

Questions for Missoula City Council Candidates

Dave Strohmaier

Ward 1

1. Are you a Democrat?

Yes

2. Are you seeking Missoula County Democrats' endorsement, why? Will you be seeking any other political party endorsement this election?

I am seeking the Missoula County Democrats' endorsement because they best represent my political ideals among political parties. As I have in the past, I will continue to work hard to find mutual understanding among competing interests, but an endorsement from the Missoula County Democrats will help voters understand where I stand on a variety of issues that otherwise might not be addressed in a local election.

3. What have you done in the past to support or work for Democratic candidates, local, state, or national?

I have supported the campaigns of local, state, and national Democratic candidate through financial contributions, endorsements, and assisting with neighborhood canvassing.

4. How much or little do you agree with the following statement? **Stewardship—acting now to maximize the well-being of future generations—is the primary responsibility of government and the lens through which policy making in areas as diverse as energy, transportation, education, health care, human rights and taxation should be focused.**

I agree with this wholeheartedly, as I think my record on the Missoula city council bears out. It's far too easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees as an elected official: balancing competing interests of constituents, attending to mundane issues

of day-to-day city operations while holding down second jobs, attending to long-range policy decisions, and all the while investing time and energy into the most important priority of all—spending time with one’s own family. As a result, it’s important to maintain some center of gravity, some guiding principle that knits together these disparate elements of what it means to live in the Missoula Valley of the Northern Rockies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Stewardship is a unifying principle that includes the three-fold notion of sustainability—ecological, economic, and social. It means living within our means, but not merely living. It means living in a way that current and future generations will flourish, and includes all the elements enumerated above in the concept of stewardship.

5. The Central Committee recently ratified the enclosed document, written by Missoula Democrats, that states our shared values. How will your work in local government reflect those values?

During my first term on the Missoula city council, I’ve endeavored to realize many of these goals, and I’ll continue to press forward on them during the next four years. Being a steward, and promoting sustainability, first and foremost requires a commitment to maintaining our environmental and ecological health. To that end, I’ve consistently promoted opens space and parks, supported efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce energy consumption, promote multi-modal transportation, conserve our precious agricultural soils, and protect our aquifer. On the economic and social sustainability front, I’ve worked hard to maintain the vitality of our community through developing a master plan for downtown Missoula, adopting an updated zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations that preserve our natural environment while at the same time providing housing options for all of Missoula’s diverse residents, and promoting the arts and culture, which are all too frequently seen as mere amenities but to my lights constitute a necessary condition to living a good life. I think we can do better as a local government to foster sustainable economic development that defines Missoula as a place, and draws on the unique strengths of our citizenry and the land itself. For instance, as part of pursuing renewed passenger rail service to Missoula, I’ve thought, Why couldn’t Missoula become a hub for manufacturing passenger rail cars? This would simultaneously provide another component to Missoula’s economy, but also foster a sector that promotes sustainability, locally and nationally.

6. With respect to the issues caucus document, which positions (if any) on local, national or international issues do you disagree with? Why?

As written, I support the caucus document.

7. What should government's role be in managing growth?

I don't see growth as necessarily a good or bad attribute of a community. However, how a community grows (if it grows) is absolutely critical to address. Here in Missoula, this must begin with a clear, overarching vision for our community, and for me this boils down to the notion of sustainability. Under that rubric, we must keep our growth policy and other land use regulations current and relevant. We must ensure that our water, air, and environment are not degraded through growth. We must also ensure that where growth occurs it does not irreversibly and adversely impact agriculture in the Missoula Valley.

Some of the steps that we've taken on this front include examining the desirability of growth in certain areas of town through the UFDA initiative, updating our city's antiquated and unwieldy zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations, and developing a master plan for downtown Missoula. In the next several years, I look forward to updating our growth policy, developing a clear policy on the protection of agricultural lands and annexation, collaborating with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to develop a wildlife management plan for the city, and adopting development standards for the wildland-urban interface in relation to wildland fire. Finally, any discussion of growth must include partnerships with multiple government jurisdictions, including county, state, and federal. One neglected public entity is Missoula's public schools. In my next term, I hope to enter into serious discussions with the school board and superintendent to examine ways to collaborate on issues of growth and education.

8. What should local government do to facilitate Missoulian's consuming less energy?

First and foremost, local government must lead by example. I introduced local legislation that would require the city of Missoula to reduce its fuel and energy consumption by 10 percent from 2008 levels by 2011. Currently, the city is examining how to implement this policy. A number of us on council have persistently encouraged city staff to move away from gas-guzzlers to more fuel efficient vehicles, and we're making progress on this front. I was also a sponsor of the Missoula Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, which was intended to both enhance the nighttime aesthetics of our community and also reduce the amount of energy consumed through inefficient lighting.

More work definitely remains. The Green Blocks Project, which focused on improving—free of charge—the energy efficiency of eight blocks in Missoula was a rousing success, and should be expanded in years to come. If new parking structures are developed in downtown Missoula, my hope is that they will accommodate electrical outlets for hybrid vehicles. By encouraging alternate forms of transportation—be it walking or biking or transit—we can also lower our collective

energy use. Finally, while not necessarily decreasing energy use, I think we must seriously examine ways that we can generate clean energy for the city of Missoula.

9. Discuss how you would balance expanding road capacity and adding transit or bike-ped options when making transportation policy.

Without good alternatives to motor vehicle transit, it's difficult to effectively move beyond the "more lane" mentality. Options need to include enhanced commuter trails; complete streets, which not only include motor vehicle lanes but also dedicated bike lanes, sidewalks, and traffic calming features; robust bus service; and the possibility of restored passenger rail service. Adopting the Greater Missoula Downtown Master Plan and the West Broadway Corridor Plan are two tangible means to encourage bike and pedestrian facilities. But whatever plans we develop, we must find ways to adequately fund transportation projects. We must consider moving beyond our traditional process of adopting large-scale special improvement districts (SIDs) or simply ordering in curbs and sidewalks. Although these options may still serve a purpose in the future, the time has come to examine street maintenance districts as a possible means to more adequately and equitably fund our transportation infrastructure. As part of such districts, everyone in Missoula would pay a certain amount each year to fund street infrastructure maintenance, thereby eliminating the need to burden individual property owners with large SID assessments for street projects.

Whatever approach we adopt relative to enhancing transit and bike/ped options as alternatives to adding motor vehicle capacity, we can't become myopic, only focusing inward on Missoula. To that end, I'm a strong advocate for restored Amtrak service to Missoula, and have sponsored a number of city council resolutions in support of state and federal legislation that would help make this a reality. I've met with Senator Tester in Washington, D.C., to discuss restoring passenger rail service to southern Montana, and I've traveled to Helena to testify before the legislature on this issue. Currently, both Amtrak and the Montana Department of Transportation are studying the feasibility of bringing back the North Coast Hiawatha to southern Montana. My goal is to see regular Amtrak service return to Missoula within the next four years.