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Respondent

9

Anonymous

71:51

Time to complete

1. Name & office you are seeking *

House District 99

2. The 2023 Legislature passed several bills to encourage housing development by revising land use laws (subdivision), reducing regulatory barriers, and streamlining processes.

SB 382 – Montana Land Use Planning Act.

SB 131 – Revise exempt subdivision review timelines.

HB 211 – Revise local subdivision review process.

What are your opinions of the legislation listed? What specific policy changes would you recommend/support to further encourage housing development in our community? *

I voted for SB 382 and SB 131. I voted against HB 211 because I thought most of the bill's provisions really didn't add much to existing law and because I was and am concerned with any weakening of laws regarding water quality and quantity .

3. Missoula is an employment anchor in western Montana, but a quarter of Missoula's workforce lives outside Missoula County. The 2019 Missoula County Housing Action Plan states, "Underlying high housing costs is an undersupply of around 2,400 housing units in Missoula County".

What specific policies would you pursue to address the community's workforce housing deficit and ongoing needs? *

I worked on and supported HB 819, which was the 2023 Legislature's signature bill by way of addressing a number of housing issues including workforce housing. HB 819's principle provisions are only now be implemented and it is unclear how effective the bill will be. Further legislation and increased funding will be necessary to address housing issues.

4. During past few years as home prices have soared, rental rates have seen a similar trend. Locally some people have voiced concerns that short-term rentals are reducing available rental units and increasing rental rates.

What is your opinion on short-term rental regulation? *

I think we need more facts to develop a clear picture of how short term rents are affecting overall supply. I am not against some regulation if it is warranted. I think the best answer is to accelerate the construction of new rental units, especially units that are affordable to the majority of Montanans.

5. Montana policymakers must address the disconnect between growth in our communities and inadequate infrastructure.

What legislative changes would you support or propose to help communities invest in infrastructure to keep up with the demands of growing local economies and populations? *

I am a strong proponent of giving local jurisdictions maximum flexibility by way of managing growth and incentivizing infrastructure development to meet growth issues. I think Tax Increment Financing is a critical component of providing the funds needed to meet infrastructure needs.

6. Property taxes are the primary funding source for local government services and infrastructure and help to fund public services, infrastructure, and education. Increasing mill levies and increasing property value assessments have left many property owners demanding relief.

What policies would you support to provide permanent property tax relief to Montana homeowners? *

I support focusing property tax relief by 1)strengthening the Homestead Exemption by reducing the taxable value on residential properties, 2) reducing taxes on owner-occupied primary residences of modest & middle values, while ensuring owners of higher value homes pay their fair share and 3) preventing property taxes from rising above an affordable percentage of income for seniors, renters & workers with modest or middle incomes.

7. State Law provides for tax increment financing (TIF) and urban renewal districts. TIF is used within urban renewal districts to combat blight and promote economic development. However, critics of TIF say that these urban renewal districts can be in place for many years, and TIF diverts property tax revenue away from schools and county governments.

What is your opinion of TIF? What changes to TIF statutes would you recommend, if any? *

I strongly support providing TIF authority to local governments and believe TIFs have done a great deal to renew and rebuild infrastructure and encourage redevelopment in our cities and more urbanized counties. I don't have any recommendations for change at this time and would be interested in MOR's recommendations.

8. One in five homes in Montana is serviced by an onsite septic system. If properly installed and maintained, septic systems are a safe and cost-effective means of waste disposal for homeowners and businesses. Some regulations on septic systems are enforced by local health departments, and enforcement is inconsistent. For instance, how bedrooms are counted to determine what size of system is necessary and how nonconforming systems are handled varies.

Will you support legislation that brings greater consistency to the enforcement of regulations on existing septic systems? *

I am deeply concerned with the aging out of many septic systems in Montana and the potential for water quality degradation in many parts of the state. I think septic system regulations need to consistently applied and that additional septic system regulation may be warranted.

9. Housing development outside of areas with access to municipal water systems frequently rely on exempt appropriations statutes for water supply.

What are your thoughts on current statutes? What, if any, changes would you support? *

In the 2023 Legislature, HB 642 was introduced to provide more flexibility for exempting water wells from review. This bill was strongly opposed by agricultural organizations and existing water users and I voted against it in the House Natural Resources Committee. Any changes in the exempt water well statutes must be the result of collaboration between developers and Montana's farm and ranch organizations.

10. **Do you support Montana's existing code regarding exemptions on discrimination in housing (49-2-305)? ***

I strongly oppose discrimination in housing. I am not aware of proposals to amend MCA 49-2-305.

11. REALTORS® believe that private property rights are fundamental to our free-market system and are a cornerstone upon which this nation was founded. Our United States and Montana Constitutions recognize and protect the right to own property. A strong economy depends upon preserving the right to freely own, use, and transfer real property.

If elected, what approach will you take to balancing private property rights with public interests? *

I agree with the REALTORS that property rights are fundamental to our economy and a cornerstone upon which the nation was founded. Laws that seek to balance private property rights with public interests must carefully considered and diminishing private property rights should be avoided whenever and wherever possible.

12. Treasurer's Name, Address and Phone Number *

Barbara Berens, P.O. Box 8392, Missoula, MT 59807

13. Will you accept PAC contributions? *

Yes

No

Thank you!

We appreciate you taking the time to complete our survey so that we might better understand your position on key issues facing our community. The committee will be evaluating surveys received and responding within a few weeks regarding next steps.