

## Mike O'Herron (Ward 5)

### Answers to "Questions for Missoula City Council Candidates"

1. **Are you a Democrat?**

This election is a non-partisan City election, so in some ways the question seems moot. But for the sake of this survey, the answer is no; I am a moderate Independent.

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

It is most accurate to say I would appreciate the endorsement of the Missoula County Democrats, however I am not actively seeking the endorsement. The reason -- I would prefer to honor my independent status and allow the Missoula County Democrats to gauge whether I am an independent candidate worth endorsing for a seat on the Missoula City Council.

I will not be seeking the endorsement of any other political party in this election. I highly doubt that Missoula County Republicans would endorse me, because the incumbent against whom I am running portrays himself as a dyed-in-the-wool Republican.

3. **What have you done in the past to support or work for Democratic candidates, local, state, or national? I have never worked for a candidate from any party, and my candidate support has been in the form of voting and some modest**

campaign contributions. As a true independent, in my lifetime I have voted for Democrat, Republican, and Independent candidates.

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.**

First - I believe the definition of stewardship as stated here is incomplete. Stewardship includes responsibly addressing the needs of both the present and future generations. To illustrate my point -- farmers would not be good stewards if they worked day and night to improve soil productivity so that future generations could maximize food production, and while doing it they neglected their families and their neighbors. Similarly, public stewards such as City Council members should propose solutions and establish policies that address both today's citizens and future generations.

Second -- At the risk of getting caught up in semantics, the primary responsibilities of government laid out in the Montana Constitution are "...to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations..." This is different from "**maximize the well-being of future generations**".

Therefore, strictly speaking, I disagree with the statement. I would agree with a statement more like this: **Improving the quality of life, equality of opportunity and securing the blessings of liberty *for this and future generations* are the primary responsibilities 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.**

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?**

Of the 5 values statements, the last three pertain almost exclusively to state and federal government, so I will stick to the first two: **Conservation and Education**

**1) Conservation** -- I copied some quotes from the Caucus Write-up and followed with my remarks:

conservation-guided adaptive reuse of existing buildings -- This is stated pretty generally, but it sounds cost effective and smart.

mandating stricter energy-efficiency standards for new construction -- This is a topic that has to be thoroughly deconstructed before making policy. Starting with -- What exactly is the problem we are trying to solve or the opportunity we are trying to take advantage of? It is important to convey specifically to citizens how they will benefit, now and in the

future, by having stricter energy-efficiency standards for new construction in Missoula. And something to consider is - what is the potential for unintended consequences? For example, depending on how a mandate would be implemented, it could add to the cost of a new house in a market that is already expensive. People could be priced out of the Missoula market and forced to inhabit outlying communities which could increase traffic, energy consumption, and pollution. I would suggest including the building industry in the policy making process and challenging the industry to find the methods and strategies for increasing energy efficiency and doing it with minimal cost increases.

protecting air and water quality and wildlife habitat through land-use planning, subdivision review and the preservation and maintenance of open space

This one is easy to agree with - and I feel Missoula already embraces this concept.

implementing policies to allow low-impact and distributed power generation - This depends on the type of power generation -- windmills are more impactful to neighbors than solar panels.

local governments should complete sidewalk, bike lane, and trail systems; increase the frequency and geographic reach of public transportation (whether bus, van pool or light rail) to ensure transportation options for urban and rural areas alike; better maintain the existing multi-modal transportation network; and consider alternatives to simply widening roads for reducing traffic congestion.

I didn't write up detailed responses to all these topics, but here are some things I support:

- public transportation (funding is always a challenge, though)
- traffic calming (through a combination of law enforcement and other creative things like roundabouts, where appropriate)
- trail systems - definitely
- bike lanes - I would not dismiss the concept of bike lanes as we now know them, but I think we need a fresh, new look at how to move bikes safely through the City. The bike lane may be creating a false sense of security to bikers, as some drivers do not fully recognize and adhere to the bike lane.
- sidewalks - In general, I am supportive of building traditional neighborhoods with sidewalks separated from the street with a planting strip and city-owned trees in the planting strip. But retrofitting neighborhoods that do not currently have sidewalks may or may not be a good idea, depending on several factors, including (1) how will it be

funded? (2) Is there anywhere to walk to, if a sidewalk is installed ? (3) Does the neighborhood embrace the idea?

**2) Education** - Many points regarding education were made in the Caucus Write-up that are hard to argue with as far as being worthy goals. Like many others, I believe that excellence in education and vocational training leads to a stronger, freer country. The biggest roadblock to having an outstanding educational system is lack of funding. Until there is a cultural shift in how we prioritize the funding of education, we will continue to scratch and save and cobble together the best system we can to cover our most basic educational needs. As a member of the City Council, my ears will always be open to ideas for improving education, including new and creative ways to fund education, such as public/private partnerships.

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

As this is a City Council election, for the sake of the survey I am sticking to local issues, as reflected in my answers to the other questions.

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

Missoula City/County government is the model of the role government should have in managing growth. We have established the Office of Planning and Grants to help the City government and the citizens tackle a very complicated and messy assignment -- comprehensive land use planning and growth management planning. As an expanding and evolving urban area, Missoula would be at an extreme disadvantage without a formally established office such as OPG to help organize activities related to growth management.

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

First, as with any public works project, describe in detail the Problem or Opportunity that needs to be addressed, and explain how the quality of life of average citizens is affected.

The Problem is, like most urban centers, we are not prepared for a post-petroleum world, and the Opportunity is we can start doing things now to be prepared for a post-petroleum world and the accompanying steady and dramatic rise in the price of petroleum. We can systematically position ourselves to rely less on petroleum to feed and transport ourselves and to heat our homes. But Missoulians are like most Americans, in that we will probably only take measurable steps to wean ourselves from petroleum dependency when the price gets high enough to cause behavior-changing pain. There are, however, two other factors that can also cause citizens to prepare their community for the future, and those factors are vision and leadership. As a Missoula

City Council member, I feel part of my job is to help us all to visualize a City that can thrive and sustain itself while relying less on petroleum, and to help lead us to realize that vision.

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

Some thoughts I would bring to the discussion are:

- Use a web-based brainstorming process to elicit potential ideas and solutions from the public.
- For newly built neighborhoods continue to consider building walk-able and bike-able neighborhoods with mixed uses so there would be less need for driving to enjoy basic services and amenities.
- Emphasize the continued growth and development of outstanding bus service - the goal would be to have residents and visitors saying "I don't even need a car in Missoula - I can catch a bus anywhere".