



LAWRENCE BOARD OF REALTORS

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2021 CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Biographical Information

Occupation: Lawrence City Commissioner

Previous Government Experience:

Kansas Department of Health and Environment 1985-1992, Federal and State Government Contractor 1992-2016, Lawrence City Commission 2015-2021

Community Involvement Activities:

City Commissioner, volunteered as a Kansas Certified Mediator for the Douglas and Johnson County Courts, Board Member, or former Board Member of the following: Business Technology and Bioscience Center, Economic Development Corporation, Douglas County Master Gardeners, Peaslee Tech, Library, and Sister Cities. I was or am on the following task forces or committees: Plan 2040 Task Force, LMH Community Health Equity Advocacy Council, Community Reconciliation Project (CRP), and the Lawrence DG Co. Metropolitan Policy Organization.

Positions on Important Issues

Priority Issues:

1. What are your three top public policy priorities if you are elected to the City Commission?

Policing

Policing is undergoing significant changes and challenges. The national dialog regarding policing methods and the treatment of persons of color has brought to the forefront the problems inherent in a system that has few checks and balances, and that sometimes requires officers do more than their training can support.

We recently had a comprehensive study done to evaluate our police department. From that study came 60 findings and 75 recommendations. Some of the findings and recommendations included the Police Department's community engagement, and the ability to build trust within our community, especially with people of color. The

study did state that our officers are “universally proud, want to serve Lawrence, and want to continue to improve.”

Addressing these 75 recommendations will take a commitment by our officers and our community to work through these for the betterment of our community members and to build the trust that is the foundation of a good relationship. As a result of the study, the department will be submitting a plan to the Commission for implementation of the recommendations by late summer – early fall.

If we are to move towards a more community-based policing model it will require that we enact policies that support policing in this manner and remove policies that work against it.

People without Homes

This is a local and national problem that continues to grow each year. The resources available to address the needs of many are never enough. Since I have been on the Commission, we have invested \$3,550,000 in programs and support for people without homes.

The problems are complicated and require expertise to better address the needs. Our community has the experts through our many social service organizations such as Bert Nash and the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority to name just a few.

As we develop policies to address this issue, we must consider the impact on our community. The growth of the homeless population, coupled with the impact from COVID has created a situation that has allowed camping in areas that normally would not be allowed, such as the downtown district, parks, and trails that border residential areas. This has caused disturbance to the neighborhoods and commercial districts and has grown to the point that there are significant and valid concerns for safety of person and property.

We must not forget that the right to a peaceful community extends to all. As we re-evaluate our policies, we must ensure that the protection of our neighborhoods and commercial districts is foremost. While we have begun the process of removing campsites from various locations throughout Lawrence, the work to keep these areas safe for all will continue to be a challenging task.

It will take serious collaboration and commitment from the county, city, and service organizations to develop a plan that addresses the needs. The planning process is progressing and includes the following next steps:

- 1) Working with the county to do a system-wide needs assessment to determine the best collaborative method to provide housing and support.
- 2) Using the [Built for Zero](#) housing model which relies on building a diverse team of providers and funders with shared goals and shared commitments.
- 3) Each partner is accountable to the other and the community for successful implementation of their commitments.

This is a systematic and data-driven approach that will avoid overlapping and duplicative services and relies upon the strength of each entity. This program has been successfully implemented in several communities across the country.

We want to help those who are mentally or physically ill, or those that are connected to our community and need temporary assistance. However, we must insist that we cannot continue to spend precious resources on those that are without a home by choice or can support themselves but refuse to.

Affordable Housing and Economic Development

These two issues are an ongoing concern. I believe they must work together to successfully accomplish both. Economic development that brings well-paying jobs will give our residents a better chance to afford the housing they need.

Our economic development policies that we put in place in 2017 have created a structure that has attracted new manufacturing firms to the long-time vacant Venture Park and provided incentives to several existing manufacturers to increase their investment into our community. This program has brought \$46 million dollars of capital investment into our community along with jobs that pay above the living wage.

These are the policies that I will look for and continue to support.

Housing Affordability:

2. What does “housing affordability” mean to you?

I accept the standard definition set by HUD, and that was adopted by our Affordable Housing Advisory Board, and included in Plan 2040: Housing that the owners/renters are paying no more than 30% of their income for housing costs, which includes utilities. For homeowners, the price of housing should fall within 80% of the mean family income.

3. In 2018, the Commission received the results of the BBC Housing Market Analysis. Among other things, that study told us:

- Between 2001 and 2018, Lawrence saw an 85% increase in the median price of sold and listed homes (Section II, page 9);
- An affordably priced home using the HUD 80% MFI (the definition adopted in Plan 2040 for “affordable housing”) for Lawrence in 2019 is \$180,000 (Figure II-13, Section II, page 12);
- Nearly 50% of non-student renters in Lawrence want to buy a home and could afford a home priced between \$110,000 and \$262,000 (Section II, page 12);

Since then, housing prices have steadily increased in Lawrence while inventory has declined. How would you suggest Lawrence address this availability and affordability gap?

As stated in the 2018 Housing Market Analysis, the housing price increases in Lawrence are reflective of the national trend. Adding to the problem in today’s economy (post COVID) is the constant increase in the price of materials.

I believe the main tools we have as a city are to re-evaluate our codes and provide the appropriate infrastructure and programs that will attract companies that pay good wages.

In our 2022 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), we have budgeted for an overhaul of our entire land development code. Furthermore, in 2017 we adopted the Catalyst Program that provides free land and tax incentives for companies to move to Lawrence, or to expand their operations if they are an existing business. I believe this program has been one of the most successful in our history for attracting manufacturing type businesses to Lawrence and encouraging existing businesses to reinvest in our community.

4. The Lawrence Board of Realtors® believes that everyone in Lawrence should have access to safe, affordable housing and that everyone should be able to experience homeownership within their means. Meeting the demand for moderately priced housing is difficult. The City of Lawrence has identified Affordable Housing as a major priority. Do you support new development policies that increase the cost of residential development? Please explain.

No, unless they impact the safety of housing. We have budgeted \$400,000 in our 2022 CIP to hire an outside consulting firm to overhaul our entire land development code. This will be done with opportunities for input from the entire community.

This will be a good opportunity to evaluate codes for their usefulness and applicability to today's housing market, and our community values.

Would you support new development policies that would incentivize new residential development meeting market demand to supply workforce housing at \$250,000 or less? Please explain.

This is an open-ended question that requires much more discussion and understanding of the parameters before I could answer this question either way.

Energy Efficiency

5. In March 2020, the City of Lawrence adopted Ordinance 9744, establishing a goal of 100% clean, renewable energy in all municipal operations by 2025 and city-wide by 2030. The Kansas Legislature preempted this ordinance during the 2021 session with the Energy Choice Act. What is your opinion regarding clean energy policies and how should we balance environmentally conscious policies with the rising cost of housing and utilities?

Ordinance 9744 sets goals, not mandates. My understanding of the Energy Choice Act is that it prevents the enactment of any laws that takes away the right to choose your energy source. It is inaccurate to state that it preempts an ordinance that defines goals because it does not.

We must continue to find ways to move away from fossil fuels or find ways that negates the negative impact they have on our environment. Moving in this direction will require significant lifestyle changes for all, and corporations have and must continue to develop technologies that address the impacts. We are already seeing that impact in the rise in use of wind and solar energy by Evergy, and their shuttering of coal plants. This is the right direction. These companies all have long-term goals to convert their operations to clean energy. Setting goals will help drive the needed changes.

I voted to convert 98% of our facilities electric source from coal to wind energy. According to an EPA evaluation, this put Lawrence in the top 30 cities that use the most green energy for their power source. This is the first time Lawrence has placed this high.

Each Lawrence resident can choose the type of electrical energy they want to use (wind, solar, or coal) by opting into programs through their electric company's website. Essentially, our entire community could be using solar or wind for their power source right now.

The decisions we make today are what will make a difference for the future of our planet, our children, and grandchildren. This not only makes sense from a business standpoint, but it is the morally correct thing to do.

Sidewalks

6. The City of Lawrence has implemented a policy requiring landowners to maintain and repair sidewalks on their property or the City will do so at the landowner's expense. Do you support this policy? Please explain.

The requirement to maintain and repair sidewalks is not a policy. This is law set by the State of Kansas many years ago. We are now enforcing this law. Our policy provides funding mechanisms for homeowners that have income challenges ranging from full payment of the cost to offering a payment plan. The policy also pays for homeowners whose sidewalks have been impacted by street trees or utility trenches and will pay half of the cost for homeowners who have sidewalks on more than one side of their property.

Yes, I support this policy.

Economic Development

7. In 2012, the Lawrence City Commission and the Douglas County Commission approved a proposal submitted by the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce to create the Joint Economic Development Council that is responsible for a wide range of economic development activities in our community. Do you support this partnership, and do you support the continued funding of the Joint Economic Development Council? Do you intend to promote economic development in the City of Lawrence and Douglas County? Please explain your answer.

The JEDC was disbanded several years ago. Furthermore, the city never provided funding for it.

The economic development policies that I voted to put in-place in 2017 have created a structure that has attracted new manufacturing firms to the long-time vacant Venture Park and provided incentives to several existing manufacturers to increase their investment into our community. This program has brought \$46 million dollars of capital investment into our community along with jobs that pay above the living wage.

Filling Venture Park also shifted the cost of infrastructure to these firms. The city invested almost \$10 million dollars in infrastructure for this industrial park. As the lots get filled these costs are shifted to the companies.

8. When appropriate, do you support the use of economic development incentives (such as industrial revenue bonds, tax abatements, rebates, community improvement districts, etc.) to attract or retain jobs and economic development investments in our community? Please explain your answer.

In 2017 we updated our Economic Development Policy that details the requirements necessary to receive incentives. Also, in 2017, we passed the Catalyst Program targeting manufacturing companies. My past voting record shows my support when a company meets requirements set forth in our policies.

9. How would you propose to balance the need for economic development and increasing density in our City with preservation of the City's character and historic resources and monuments?

Sustainability is a key component and goal of Plan 2040. Creating a denser community is one way to meet this goal. Denser communities utilize existing infrastructure and provides more rooftops into a smaller area, something that brick and mortar businesses need to increase their viability.

Increasing density does not negate the need to annex property into Lawrence. Annexation should be done in conjunction with the need to increase density. Smaller lots would allow for more housing and very likely at lower costs.

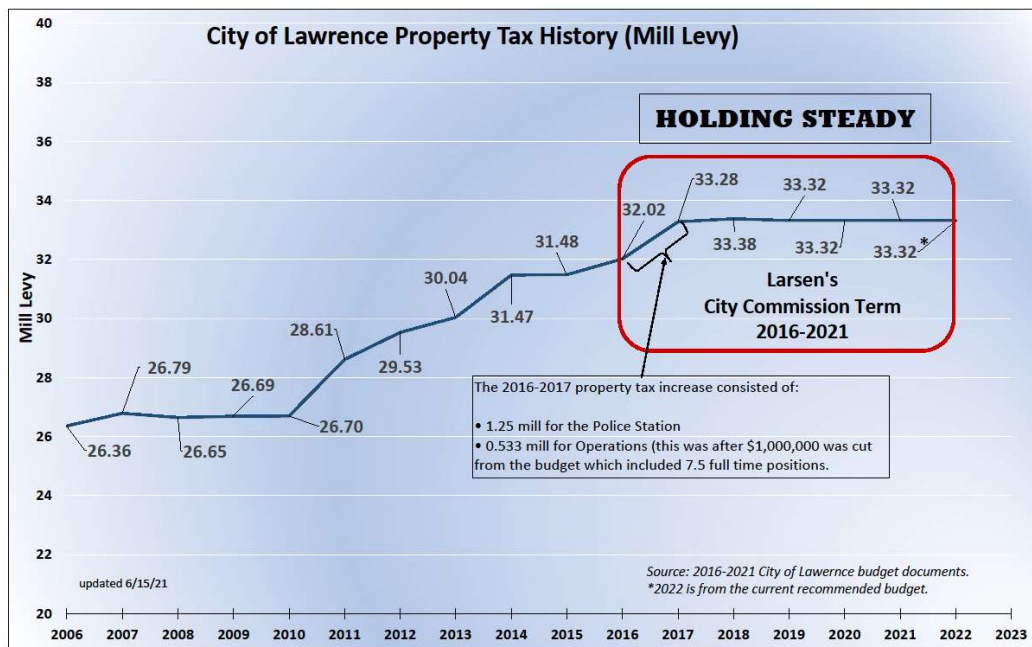
The preservation of our City's historic resources and monuments is codified in the Conservation of Historic Resources Code. This code needs updated for clarity and consideration for balancing the preservation needs with our need for economic development.

City Budget Issues and Property Taxes:

10. In terms of your priorities on the City Commission, how highly would you prioritize your commitment to decreasing, or limiting future increases in the mill levy rate?

I have always been fully committed to minimizing increases in the mill levy. This is evident in my actions for budgets that I have passed during my time as a Commissioner. The chart below shows the work I've done to hold the mill levy steady.

My goal will always be to consider an increase only after all efforts have been made to find cost efficiencies. If revenues need to be raised, I will look at minimizing increases by limiting them to well defined needs.



Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation in completing this candidate questionnaire. Your response will be greatly appreciated and will be distributed to our membership so they can make an adequate judgment on the merits of the candidates.

Please return this questionnaire to our office by June 18, 2021.

Rob Hulse

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