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Respondent

8

Anonymous

108:20

Time to complete

1. Name & office you are seeking *

Jonathan Karlen, House District 98 (current Rep. for HD 96, which becomes 98 with redistricting)

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 was a co-sponsor of SB 382 (MT Land Use and Planning Act) and was glad to support the bill in the House. I voted for both SB 131 and HB 211. While HB 211 was more controversial, I supported the bill because I believe that it will make subdivision review more efficient without undermining the public's ability to participate in the planning and approval process.

In addition to my response to question 3, I am interested in learning whether SB 382 is being implemented as intended, or whether there are changes that the legislature should pursue.

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 believe that Missoula needs a robust supply of all housing types so that there is movement in the market and residents can find the home that meets their needs at different life phases.

To increase the supply of workforce housing, I support increased state support for the infrastructure required to build housing. During the 2023 legislative session, I supported the HOMES Act which was incorporated into HB 819 and offers low-interest loans for water, sewer, roads, and other critical infrastructure for housing. Some of these infrastructure funds have already been deployed in Missoula County. Based on stakeholder feedback, I believe some changes to the program like increasing the eligible loan size can make it more effective. I am also closely following other aspects of HB 819, including the \$56 million allocation to the new mortgage buy-down program. If that program does not seem like it can work as intended, I would like to see the money re-allocated to public-private partnerships that promote housing development through the Board of Investments and MT Housing Office. I am also interested in examining how Utah's passage of HB 572 which is supposed to spur the development of first-time homes might provide ideas for how we can develop workforce housing in Montana.

I supported legislation that allows for increased density in Montana's urban areas and would like to see closer collaboration between state and local governments on housing policy. For example, I worked with the MT Association of Realtors and the League of Cities in passing HB 465 to allow local government to use permit fee revenue to approve building permits and use the revenue for up to 3 years.

This summer, I will reach out to members of the Governor's Housing Task Force to see what ideas they believe are worth further study or introducing as legislation. I will also communicate with MT Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to see whether there is additional support that the legislature can provide with the resources needed for efficient subdivision review.

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 believe that using a property as a short-term rental is generally the right of the homeowner (not accounting for HOA regulations that might prohibit short-term rentals). For properties that are primarily used as vacation rentals, I believe that they should be classified as commercial, rather than residential, for the purpose of property taxes.

I have and will continue to support legislation to make renting more affordable. For example, we invested more than \$30 million in the Coal Trust Homes program that offers low-interest loans to develop affordable rental units. Working with the Affordable Housing Coalition, I am learning about ways that Montana can leverage more federal housing money through a state workforce housing tax credit.

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 believe that a portion of the state budget surplus, which will likely be upward of \$800m this session, should be put in a trust with the interest going to local infrastructure projects identified by counties. In addition, because HB 442 was vetoed, I will likely work on legislation to reallocate some of the marijuana tax revenue in a way that would provide ongoing funding for local 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? *

During the 2023 legislative session, I sponsored HB 280, which would have provided meaningful, long-term property tax relief without adversely impacting local governments. The bill would ensure that the property tax burden doesn't surpass set portions of household income and offered a state tax credit if the tax burden exceeds the threshold. It earned bipartisan support in the House Tax Committee but was killed on the House Floor in favor of the one-time rebates. Article about the bill and floor debate: <https://montanafreepress.org/2023/02/15/republicans-vote-down-long-term-property-tax-relief-bill/>

I have been working with numerous stakeholders for the past year on a property tax package which will be published this summer. I will be bringing bills that include a homestead exemption, rate adjustments, and a tax credit to provide long-term and sustainable property tax relief.

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 support TIF as a tool to spur investment in our community, grow the tax base, and increase housing supply and space for local businesses. I do not have any TIF reforms in mind and will oppose legislation that would undermine TIF.

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? *

Yes. On technical matters such as policy related to septic systems, I solicit input from organizations and experts in the relevant fields.

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? *

Exempt wells were highly controversial last session. Since water is a public resource, I believe water policy should be consensus-driven. I am following the DNRC water rights working group and am optimistic that an exempt well policy will be crafted that stakeholders in housing, agriculture, conservation and other fields will be satisfied with.

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

Yes, and I also would support legislation that expands the definition of discrimination to include the LGBTQ community.

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 support private property rights, and when balancing private rights with public interests, I weigh all aspects of the situation and solicit input from a broad range of interests.

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

Barbara Berens; PO Box 2960, Missoula, MT 59806; 406-273-1243

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.