

RESPONSES RECEIVED FROM IOWA CITY CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Note: Questionnaire answers are written as received from each candidate.

Megan Alter – At Large

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

As I've been saying since my candidacy announcement, I want everyone who lives in Iowa City to be able to enjoy it. Right now we are at an exciting moment in City history; current Council has ushered in important priorities for Iowa City's direction. I am ready to be a voice and a vote on the Council that moves these priorities to further action. My priorities are to continue looking for innovative affordable housing solutions, improving public transportation, working with partners to expand child care, combat climate change, and further embed equity considerations into our policy making. To do all this means Council must support funding, initiatives, and policies that put people's experiences at their center while continuing to build a sustainable, strong future for our growing city. I am ready to be that Council member. I've been planning to run for Council since 2016, and I have immersed myself in local community concerns and forged relationships to educate myself in preparation for this run. I still have much to learn from residents and experts alike—that would be an ongoing perk of the position—but I am excited to take what I've heard and learned thus far to help our community become stronger and ready for the future by making its attractions more accessible and equitable.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

When the "Core Four" were elected in 2015, many people saw that as a kind of experiment: could a community like Iowa City continue to grow if a majority of city council members committed to a progressive agenda that prioritized things like equity and social justice. We now know that the answer to this question is a resounding "yes." It really shouldn't come as a surprise. The better we are at actually doing things that show we can live up to our ideals, the more people want to live here. We are now enjoying the success that comes from a positive feedback loop of opportunities and ideals that drives our economy forward while other parts of the state are shrinking.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

Regulations are one of the ways a city council puts its ideals into practice. A council's duty is to make sure buildings are safe, citizens are treated fairly, we have clean air and water, and that the honest and decent members of our business community are not vulnerable to unfair competition from the unscrupulous. The long-term health of our community depends on a council that refuses to shirk this duty. Regulations and enforcement need to promote and protect the valuable members of our business community and developers who see Iowa City as a place where we invest in each other's success and growth, just as that regulation and enforcement protects and promotes the general wellbeing of all members of our community.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

Any project that uses some public financing options, including TIF, needs to provide proportional added value back to the community. Our current council has made real progress in making sure this happens. As I noted above, when the Core 4 was elected in, many people thought development would dry up. Instead, we are now looking at some of the largest growth and future revenues to date.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

Relating back to the last question, this is one area in which I've seen the current council make real progress. For example, the use of fee-in-lieu on the affordable housing requirements for TIF projects and other forms of public-private arrangements shows real promise for future projects aimed at affordable housing. I also believe there are many opportunities for the city, working through mechanisms such as TIF and zoning, to support a holistic approach to affordable housing and continue to create opportunities for developers.

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

I mentioned earlier how our success relies on a combination of living out our ideals for equity with additional opportunities we have in our community, from a major university and hospital system to a growing population and numerous places to work, learn, and enjoy life in Iowa City. I am interested in exploring opportunities throughout Iowa City; there are many commercial spaces on the South and East sides of town that need improvement and have room for growth. Additionally, as you note above, there is nothing that is truly isolated in a community like ours, and building a certain number of homes spreads all kinds of ripples out into the community. As a member of the city council I look forward to engaging your members to make sure we are getting the most benefit from those ripples, not just for the years I will be on the council but for decades to come. For example, take the jobs created through home construction and maintenance. City council should work with developers and other members of your organization to make sure that those jobs provide fair pay and benefits to those workers. This not only helps those local workers, but boosts the broader economy that will sustain development in the long run.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

I see this as an opportunity for the home building industry, who could be a partner with the City in achieving its climate action goals. At the same time I recognize the building industry is looking at higher expenses that go into the materials and labor in order to go greener, there are many potential home owners (as well as current ones) in the Iowa City area who want their homes to be part of the solution, not contributing to the problems posed by climate inaction. Witness the thousands of people who rallied in DT Iowa City. These weren't kids—these were entire families, and news of this rally went national. People want to live here for very specific reasons, and visible values and commitment to them is a strong one. Climate action isn't a fad, it is a new way to think about business. As a council member I would consider both the financial impacts to the industry while also working with you to usher in changing considerations of how business gets done for the Iowa City of the future.

Laura Bergus – At Large

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

I am a lifelong Iowa Citian. I have wanted to serve on Iowa City's city council since I first got excited about the meetings when I was a teenager whose job was televising those meetings. I then had a career as a public servant, working for the City of Iowa City and the City of North Liberty, where I learned that good city councilors could really make a difference for the community as a whole. In addition to my background in local government,

I now have the skills of a professional mediator and attorney. I am trained to listen, to balance different interests, to creatively problem solve, to quickly process lots of information, and to use good judgment in making decisions.

If elected, my top priority is to improve the process. It needs to be fair, reliable, transparent, and predictable. City council needs to keep policy and the strategic plan always in mind, and not get stuck in the weeds. We need to trust our appointed boards and commissions, and direct staff to carry out policy on the day-to-day level. The current process involves a lot of second-guessing and some micromanaging. This calls for systemic improvements so that all parties know what to expect, how they can effectively be heard and give input, and how to request change from their government.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

Iowa City is growing and needs to continue to grow. We know that our economic development is complex. The University of Iowa influences a lot of other factors. We also have neighboring communities such as Tiffin, North Liberty, and Coralville that have a reputation for being more favorable for certain kinds of growth (including home building, from what I have heard). We need to remain knowledgeable about what our neighbors are doing but also leverage what makes our community attractive: diverse, thriving neighborhoods; vibrant arts and culture; deep and meaningful history.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

At its core, government regulation of buildings is about things we all want: safe, quality construction. We need to listen to those who are building throughout the area and pinpoint the perceptions and realities of Iowa City's regulatory environment. We need to be sure that we are being consistent and fair in enforcement of standards and rules, and be willing to learn and balance the pros and cons of different approaches in the context of Iowa City's own goals.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

Tax increment financing can be a powerful tool to incentivize the inclusion of public benefits in developments. Every TIF request needs to be considered on its own merits, in the

context of the specific project. I believe that TIF policy in Iowa City has provided public benefits that likely would not have otherwise occurred in certain developments, such as more green space, more trees, historic preservation, and affordable housing initiatives.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

Iowa City should continue its financial commitment to affordable housing initiatives, with a continued significant annual budget allocation. We must also leverage partnerships with those who are working actively on making homes that are affordable, including the HBA, Housing Trust Fund, Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition, Housing Fellowship, Shelter House, and others.

I am glad Iowa City has an affordable housing action plan, and we need to stay on track with meeting those goals and setting new ones once we have achieved existing goals. I am also in favor of streamlined approval or alternative regulatory thresholds for affordable housing. I also believe mixed-use neighborhood development, with a diversity of housing types and not just one affordable home among a sea of others, is a good way to incorporate affordable housing throughout our city.

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

I will always be accessible to listen, learn, and take action when needed. I encourage the HBA legislative committee to keep an open and ongoing dialogue with city council, so that we can together be proactive about policy that may impact HBA members.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

I am glad Iowa City is taking climate change seriously. We should encourage everyone who participates in our economy, including the home building industry, to minimize our impact on the environment. We know that some environmentally sustainable materials and practices are more expensive than conventional ones, so we need to consider incentives to help with wider adoption. The city should also actively encourage public education about environmental benefits so that those consumers who are willing to absorb higher costs of sustainable alternatives are aware of them and can effectively communicate that demand.

Janice Weiner – At Large

Why are you running and what are your priorities if elected?

Any level of government runs best when it has dedicated and experienced public servants. I am both of those. We need good people at the local level, the level of government which affects everyone directly and on which they can have the most direct impact. My priorities include improving public transit, improving access to daycare (which expands our pool of workers), repairing our streets, expanding smaller business hubs, and figuring out what changes can be made to zoning to allow housing to be built at a lower price point – that is a realistic way to acquire more affordable housing. I also believe that “climate” should be on our checklist as we examine projects, but via the use of carrots, rather than sticks.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?
 All levels of government need to work together. People appreciate a community that is safe, where they have stable employment AND there are good schools for their children. They appreciate it when the infrastructure is good and services function well. They appreciate it when there is access to the arts, entertainment and sports. And business of any kind wants to know the rules of the road – those must be clear. I would like to see a focus on developing businesses in outlying hubs so people can easily access what they need. And I would like to work on cooperating with the school board, the county and neighboring communities.

How do you feel about the current government regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

I don't yet know enough of the specifics to answer this question well. I do think we need to rework some of the zoning laws. We need to get everyone involved around the table, take all concerns and ideas into account; learn from what successful communities similar to ours have done, and then move forward. Once we have a revised code, we need to respect it. There is much to learn.

What are your thoughts on TIF funding for projects that enhance economic growth and are you favorably disposed as to how this has been utilized by current and past councils?

The city council has decided that they will consider TIF when it creates a public benefit, and when the project meets certain strict environmental standards. I believe that Iowa City has been relatively restrained in its use of TIF. TIF is an imperfect tool that should have to meet the "but for" test – as in, "but for" the TIF, the circumstances were such that the area would not have been developed. And it should sunset after a specified period – for example, 15 years. I appreciate that it has not been overused. Perhaps a good approach would be to have a commission take a good look around the city and determine specific limited areas that may meet TIF criteria.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing in your community?

I am still talking to people – builders, those active in social justice, current council members. I know the current council has taken important steps, and that prior councils have worked on it as well. I think we need to approach it from additional angles. One could be to take a good look at zoning codes and see what would allow builders to build at a lower price point, while still maintaining quality homes, duplexes, etc. Another could be to look at lot sizes and zero lot lines. There are "tiny home" communities springing up around the country – perhaps we need to look at that, too. And if people can increase their earning potential through training, that can help alleviate the situation as well. We need mixed neighborhoods – they exist around the city, but not uniformly in every neighborhood.

[HBA Note: Home building generates substantial local economic activity, including new income and jobs for residents, and additional revenue for local governments. The estimated one-year impacts of building 100 single-family homes in a typical local area include: \$28.7 million in local income, \$3.6 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 394 local jobs. The additional, annually recurring impacts of building 100 single-family homes in a typical local area include: \$4.1 million in local income, \$1.0 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 69 local jobs.]

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

I was really impressed at the breadth of professions represented at the Home Builders Association meeting. If we are looking at changes to codes, or to get input on what works and what doesn't, we need everyone at the table. We should absolutely draw from your membership for that. For some things, there may be overriding social policy reasons. For others, it may turn out that there is no good reason. It boils down to having an open channel of communication, listening and learning. And not just once – a give and take, as with other sectors and residents' groups.

What is your position on climate change and how they would address the impact to the home building industry?

I believe we have a climate emergency. And I am waiting to see what the city's 100-day plan looks like. Take, for example, the increase in extreme weather events. The home building industry will need to take account of weather-related factors in considering where and how to build. I believe that we need to add "climate" to our checklist of lenses through which we view various projects. I'm a believer in carrots – creating incentives for buildings to be more carbon neutral, and to encourage the use of renewable energy, as well as retrofitting. Perhaps there could be another county-wide effort to solarize. This is another example where those who build need to be at the table. We must also coordinate with/talk with the university and surrounding communities – joint standards and joint efforts could be extremely helpful.

John Thomas – District C

Why are you running and what are your priorities?

If re-elected for a second term, I want to continue implementing and expanding upon the numerous initiatives approved by the current Council. These initiatives include: Affordable Housing Action Plan; Bicycle and City Parks Master Plans; Public Transit Study; Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan.

In addition to policy initiatives, an issue of citywide concern is the condition of our streets. A couple of years ago, I expressed to Council and City staff my concern about poor street conditions in various parts of Iowa City. I felt we were falling behind in our street maintenance, and our 5-year capital funding cycle was insufficient to catch up. This year, staff will be developing a pavement management program to address this issue, and City Council will be considering funding options (including the possibility a local option sales tax) to address street repairs in a timely fashion.

How would you facilitate a continued favorable economic environment for your community?

In seeking re-election, I would like to continue to promote a favorable economic environment by: Maintaining a AAA bond rating; Moderately reducing the property tax levy while maintaining a high level of public services for a growing community; **Significantly** Increasing our budget allocation for street infrastructure, possibly by public approval of a local option sales tax Improving the affordability and diversity of housing/transportation options.

How do you feel about the current regulatory environment and how might you improve what is currently in place?

While serving on the Planning and Zoning Commission several years ago, I introduced the notion of “missing middle” housing, especially “cottage courts/pocket neighborhoods” and those that outwardly resemble a conventional single-family structure but contain two to four units. The Peninsula neighborhood and Prairie Hill Co-housing (Miller Ave. near Benton St.) include some of these housing types.

I’m interested in promoting traditional neighborhood design that includes “missing middle” housing as an alternative to our conventional subdivision standards. The City’s first application of this approach will be in the South District.

What are your thoughts on TIF, and are you favorably disposed as to how it has been utilized by current and past councils?

As a member of the current council, we have approved two projects that received TIF: Augusta Place and Hieronymus Square. In addition to satisfying our TIF policy’s affordable housing requirement, both projects provide housing at a relatively attainable cost for the downtown housing market. Both have a higher level of design and amenity than student-oriented housing. Augusta Place also preserved the historic Unitarian Universalist Church at the corner of Iowa Avenue and Gilbert Streets.

Looking forward, I will be inclined to support high-quality projects that increase the availability of attainable and affordable housing, advance the goals of the City’s Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan, and are in general consistent with the intent of our Comprehensive Plan.

How do you plan to address the issue of affordable housing?

The current Council approved a 15-point Affordable Action Plan that has received considerable acclaim from public agencies and non-profit affordable housing advocates. One last action item – revisions to our zoning regulations – has yet to be completed. I have long supported identifying ways new housing construction can be made more affordable and inclusive by design.

How do you plan to engage our membership to further enhance our area?

As Iowa City considers policy initiatives that affect your association, I encourage your members to engage in the conversation. I’m sure City staff, as a matter of procedure, reach out to facilitate such engagement. I would also be interested to meet with your membership to share ideas that might further enhance Iowa City.

What is your position on climate change and how would they address the impact to the home building industry?

The Council recently declared a climate crisis and is awaiting staff’s response to that declaration, due in November. The response will propose ways to accelerate the City’s Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan so that it aligns with the recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (link to Plan: <https://www8.iowa->

city.org/weblink/0/edoc/1803121/Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf) Reducing carbon emissions associated with new and existing buildings is part of the original plan, and will likely be included in staff's response due next month.