

## Street Collective 2023 Des Moines City Council Candidate Survey

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

|                  |  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Name</b>      | Connie Boesen (CB)   | Denver Foote (DF)  | Josh Mandelbaum (JM)   |
| <b>Pronouns</b>  | N/A  | They/Them  | He/Him   |
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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?

Connie Boesen (CB): We need to close the gaps sooner and need to see how we can incorporate sidewalks into our road projects. We need to review funding to see how we can allocate more dollars to build more sidewalks.

Denver Foote (DF): This amounts to roughly 11 miles a year, or just under one mile a month. While promising, I think we can do better. The city currently prioritizes too much funding and resources to business development and the protection of property. If we instead rapidly shifted focus and funding to the most marginalized residents of the city we could accomplish much more. This funding would come from areas like the police department budget, which is currently excessive compared to how they perform.

Josh Mandelbaum (JM): We should be working to fill all priority one sidewalk gaps within the next decade. I supported using America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars for priority one sidewalk gaps. If there are other ARPA projects that are not successful or will not move forward, I would support reallocating those dollars to priority one sidewalks. I think that we could be allocating additional local

option sales tax dollars to priority one sidewalks. I also think we should be re-evaluating existing infrastructure projects. The complete reconstruction of the Walnut Street bridge is estimated to cost almost \$20 million. The city could rehabilitate the bridge for a fraction of the cost and re-allocate dollars to priority one sidewalks or other active transportation projects.

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?

(CB): I believe it is important to review all of the portions of a more walkable/bikeable transit system. I do not believe we are ready to do so at this time but believe we need a plan to determine how we get there. As we transition more into electric vehicles, we need to determine how it impacts parking lots and the other components of transportation.

(DF): Unequivocally yes. Beyond walkability, we need to stop burning fossil fuels as soon as possible. This is a tough hurdle to clear in a place like the Midwest that's riddled with Eisenhower-era car-centric infrastructure. However, that shouldn't diminish the necessity of the task at hand. If we're going to ask people to drive less, we need to offer up workable solutions in the same breath. Additionally, we can't just promise to fund DART and hope that will be enough (although we should do that regardless). This will need to be a multi-pronged approach and surface parking and promoting mixed-use districts is a good low-impact way to get the ball rolling.

(JM): I look at every surface parking lot as an opportunity for something better. Particularly in downtown and along transit corridors, surface parking lots can easily be converted to high density mixed use projects. I have advocated for these type of mixed use projects in my tenure on the Council. A good example is the Star Lofts project. The property owner of the Star Gas Station came to me seeking support for a waiver of code requirements to make updates to the gas station. I held firm and as a result, we are replacing an underutilized gas station with a denser, mixed-use project that contains affordable housing.

## **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?

(CB): Yes

(DF): In Des Moines there are a variety of what transit experts have taken to calling "stroads." I'm sure the street collective is familiar with these parts of the city.....Merle Hay Road, Euclid Ave., Fleur Drive, etc. Everywhere there's a major thoroughfare I see a set of problems waiting to happen. The lane calming measures that have been enacted in the Ingersoll and Euclid areas are a good start but I think we also need an educational campaign that will help persuade drivers that, while inconvenient to them, these are positive changes in the community.

(JM): MoveDSM provides a vision for what the bike network can be in Des Moines. We should continue to implement MoveDSM and ensure that we add protection and reduce speed where possible. We should focus on ensuring crosstown connectivity in places that currently do not have it.

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?

(CB): Yes

(DF): Yes

(JM): Yes. We should work towards making physical barriers a standard part of our bike infrastructure

### **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?

(CB): Yes

(DF): Yes, cars receive far too much deference which contributes to ongoing inequality because owning a car is a financial privilege, yet it's treated like a prerequisite to participating in society. This needs to be corrected by reminding drivers that not only are there other means of getting around, but these deserve as much, if not more emphasis.

(JM): I support roadway redesign changes for safety and implementing our Vision Zero and complete streets policies. The most dangerous roads in Des Moines are the undivided four lane roads. Often times, those roads do not have the traffic volume to justify the number of traffic lanes. This provides an opportunity to right size the roads for safety without impacting traffic flow. We should be identifying places where we can effectively make these type of changes.

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

(CB): Yes

(DF): I do support this, but there are a couple caveats that I think are worth noting.

-A safer Des Moines means no traffic unit of DMPD, which necessitates innovative responses like camera and light enforcement to protect the public from reckless drivers

-HOWEVER many of these solutions operate on a system of fines and fines are essentially only laws for the economically disenfranchised. If a wealthy person wants to drive recklessly, there is little in the way of incentive to stop them. I would recommend imposing fines or punishments more proportionate to a person's status/income to alleviate this inequity. Also a majority, if not all, speed cameras are hosted by a company out of state, so most of the money from these tickets do not come back to the city.

(JM): I support expanding the use of speed and red-light camera enforcement. These tools have been effective public safety measures where implemented, and there are more places where they can create benefit.

## 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?

(CB): I will support increased funding but we must do a better job of working with other communities and build out a system that is more robust. I also believe we need to offer more on call service.

(DF): Absolutely. DART is underutilized and that is partially due to the city's lack of respect for the average bus-using resident and for public transportation in general. I support not only an increase in funding but an increase in service. If you look closely at the Des Moines city budget, you see our most important services, like DART, being underfunded while policing receives over 40% of the budget. We need to be more public with our funding and where it is going. Being transparent and pushing for funding for our communities.

DART currently operates on a spoke-and-hub system, with the hub being the DART central station. This does not make a lot of sense based on the travel needs of the average bus user. It makes a lot of sense for folks who live and work downtown but each additional parking garage sees to it that those people do not actually represent the average DART user.

(JM): DART has an ongoing structural deficit. I support fixing the structural deficit through increased funding rather than service cuts, particularly since Des Moines has an option that could allow for ongoing funding while reducing Des Moines residents' DART property tax levy.

As long as DART relies solely on property taxes for funding, our system will be limited and unable to respond to the need in the community. We still need to work to identify alternative funding sources for DART and to get those options authorized and implemented.

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

(CB): We have a long way to go to have a sustainable regional system, MPO was supposed to be the mechanism for regional transportation and based on the issues we still have today has not fulfilled its mission. Each community builds its roads based on its individual needs, not how it is connected to providing reliable mass transit throughout the area.

(DF): By not approving development deals that cater to car infrastructure (car washes, auto part store franchises, etc.)

A mission to turn every "stroad" into a "streetscape."

Preparing roadways to cater to more transit and walkability as climate change advances.

(JM): Des Moines should lead the metro in advocating for and developing a robust transit system that meets the needs of the community and is sustainable for the long term.

One of the most important things the city can do is encourage development that considers transit. On our major transit corridors, we should be encouraging density and access to housing, jobs, services, and amenities so that someone has everything they need on our transit corridors. We should be a model for transit-oriented development in our region.

We need to increase efficiency, frequency and access to transit in our community. The Transit Optimization Study provides a roadmap for improved service and efficiencies as well as a path for what expanded service could look like (where increased frequency is needed, where new routes make the most sense, etc.). Implementation of the transit optimization study will be an important part for improving transit service over the long run and increasing ridership.

Finally, as long as DART relies solely on property taxes for funding, our system will be limited and unable to respond to the need in the community. We still need to work to identify alternative funding sources for DART and to get those options authorized and implemented. Des Moines needs to lead in keeping the region focused on the need for additional transit funding.

### **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?

(CB): Yes

(DF): Absolutely! This is one of the aforementioned incentives that should be offered in tandem with lane reductions and speed limit reductions.

(JM): Des Moines should be exploring e-bike rebates. This fits with our climate action plan (which needs to be adopted) as well as encouraging active transportation.

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?

(CB): The roads in Des Moines were in very poor condition from lack of resources over the years and I believe have made great efforts to repair and replace with cyclist in mind. If you go down many of our side streets we have much work still left to do to make them adequate for bike and car travel.

(DF): Less:

-Highway expansions and additions

-Lane expansions

More:

-Trails

-Ebike rebates

-expand DART so more people can get to place A to place B without having to transfer

-DART should be electric, run 24/7, and the routes should reflect the most highly traveled but also connecting neighborhoods that have no transit currently.

(JM): We should be focused more on active transportation projects and using existing infrastructure more effectively. We should be looking to fill the priority one sidewalk gaps more quickly. We should be investing in bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

An example of how we can use existing infrastructure more effectively is the recent lane change on Ingersoll from MLK to 15<sup>th</sup> Street. We simply restriped the road to improve bike infrastructure and add on-street parking without needing any new construction. While this could have been designed better (e.g. protected bike lanes rather than buffered), there are additional opportunities to use existing overbuilt roads differently. MLK south of downtown and Keo Way into downtown are other examples where overbuilt roads could be redesigned.

I also think we should be re-evaluating existing infrastructure projects. The complete reconstruction of the Walnut Street bridge is estimated to cost almost \$20 million. The city could rehabilitate the bridge for a fraction of the cost and re-allocate dollars to priority one sidewalks or other active transportation projects.

Finally, we need to respond to signals that the federal government is giving about transportation priorities. We continue to apply for federal dollars for the Southeast Connector when the Biden administration has signaled projects with more multi-modal and active transportation components are more likely to be successful. We should pursue Reconnecting Communities funding with the Keo, 9<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridors being good candidates for an application.

### **Personal Travel Habits**

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

(CB): Never

(DF): Never

(JM): Monthly

How often do you ride public transportation in the city?

(CB): Never

(DF): Weekly

(JM): Yearly

How often do you drive a car in the city?

(CB): Daily

(DF): Weekly

(JM): 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?

(CB): Yes

(DF): Yes. These meetings should also be hybrid for folks that cannot leave their homes to be involved in local council happenings.

(JM): Yes

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

(CB): I use car travel because of my schedule, I have meetings all over the City and when I do work I do not have the time nor are the options great for me to use the bus system.

(DF): Commuting to work is usually the only time I drive in the city. I purposefully moved to the Drake neighborhood because it is more convenient to access bus routes. My old apartment, that was on 42nd and Ingersoll, it would take me 40+ minutes to get to work and get home on the bus. This created pressure on me to drive to work, in the Merle Hay Neighborhood. Moving to a better bus line has cut down my time on the bus by over 20 minutes. I feel privileged to have such close access to transit, but I know many folks across the city are not. We must expand transit to connect folks to housing, to food, to jobs and to care.

(JM): I typically drive to work. I frequently drop my kids off at school before going into work. I walk regularly for things like coffee, going out to eat, and going to a bar. I keep a bike in my office downtown and will frequently walk/bike to meetings and appointments in the downtown area.

The Ingersoll streetscape changes have had a direct impact on my family. The walk to a restaurant and the street crossing is much more comfortable with young kids than it was previously. We need to create more corridors that create safe places for all users. We should focus initial efforts on neighborhood nodes.