



Street Collective 2024 Des Moines City Council Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name: [Mike Simonson](#)
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Walkability:

The current budget plan aims to fill 180 miles of existing sidewalk gaps by 2040. Do you believe this timeline adequately prioritizes pedestrian safety on key streets? If not, what strategies would you propose to expedite this process?

Answer:

[It is not realistic. Sidewalk locations need to be prioritized. Additional funding sources need to be identified outside of the city budget.](#)

Public Transit:

Given the recent proposal by the City to allocate additional funding of 3.5 million in the next two years to aid DART, alongside the consideration of a 2.5% franchise fee for future transit expenses, what steps would you take to address DART's financial challenges and ensure its long-term? Do you support a fully funded franchise fee in conjunction with the general funds?

Answer:

[This topic can't be answered in a simple paragraph. I will say this, however. Dart is a regional effort that serves a broader geographical area than just Des Moines, and is an essential service of any city our size. I do not endorse reducing service and migrating toward a call on demand type of service. I requested, and met with, Dart leadership to better understand the funding and decision making process guiding Dart. Amanda and I, at my request, spent about an hour and a half to get me up speed on the current 28E agreement, and understanding of the current system. I have also spoken with council members of three member cities, all of whom are supportive of bolstering Dart. The City Manager of Des Moines has identified \\$1.5M within the current budget to be applied to DART. Do I support utilization of the franchise fee that is an available tool? Yes, but to what level, I don't know. The surrounding communities within the 28E need to have a hand in solving the system issues, and Des Moines should lead that solution. I would like to take a leadership role in solving the issues confronting DART.](#)

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Transportation Spending Priorities:

There was significant interest at this week's budget hearings regarding increasing spending on building more sidewalks and implementing local traffic calming projects, how do you propose to capitalize on this momentum to enhance pedestrian safety and improve traffic conditions in our city? What specific strategies would you prioritize to ensure that these additional funds are effectively utilized to address the needs of our community?

Answer:

If these efforts are a priority to the people, then these budget items need to be sacrosanct and not available for negotiation as we as a city continually have budget issues and look at cuts. Somewhat related, we need to be prequalifying our contractors to avoid hiring less qualified contractors, who are always the low bidders, who grossly exceed their agreed upon schedules, and with lesser quality, which leads to frustrated shop owners and neighbors, who may become less likely to support these projects because of the length of time they are taking.

Denser Development and Mixed-Use Areas:

Encouraging denser development and mixed-use areas can enhance community walkability. Do you support initiatives to repurpose car-oriented infrastructure, like surface parking lots, in favor of mixed-use and multi-family developments along major streets?

Answer:

Yes. I was on P&Z for twelve years, and the last action I took was to approve the zoning ordinance, which allows and encourages greater density on our major corridors (which promotes use of DART). In the downtown core, there are no minimum parking requirements. Outside of the downtown core, the parking requirements are much more modest than the suburbs, and in some locations, require much less parking. As a city, we have become accustomed to giving financial incentives to most development projects. We need to be more focused with our incentives by more heavily investing in some redevelopment areas, and much less, if any, in other areas.

Safety Measures for Bicyclists:

To enhance bicyclist safety, do you endorse the installation of physical separators such as bollards, planters and curbs between street lanes and buffered bike lanes? How would you prioritize implementing such measures?

Answer:

I have mixed feelings on the implementation (details) of our bike lanes, probably because we have no standards. In one block, the bike lane may be created by pavement striping, in other blocks it's colored concrete at the elevation of sidewalks. In some areas, the bike lane is against the curb with parked cars between the curbed bike lane and the vehicular traffic. In other areas the bike lane is between the parked car against the curb and the vehicular traffic. It's confusing. The challenge is that we are modifying existing infrastructure, where existing conditions vary. If we were building in a corn field, it would be far easier and more cohesive. I support bike lanes, but details matter.

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Vision Zero:

Improving safety on our most hazardous roads may involve reallocating space and resources. Do you support redesigning our most dangerous roadways if this means eliminating some travel lanes and parking spaces for cars? For example, do you support the lane reductions and other traffic calming measures of Euclid Ave, Douglas Ave, and similar future similar projects?

Answer:

No two existing streets are the same. They are composed of different building existing densities, have differing traffic counts, some are state highways, etc. I support road diets if it can be done in a safe manner. Fewer vehicular lanes, trees along the streets, etc all slow traffic, which is a good thing, and embrace the neighborhood rather than merely flying through them.

Personal Travel Habits

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

Answer:

I drive a used car, nice, but used. I have four or five meetings per day outside of the office, so my meeting load does not lend itself to walking, biking, or public transportation. On a rare occasion when my schedule permits, I will walk, and I'm always glad when I do. One sees so much more. How to improve our traveling experiences? I'm bullish on street trees, providing green canopies, slowing traffic, creating shade, habitat for creatures, etc. West Des Moines, until most recently, has not allowed any trees within their right of way. Depressing to say the least, but their city manager is working to change this. Our head of Public Works, Johnathan Gano, is a strong supporter of trees; we should fully support tree planting while we have him.