get stretched too thin."

## Omaha Mayoral General Election Questionnaire

RJ Neary

4. **What critical investments do you plan on making within the city to retain and recruit public health and medical professionals?**

A. "In order to recruit and retain public health and medical professionals we need to create a city that people are excited to live in and are able to find good jobs. Whether someone is a lifelong resident or a recent transplant it is important that they have a strong place in the fabric of our community. I will appoint younger people to boards that shape the future of Omaha and I will appoint an Equity Officer to my Cabinet to make sure that our city is a place that works for everyone. We will also invest in and promote multi-modal transportation, creative neighborhoods, and opportunities for young professionals, developers, businesses and creatives. We will also offer grants to young professionals in large cities to attract talent to Omaha. I will also work to improve coordination with industry and community leaders benefitting from the presence of talent in Omaha to make sure that we have the opportunities needed to support and retain talent. My office also develop public metrics and efforts to attract and retain talent in the city so that we can make data-informed decisions on how to remove structural barriers attracting and retaining talent in Omaha."

5. **How do you plan to improve access to healthcare in low-income areas in Omaha while you're in office?**

A. "The legacies of redlining and segregation need to be recognized in City Hall in order to improve access to healthcare. We can't spend another four years pretending that race and class don't have an impact on a person's lived experience in our city, and the fact that access to healthcare is still an issue is yet another indicator that things aren't working in City Hall. My administration will develop intentional partnerships with service providers like Charles Drew, OneWorld, UNMC, and others to support their ongoing efforts to serve our community. We don't need to recreate the wheel when we have community groups on the ground who are trusted and reliable, we need to support the people who are doing the work. My administration will be an active partner of organizations like these and will combat the ongoing impacts that racism and classism have on access to essential services in our city. This will include listening to the expertise of providers and the experiences and needs of people who access their services. I will be an advocate for healthcare in our city and won't let us face the short end of a stimulus cutoff like we did during the pandemic."

# 2021 Omaha Voter Information Packet

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## Omaha City Council Election

### District 1

**Pete Festersen**



#### **Healthcare:**

- Voted for Omaha mask mandate

#### **Climate:**

- Helped put forward an ordinance to ban single-use plastic bags in retailers primarily selling food
- In reference to banning plastic bags: "I do think it's a good question to be talking about at this time frame and along with the trash contract...As to what are we doing to reduce waste stream in our communities? And what are we doing to prevent litter that we see in our sewers and our parks and our trees and our vacant lots?"

#### **Public Safety:**

- "I've prioritized public safety, deterred property crime and have supported initiatives that address poverty and unemployment."
- "Introduced a resolution to develop action steps tackling racism, inequality, community-police relations and economic disparities in communities of color." This resolution passed unanimously
- Introduced a measure to "create a threat assessment and crisis intervention team...also establish a hotline where people can report concerning behavior, information or tips."
- Helped pave way for purchase of 460 body cameras for Omaha police

#### **Workforce Development:**

- "I cut property taxes, voted against the restaurant tax and pushed for major pension reform. I renovated the Benson, Dundee and Florence Business Districts and have been a leader in the city's diversity and inclusion efforts and COVID-19 response."
- Voted to provide renovation to historic Benson Theatre

**Sarah Johnson**



#### **Healthcare:**

- Will prioritize "mobility equity, accessibility, and connectivity for all residents"
- "I'll fight for truly moving our mobility infrastructure forward so we can all make our way around our city, no matter our financial or physical ability"

#### **Climate:**

- Wants to prioritize "increased sustainability and implementation of a climate action plan"

#### **Public Safety:**

- Sarah will prioritize "public safety and wellness, from racism to Covid response and what we really need to feel secure in our city"
- Wants to establish "a collaborative culture of communication between local government and the community"
- Focuses on "inclusion and amplifying the voices of our historically marginalized communities"
- "Will listen to the safety needs of the community and work with you to build trust and address the root cause of our struggles. Leading with empathy and compassion is essential for meaningful change to happen. As the poet Amanda Gorman said, 'Just is, isn't always justice.'"

#### **Workforce Development:**

- Wishes to put forth "thoughtful, intentional development that benefits all of Omaha"
- "Will fight for common-sense initiatives, such as classifying the internet as a utility and introducing city-wide WiFi. I'll fight for sustainable, affordable housing. I'll fight to eliminate city funding for predatory landlords."

# 2021 Omaha Voter Information Packet

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## Omaha City Council Election

### District 2

**Ben Gray**



#### **Healthcare:**

- Member of Douglas County Health Board.
- "The fact still remains that this virus is real. This virus is serious. And it needs to be addressed in the way that our professionals are telling us that it needs to be addressed,"

#### **Climate:**

- "We got a protected bike lane from Market to Midtown on Harney Street unanimously approved!"

#### **Public Safety:**

- During his time on the Council, Ben has fought for the civil rights of the LGBT community, worked with council colleagues to pass legislation in an effort to help those chronically unemployed and supported and helped create the "Good Neighbor" ordinance that addresses problem liquor establishments.
- "Ben was involved in changing how the Omaha Police Department tests applicants. When he first came on the City Council in 2009, the makeup of the Omaha Police Department was 4 percent African American. Today, it is 11 percent."

#### **Workforce Development:**

- "I have secured funding to create the "Step Up" summer jobs program, reduced the unemployment rate in our community, and raised million-dollar small business contracts for local entrepreneurs."
- "Ben fought for a 4.5 percent occupation tax on Omaha's tobacco vendors to help generate \$35 million for campus construction. Today, the world-class [Buffet] Cancer Center allows patients to receive the best care close to home and acts as an economic driver for the city, state and region."

**Juanita Johnson**



#### **Healthcare:**

- "I will lead the change for tackling health disparities"

#### **Climate:**

- Endorsed by the Sierra Club.

#### **Public Safety:**

- "As your City Councilwoman, Juanita will encourage the expansion of minority owned businesses and advocate for improved public transportation access to the Omaha Metro areas."
- Notes that sidewalks in District 2 are severely lacking and undermaintained, risking safety of those that traverse them, including children
- Wants to focus on criminal justice reform and accountability within city government

#### **Workforce Development:**

- "Juanita will increase apprenticeship and internship opportunities and present a plan to foster job growth in North Omaha"
- "I will lead the change for addressing educational gaps."
- Wants to bring higher paying jobs to District 2

## Omaha City Council Election

### District 3

**Danny Begley**



**Healthcare:**

- No stance directly stated

**Climate:**

- “First strategy that I would prioritize in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for the impacts of climate change would be to provide higher quality and more accessible public transportation.”

**Public Safety:**

- “Workers deserve wages that they can live on to help them afford safe and healthy housing, put food on the table, pay for childcare, and use our world-class healthcare system”
- “Danny will ensure all workers are treated fairly and adequately trained to provide the highest quality work on city projects.”
- Provide training for young adults reentering the workforce after incarceration
- Build partnerships between neighborhoods and the first responders who serve them

**Workforce Development:**

- Endorsed by multiple labor unions
- Worked with the Omaha Federation of Labor and Project NEXt to further elevate Omaha’s position as a home for the brightest medical minds
- Supports trade worker training

**Cammy Watkins**



**Healthcare:**

- Supports Quality Healthcare, Investment in Mental Health and Investments in Public Health coordination with the Douglas County Department of Health.

**Climate:**

- “Sustainability is one of my 3 values in the campaign, because addressing climate change must be weaved into all aspects of our future planning in Omaha.”
- Will work with fellow city council members and the mayor to look at climate change action plans such as the Thrive Agenda and Green New Deal to ensure Omaha is ready for the impacts of climate change.

**Public Safety:**

- Current Deputy Director of Inclusive Communities, a nonprofit organization that works to confront prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination through education and advocacy related to the topics of diversity and inclusion.
- Helped over 100 families in Omaha realize the dream of homeownership and helped dozens more work towards ending the cycle of poverty through financial literacy and education.

**Workforce Development:**

- Wants to pass a participatory budget measure if elected so community members have a say in the city council budget funds for building a better Omaha.

## Omaha City Council Election

### District 4

**Becky Barrientos-Patlan**



**Healthcare:**

- “Becky will vote to end the mask mandate, and restore your liberties.”
- “First off I am a conservative, who believes in the rights for the unborn. We must always remember God is the creator of life, and He says, 'Thou shall not kill.' This is an absolute. I believe that the words, reproductive rights are a hidden set of words for abortion on demand.”

**Climate:**

- No direct stance on climate stated, though mentions fighting for testing for lead and improving air quality in District 4
- Worked on the Combined Sewer Overflow project (CSO)

**Public Safety:**

- “I spearheaded Nebraska’s Heart for Missing Children (DBA A Hand to Hold) in 2005. Through A Hand To Hold we started the Amber Harris Project, and have knocked on doors of neighbors of sex offenders, to let residents know who is living next to them. Children and vulnerable adults need to be protected.”
- “Barrientos-Patlan told the Voter Information Project her priorities include law enforcement and quality of life in South Omaha. She said she spoke at a Back the Blue rally and would never defund the police.”
- “Asked about systemic racism, she told the Voter Information Project, ‘We need not issue any more special individual rights, to anyone. Everything we need for human rights and equality, is secured in our United States Constitution.’”

**Workforce Development:**

- “...voting for policy to help keep the tax burden off the hard working people of South Omaha/District 4”

**Vinny Palermo**



**Healthcare:**

- Pro-mask mandate for slowing the COVID-19 spread, voted for mandate

**Climate:**

- No stance directly stated

**Public Safety:**

- “Vinny currently serves as City Council Vice President and serves on the Police and Fire Pension Board.”
- Remains involved in the South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, South Omaha Community Care Council, and as a Police Athletics for Community Engagement volunteer.

**Workforce Development:**

- “Throughout his career, Vinny has been a South Omaha small business operator and entrepreneur. Prior to serving on the City Council he was elected to the Omaha Public School Board.”
- “Vinny maintains an active presence in his community as a member of the South Omaha Business Association.”

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## Omaha City Council Election

### District 5

**Patrick Leahy**



**Healthcare:**

- “Now more than ever it is important to serve our front-line workers including our police, fire fighters, healthcare workers, and educators.”

**Climate:**

- No stance on climate directly stated, though mentions supporting trash and recycling services

**Public Safety:**

- “I will listen to community members, their ideas, concerns, suggestions. With the community concerns and their solutions in mind I will formulate the best solutions using evidence based solutions, using data, and look at results and impacts of each option, and choose the best solution for the city of Omaha and work to make it happen. I will invite to the table people from across the district and the city from all income levels so everyone is represented.”

**Workforce Development:**

- “Encourage economic development to bring new jobs and improve the Omaha economy.”

**Don Rowe**



**Healthcare:**

- No stance directly stated

**Climate:**

- No stance directly stated

**Public Safety:**

- “Strong Fire and Police departments promote safety for our community. We need to foster relationships and instill trust in those we depend on to keep our community safe.”

**Workforce Development:**

- “Now more than ever, business in Omaha needs our support. We want to retain talent and help foster the small business community that contributes to Omaha's great culture.”

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## Omaha City Council Election

### District 6

**Naomi Hattaway**



#### Healthcare:

- “I rely heavily on common sense, which also includes trusting science and data, and fully support mandates on mask wearing in Omaha and Douglas County. As we proceed into 2021, our elected leadership needs to both support our essential workers and healthcare workers, and honor the leading health experts and medical professionals we have in our backyard.”

#### Climate:

- “While climate change in Omaha may not seem a pressing issue for all, however I believe it is wise to examine our current sustainability. Part of this exercise includes researching renewable energy in our public buildings and facilities, looking at the method by which we convert and consume our land, and our attention in maintaining our riverfronts and green spaces.”

#### Public Safety:

- “We need to have a combination of lower crime, safe neighborhoods for all, reduced instances of harm inflicted by officers, increased care when addressing those suffering from mental health instability. It is all connected and woven together. While there is not a singular answer, it is no secret that we can be more responsible to our community by changing the way we fund our policing measures, including a priority on equity, culture and diversity.”

#### Workforce Development:

- “Our labor force keeps our city functioning, operating and thriving. We must continue to protect and expand the rights of our workers as they represent a large number of families in Omaha. I support collective bargaining and equitable workplaces. ...it is important we also ensure our workforce is prioritize and protected with a living wage, and good, safe working conditions.”

**Brinker Harding**



#### Healthcare:

- No stance directly stated

#### Climate:

- No stance directly stated

#### Public Safety:

- “Since 2017, we have added more police officers, built a 5th police precinct in Elkhorn and transformed the city of Omaha into one of the safest communities in America.”
- “Another key component of public safety is covered by the men and women of the Omaha Fire Department. I supported funding for additional turn-out suits and the installation of cleaning machines at precincts for firefighters’ gear. I have also supported the upgrading of existing fire stations, as well as new construction like Station 31 in South Omaha.”
- “As other cities are going backward, Omaha continues to expand and move forward in a safe and responsible way. A record that is unparalleled across the nation.”

#### Workforce Development:

- Noted investment in community projects, including the Capitol District, redevelopment of Crossroads, and Main Street in Old Elkhorn

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## Omaha City Council Election

### District 7

**Sara Kohen**



#### **Healthcare:**

- “Public health policies should be based on science, not partisan politics. It’s past time to listen to the experts, such as those at [UNMC], as we create a roadmap for moving forward. Looking beyond the pandemic, Sara will work to support public health by advocating for safe opportunities to walk and bike, supporting our parks, and encouraging development that includes green spaces and allows for active lifestyles.”

#### **Climate:**

- “Our long-term success as a city also requires conserving our natural resources and planning how we will adapt to our changing climate. [It] starts with holding trash and recycling providers to their obligations and [helping] make walking, biking, and public transportation safer and more convenient; and encouraging environmentally-sustainable development.”

#### **Public Safety:**

- “Sara also will work to promote public safety. We need to listen to and work with first responders and community members to adopt data-driven policies to keep our neighborhoods safe. Sara also will work to facilitate communication and build trust to help bring our community together.”

#### **Workforce Development:**

- “We need to focus on growing our local economy and creating great jobs in an environmentally-sustainable way. Sara will push the city to partner with schools, colleges and universities, other nonprofits, and businesses to train people, create new jobs, and build an even better city.”

**Aimee Melton**



#### **Healthcare:**

- “The COVID-19 Pandemic has been one of the greatest challenges our city has ever faced. Our recovery has been dependent on responsible, responsive leadership. Our City Council has led by example to protect and grow Omaha. Together, we can work to encourage our neighbors to take practical precautions to protect our most vulnerable and get in line for the COVID-19 vaccine. I am hopeful that as the weather warms this spring and we do our part as responsible neighbors, our community will feel more at ease and ready to return to normal life.”

#### **Climate:**

- No stance directly stated

#### **Public Safety:**

- “Public safety is my first priority. As your City Councilwoman, I prioritized the safety of our community by responsibly funding our first responder forces. We hired more police officers, invested in body cameras and modern technology, provided our firefighters with new equipment and worked with Mayor Stothert to open the West Omaha Police Precinct. Our heroes in uniform are now better equipped to protect our community.”
- “Omaha is now one of the safest communities in America. Together, we can continue to make Omaha a safer place by providing first responders with the resources they need and the right policies to keep them accountable.”

#### **Workforce Development:**

- No stance directly stated