



**LAWRENCE BOARD OF REALTORS®**  
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## **2021 CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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### **Biographical Information**

Occupation: Regulation Specialist

Previous Government Experience: n/a

Involvement in Community Activities:

- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.
- League of Women Voters
- Human Relations Commission

### **Positions on Important Issues**

#### **Priority Issues:**

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

I plan to serve so that people most impacted by our policies are also most engaged in shaping them. We will put the people back in public policy by engaging with the community, listening to people, being inclusive in our deliberations and connecting people to the decision-making process. So, by listening to people, I hear primary concerns around affordable housing, investment in human service, and growing the economy through jobs that pay well and require a high level of skill. I want to see us move from planning and strategizing to implementation, and these are the three areas that require our focus:

- First, we need to create a collective definition of infrastructure—transportation, sustainability, and human service. I am encouraged by community efforts in public health and safety as it pertains to social justice and want to amplify those efforts.
- Second, I will use community engagement and connection to develop a successful and efficient affordable housing plan that grows community health—again, looking through that public health lens is an effective way to frame the work.
- And, third, I believe our community will grow best by viewing economic development through a workforce lens, connecting people to employment and attracting high-skill, high-paying companies and investing in a workforce development system that is more innovative and adaptive.

## **Housing Affordability:**

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

I would use the HUD definition of affordable housing, because what is affordable to any household depends on the income of that household. People should be able to find housing that allows them to spend 30% or less of their household income on rent or mortgage and utilities. Anyone who spends more than that is considered "housing cost-burdened".

### **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?**

I look at this from a different perspective, since I work with Kansas families and children. We have a national trend of increases in housing costs that outpace people's wage earnings, and this gap is larger when we look at households of color. Lawrence has one of the most severe affordable housing shortages in the state. We cannot look at this through the lens of residential homes sales alone, and City policy alone will not make or break an already critical situation. Additionally, the rental market recently has had vacancies, but not at the right price points for many who are working in Lawrence.

I understand that we will need to work collaboratively with community partners, and it will require innovative problem-solving with those partners. A comprehensive plan that moves us to housing available to all in our community at the price points we need means managing traditional problems of "lumber and land" and acquiring more of existing housing as sustainably affordable. That likely means some combination of subsidized housing, creative partnerships in rental management, and economic development and workforce training that grows peoples' ability to gain more earning power. We got to this point through a series of complex factors, and it will take all eyes and minds working together to find adaptive solutions--and continuous adaptations as new problems arise.

### **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.**

I need more information to give you a meaningful answer to this question. I believe that everyone in Lawrence should have access to safe, affordable housing and that everyone should be able to experience homeownership within their means. I also acknowledge that people I know, along with myself, struggle to compete to find moderately priced housing on the market. We need to be able to say we are a community that has housing for a teacher, for a firefighter, for the grocery store worker. Our community partners are developers and realtors and builders and housing service providers, and it is the homeless mother of four who is struggling to get transportation to work. While a lot of that is supply, I hear from community members that they are outbid by individuals who are able to pay cash and pay above the asking price, purchase the home without an inspection, then invest in improvements and sell the house at a profit. My perception is that there are multiple factors driving both the cost of developing new residential properties and driving the market of existing residential housing stock. As an elected official, I would not simply support a policy that increased the cost of residential development without some benefit or multiple benefits to the community while also assessing potential risks to all community partners.

**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.**

I would listen to housing experts looking at this from multiple perspectives, both from the regular housing market and our community housing service providers to get a stronger sense of the pros and cons of specific incentives packages or programs. I would need to look at the program globally to understand what funding streams might be available currently and what other funding. It is my understanding that we would need some manner of housing subsidies to build new residential development at \$250,000. I also understand that financing such projects can be complicated and there would need to be some gap funding, such as what we currently have to some degree with the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Different mechanisms such as inclusionary zoning that other states and communities have employed to spur affordable housing only work if there are incentives built in. Kansas has made it illegal to have mandatory inclusionary zoning, but Lawrence could still build incentives into creative strategies to spur development at those lower price points. I would look favorably on incentives that spurred housing rehabilitation as well as mixed income residential neighborhoods; housing units available at different price points for residents wanting to live where they work. Housing is both infrastructure and public health.

## **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 pre-empted 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?**

It has been reported that the cost of providing energy through coal plants has been shown to be more expensive now than solar and wind. Most people are not familiar with the subsidies and protections built into Kansas statute and policies. Environmental, energy-efficient housing builds lower utility costs for people who live in those units. Many individuals who are in emergency sheltering situations, such as Family Promise, often have very high utility costs because they lived in older units that were not well-insulated. The huge utility bills accrued during the polar vortex that brought a deep freeze to our area earlier this year were not wind or solar occurrences. We need good data to assess the relationship between environmentally sustainable policies and utility costs.

## **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 State of Kansas has a law on the books that places that burden on homeowners. The City of Lawrence realized that they had miles of crumbling and substandard sidewalk infrastructure that created a nuisance, eyesore, and impacted quality of life for those wishing to live in a walkable city. I do have a strong interest in all aspects of community health, so having safe, walkable, and accessible sidewalks for people wanting exercise or to walk their dogs or move around their neighborhoods is important to me. It is also a public accommodation piece. Putting this expense on homeowners would be an inequitable financial burden to many. I think there are multiple ways for the City to go about this. I would like to see subsidies for low to moderate households. For households that can afford it, I would like to see the City come up with some creative solutions that allow payments over time and the cost staying with the property or some other mechanism that does not burden homeowners and possibly including some incentives.

## **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.**

Yes, I do support a partnership. This speaks to the regional aspect of economic development. It is important that what happens locally drives economic development into the county. There needs to be mutual communication. It would be difficult to support one without supporting the other. By having a council, we ensure that we have an understanding that is mutually beneficial. We want both entities to look at economic growth more globally. We want to drive more money into the County, have more money flow into the County.

Looking at economic development through a workforce lens is important to me, and that is one of the charges of the JEDC, to attract or retain jobs.

- 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.**

I recognize that the City currently has metrics in place to utilize tax abatements and other incentives to drive economic development. These measures also allow for the City to recoup funds from businesses if metrics are not met. It is imperative deployment of incentives align with the goals and objectives outlined in the City's economic development policy- doing so ensure use of incentive to support projects address workforce needs and growth at a greater level than taxpayer investment.

- 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?**

We need to review current ordinances to understand if there is a conflict between historic preservation and innovation in planning and strategies for economic development. Some of these points came up recently in conversations about downtown. We do not want to stifle our ability to expand or grow in our central business districts. The solutions would be different in residential versus commercial zones.

## **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?**

It is recognized that property tax is the least popular form of taxation in Kansas. The passage of Senate Bill 13 during the 2021 Legislative session, repealed the property tax lid law, seen to many as an encroachment on home rule. The pandemic created budget deficiencies for most municipalities to properly fund projects and public services. Under these circumstances, as much as it is within my power as a City Commissioner, it would be important to revisit this topic by looking at alternatives that would alleviate the burden on property taxes to make up budget shortfalls. For example, on the state level, the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction Fund has not been funded since 2003- if reauthorized, those monies could once again be used to provide property taxes relief to homeowners across the state- potentially mitigating the need to increase the mill levy rate.