

Street Collective 2023 Des Moines City Council Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name	Chelsea Lepley (CL)	Linda Westergaard (LW)
Pronouns	She/They	She/Her
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Walkability

The current budget plan calls for 180 miles of existing sidewalk gaps to be filled in by the year 2040. Is this an appropriate timeline to provide safe options for pedestrians on priority streets? If not, what ideas do you have to complete them sooner?

Chelsea Lepley (CL): 17 years does seem too long to wait for sidewalk gaps to be filled. I support prioritizing routes to & from schools, public transit, healthcare facilities, social services, grocery stores, food pantries, pharmacies, and other locations important to residents' wellbeing. Of course, there are a lot of limitations on what projects are funded out of which budget, but I'd like to explore additional sources of funding to complete this work ahead of schedule.

Linda Westergaard (LW): No, we need to complete this earlier. We are using sales tax revenue to move this along faster.

To create a more walkable community, it helps to have denser development in neighborhoods and along major streets. Do you support encouraging removal of car-based infrastructure such as surface parking lots and instead promoting more mixed-use and multi-family developments in the city?

(CL): I have been advocating for mixed-use and multi-family development along Des Moines' corridors for the past decade, including my roles with Viva East Bank, Capitol Park Neighbors, Polk County Housing Trust Fund, and as a participant in the most recent updates to the zoning code. Each project will have its own considerations, but in general, I do favor decreasing emphasis on private car infrastructure and increasing emphasis on mixed-use and multi-family development.

(LW): Yes, and city staff is encouraging the same.

Biking

The Street Collective's mission states that all residents deserve active transportation options such as walking and biking that are accessible, safe, and enjoyable. Where in your ward do you see major gaps in this network and how do you propose to fix these gaps?

(CL): I agree with this mission and have been a member for a long time. Ward 2 has a lot of major gaps, and I understand addressing them will take years, if not decades. I'd like to start with pedestrian safety along busy streets and at intersections, especially near schools (including K-12 and Grand View).

(LW): Gaps between Brook Run and the Union Park area. Sheridan Gardens, and Grays Woods need trail access

Do you support adding physical separators such as bollards, planters, and curbs between street lanes and buffered bike lanes (paint only) to improve safety for bicyclists?

(CL): Yes. I was hit by a car that drifted into the bike lane, injuring me and totaling my bike, so I have a profound appreciation for the difference this can make. It will take Des Moines a long time to protect all bike lanes, so I am also willing to support other incremental measures, like buffered bike lanes, if necessary.

(LW): Yes

Transportation Safety

Do you support redesigning Des Moines' most dangerous roadways if this means eliminating some travel lanes and parking spaces for cars? For example, do you support the rightsizing of Euclid Avenue, Douglas Avenue, and similar future similar projects?

(CL): Yes, assuming the projects follow up-to-date best practices and incorporate lessons learned from other local projects. I do think we can improve on processes for input and implementation, to avoid some of the dissatisfaction expressed by residents near the Euclid project, for example, but I don't think we should give up on them. I've been advocating for a lane reduction on East University from the river to Hubbell for at least six years, to avoid exactly the kind of tragedy that happened last year. The city rushed to change the scene of the incident, but I worry it will be years before they address the danger posed by the area around E. 14th and University.

(LW): Yes. Now we need to calm the traffic on 6th Ave between Euclid and the 6th Ave bridge. Road diets do slow the traffic

Do you support expanding speed and red-light camera enforcement to high-crash streets across Des Moines?

(CL): Data from the US DOT Federal Highway Administration, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and other reputable sources indicate that automated enforcement reduces crashes and improves safety. However, I'm not eager to build out the city's surveillance apparatus in a way that could disproportionately penalize our poor and marginalized neighbors, and I'm especially reluctant to do so if the work is outsourced to private contractors. I do see the benefits of automated enforcement, and I'd support expanding it if we can find a way to address legitimate concerns about unintended consequences.

(LW): Yes, but we must be careful the state legislature doesn't ban entirely

Public Transit

DART's costs have increased, and it may not be able to continue its current level of services without increased funding. Do you support increasing funding from the City of Des Moines to DART to maintain its current level of service?

(CL): Yes, with caveats. DART needs more support, and Des Moines is facing a budget deficit. I do not want to see DART services cut, but before committing to a specific solution, I need to learn more about organizational budget restrictions, potential additional funding sources, innovations working in other areas, and whether other local governments can be enticed back into DART.

(LW): We are at our maximum amount while the suburbs are quite a ways away from their maximum taxable amount.

What is your vision for how Des Moines can play a role in a regional public transportation network in the Metro?

(CL): Des Moines can be (and arguably already is) the heart of a regional public transportation network. I would love to see this network enhanced and updated to reflect the future of public transit – and I know this is the direction DART has already been planning for. I participated in the planning activities for DART Forward 2035 and have reviewed DART's information about long-term service plans and optimization. I'm encouraged by the vision articulated there, and I hope suburban and county governments are willing to deepen their engagement. Regardless of what other local governments do, there are actions Des Moines can take to make active and public transportation easier and more attractive, including infrastructure updates to accommodate buses, mixed-use and multi-family development discussed above, improved land use planning along corridors, and more welcoming, accessible bus stops.

(LW): DART needs to make routes more accessible and they need to right size their vehicles.

Funding

Electric bicycles are an inclusive, inexpensive, and low-carbon way to get around. Denver offers a \$300 general rebate and a \$1,200 income-qualified rebate for e-bikes purchased from local bike shops. Is this something we should explore in Des Moines?

(CL): We should explore ways to support low-carbon transportation choices like e-bikes. I'm not sure a rebate like this one would work in Des Moines, since we don't have the same tax revenue streams available as Denver, but I do agree that we should explore options to incentivize e-bikes and other low-carbon options.

(LW): Where would the funding come from? If Grants are available then yes. Work with MidAmerican to offer a rebate.

Spending decisions require choices and tradeoffs, especially in light of higher interest rates on municipal bonds. The city has focused almost exclusively on car travel and an extensive street and highway network for about 75 years. What kind of transportation projects should the city do less of? What should it do more of?

(CL): I'd like new projects to emphasize safety, repair/maintenance, walkability, traffic calming, and accessible public space – we don't need to make a whole new park to have places people can enjoy time while they walk to work or wait for a bus. I'd also like to see city planners identify some spaces in Des Moines that we could convert to pedestrian areas. In general, I do favor dedicating more effort and resources to people and less to cars.

(LW): N/A

Personal Travel Habits

How often do you ride a bicycle for transportation in the city?

(CL): Weekly

(LW): Weekly

How often do you ride public transportation in the city?

(CL): Monthly

(LW): Yearly

How often do you drive a car in the city?

(CL): Daily

(LW): Daily

For city meetings open to the public such as city council meetings, and especially those that do not offer a virtual option, will you support requiring these meetings to be held in facilities served by public transit service?

(CL): Yes. I also support expanding virtual/hybrid options for meetings.

(LW): Yes

How do you typically commute to work? Describe your experience traveling in Des Moines and what you would do to improve it.

(CL): I walk, drive, or bicycle – and thanks to Read & Ride Week this September, I've realized how efficient it is to use DART, so I'll be doing more of that.

My own experience traveling in Des Moines is pretty easy, but I know that could be different if I didn't live so close to work, if I used a wheelchair or other mobility aid, if I didn't have a bus stop on my street, if I didn't have a reliable car, and if I weren't so close to one of the few bike trails on the east side.

Improvements I'd like to see include enough bike infrastructure that I don't feel like I have to choose between safety and efficiency to bike to other parts of the city and clearer, more reflective lane markings, especially near downtown.

(LW): I walk if what I am going to is nearby. I just purchased an electric bike and I could see myself using the ebike to get around.