

Street Collective 2023 Des Moines City Council Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name	Rob Barron (RB)	Chris Coleman (CC)	Kathy Hellstern (KH)	Kimberley Strobe-Boggus (KSB)
Pronouns	He/Him/His/Él	N/A	She/Her	N/A
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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?

Rob Barron (RB): I would like to be more aggressive with the plan, but I accept that there will be cost constraints and challenges with completing the work in a timely manner. Des Moines Public Schools was a major influence in crafting Move DSM when I was on the board. An equitable distribution of sidewalks with a priority on kids' routes to school is a high priority of mine and necessary if we want Des Moines to be a community that is the best place in the world to raise a child.

Chris Coleman (CC): I am a huge proponent of sidewalks and I love using them as I walk, bike or move about the city. I think the city should have a goal of all high-priority sidewalks in place in five years. Full-Stop.

I believe that in order to complete this goal, the city council needs to 1) set this as policy and 2) measure it and 3) produce a public report on progress made.

While adding sidewalks is important, I think a more urgent issue is the quality and maintenance of sidewalks by citizens and homeowners. Especially absentee landlords. As I advocate for a Property Maintenance Policy, I would absolutely include safe and clean sidewalks. Let's make our neighborhoods more walkable.

Kathy Hellstern (KH): 2040 seems like a long time for people to wait for sidewalk access, but it's understandable if there aren't dollars available to complete the project faster. First, I would want to know if more money could be directed toward this initiative, because lack of sidewalk access can be very isolating and dangerous for neighbors. Second, more pedestrian and underserved areas should be prioritized, as well as areas that provide access to bus stops. Third, while this work is being done, it is important not to forget our existing sidewalks. I live in a very pedestrian neighborhood and I see firsthand how difficult it is for people to get around on the existing sidewalks. I would like to find a way to help support neighbors with resources to get those sidewalks repaired.

Kimberley Strobe-Boggus (KSB): I think the city should adopt a faster timeline of meeting this need. We are one block away from an elementary school and just got sidewalks two years ago. We watched for too long kids and parents walling in the street to get to school. Now, we see folks using sidewalks and our neighborhood is vibrant.

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?

(RB): Yes I do! Surface lots offer no housing or aesthetic benefit to our community and we do need to have denser, more affordable housing to meet the need for our growing population. The right type of growth brings new business and encourages people to stay in their homes as hyper local amenities pop up. As our city grows it is essential that our growth supports those who have called Des Moines home for years, and is not just focused on high-end housing.

(CC): I support limiting "car based infrastructure" in neighborhood nodes. I supported the new zoning code which fixes the policy by which we have overbuilt parking lots. Not only do I support promoting mixed-use and multi-family developments in the city, I choose to live and work in a thriving one.

(KH): We do need more accessible housing stock in Des Moines. Mixed-use and multi-family developments are going to be key in housing our neighbors. Already in our neighborhood we've supported new development projects that include mixed use and multi-family units. I support those kinds of projects for a lot of reasons, and walkability is one of them. Of course, in the Midwest, we have gotten very dependent on our vehicles, so we have to strike a balance. Parking lots use up valuable land space and contribute to global warming, so finding ways to reduce the need for them would have long-lasting benefits. But, if we want to help develop businesses in our neighborhoods, we have to consider how people are going to get to those businesses. We have to consider what neighborhood life is like when the streets are filled with cars and traffic because people are trying to get to the business districts.

(KSB): Yes, I support a more walkable community that promotes safety and cutting down on car-based infrastructure.

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?

(RB): I worry about the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing and using both Douglas and MLK Parkway. Both have a history of serious injuries and fatalities per the MoveDSM report.

(CC): I see gaps being filled and progress being made. I love and look to 6th Ave for inspiration for the rest of Ward 1. That said, there are high traffic streets that are unsafe and without or with under-sized sidewalks. I would include all of Douglas/Euclid, Hickman, Meredith, 30th/31st, Merle Hay Road and more as needing new or enhanced sidewalks for walking and biking, or an alternative design for safety.

(KH): There do still exist large gaps in our biking/walking access in Ward 1. We are seeing the start of some progress with the Central Levee Trail project that will work to connect the residents on the east side of the ward to the existing bike trails. One large issue is that Prospect Park is not at all walkable. There is no sidewalk access to this beautiful, riverfront park that used to be such a big part of our city's history. The trail needs to extend to and from this park for access from both east and west. Also, neighbors on the east side of the ward will soon have the new Reichardt Community Center for gathering and activities. It will be important to connect the trail to that center to make it even easier to access. There is also a gap for neighbors in the south end of the ward, off of University. As the city is working through road diets and traffic-quieting projects, trail access should be added so all families can enjoy one of the major benefits of Central Iowa.

(KSB): I believe in Ward 1 there is a gap between Drake University and the surrounding neighborhoods, especially Beaverdale, Waveland and Merle Hay. Fixing these gaps will take a concentrated effort to invest in making walking and biking a safe means of active transportation.

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?

(RB): Yes, I do support adding more physical separators between street lanes and bike lanes. The City has made some positive progress in this direction over the past few years. I have biked the stretch on Ingersoll Avenue with separated bike lanes and found it safe, though it required some learning on my part for when to stop for traffic. My experience reminds me that the work of the Street Collective is very important when it comes to educating our community on the importance of safe streets for bicyclists.

If elected, I will be a reliable voice for forward-thinking solutions to slow traffic and diversify our commutes. With man-made climate change increasingly impacting our lives, we have to take every step possible to slow the warming of the Earth. Providing a multitude of safe routes to bike to work, school, and home allow many of us to get out of our cars and reduce our carbon footprints.

(CC): There are many places where such solutions are needed in Ward 1. I strongly support them in appropriate areas.

(KH): I think, in general, the streets of Des Moines should be safer for all pedestrians and cyclists. For example, we have a lot of intersections that lack painted lines, and really we should be using zebra

crossings to protect pedestrians, as well as audible signals for pedestrians with sight issues. Separating and marking bike lanes improves safety for everyone. Cyclists are more visible, motorists are more aware of the possibility of cyclists in the traffic pattern, and everyone slows down and pays more attention. Cycling isn't just a hobby here. There are neighbors who use bikes as transportation to work and school. Bike safety is important for everyone.

(KSB): Yes, I look to cities like Minneapolis/ St. Paul and would like to adopt their strategies to protect cyclists.

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?

(RB): I am supportive of road diets. MoveDSM offers very persuasive data about how little our roadways operate at their peak traffic. It also excites me to think of how successful strategies would lead to wider sidewalks for families to use and safe bike lanes.

Before joining Iowa & Minnesota Campus Compact, I did community engagement work for Grand View University. I spent time with leaders in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus. I got to know and respect the Kelso's and their advocacy for Euclid Avenue road diet. That road diet has slowed drivers and encouraged more foot traffic in the Highland Park shops, bakeries, and coffee shops. That plan came about because of advocacy from local residents and that is very heartening. Once on the Council, I will certainly consult with the neighbors who live in the areas proposed for a road diet to understand their motivation for change or consistency.

(CC): I was on the Board of the Beaverdale Neighborhood Association when Beaver was converted from 4 lanes to 3. This was one of the first such in the city. I went to a meeting prepared to speak against this proposed change. After listening to city traffic engineers, I quickly changed my mind. While not effective in every roadway, solutions such as 4 lanes to 3 lanes is a reasonable and VERY affordable solution for safer and more navigable streets.

(KH): I do support the current efforts to calm traffic and make neighborhoods safer. A lot of money has been put into creating highways and bypasses, and a lot of businesses, homes, and history have been sacrificed for those high-speed arteries. We do not need to be sailing through residential and business districts at highway speeds, especially now that most drivers are spending more time looking at their phones than the road. Our neighbors shouldn't have to be unsafe while people speed through our neighborhoods from the suburbs as fast as they can.

(KSB): Yes, I supported rightsizing of Douglas and Euclid.

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

(RB): Yes, I am open to additional ways to use technology to slow traffic, especially in high -crash areas of the city.

(CC): I do support speed and red-light camera enforcement. This has proven to be an effective way to raise the community's consciousness of safety. And while effective, it is an easier penalty than when an Officer writes a ticket. And they keep our police officers safe.

(KH): If those methods of enforcement are actually shown to reduce crashes at intersections, then yes, I would support them. I am not yet convinced that speed and red-light cameras are having that impact. When a driver isn't stopped in the moment, has anything really been made more safe? Painting stop bars and zebra crossings at intersections would help. Continuing to find ways to slow traffic would help. I would also be more supportive of camera enforcement if more of the money from the fines stayed in the city to help with transportation projects.

(KSB): The purpose of red-light cameras and speed traps is to change behavior. I feel the tickets go to out of state companies and puts a burden on some of our most vulnerable populations that don't have as much disposable income. I would like to look at this further.

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?

(RB): I absolutely support increasing funding for DART from the City. I'm aware of the debate about the best source of those funds as well as whether there should be a cut in services to manage the structural deficit. I look forward to having conversations with my colleagues about the best strategies for funding our share of DART. I am opposed to cutting services as I feel strongly that it would harm vulnerable populations and make DART's long-term challenges worse.

This is an issue when having a strong working relationship with council members in neighboring communities is vital as we make decisions about the future of DART. I am proud of my relationships with council members in neighboring communities like Windsor Heights, Ankeny, Urbandale, and West Des Moines.

(CC): Des Moines relationship with DART has not resulted in service levels appropriate for the ridership, the neighborhoods, and level of funding that Des Moines residents pour into DART. I'll fight that Des Moines population gets the services they deserve.

I also will support efforts to modernize the services of DART – with expanded ride-share and other on-demand services that are proving to be affordable.

(KH): Public transportation is an important tool for accessibility for underserved populations. Already, fare costs are too high for the people who need it most. It is important, for the sake of equity, that public transportation remain accessible to those who depend on it. It's time to get creative with where that funding comes from, but funding public transportation is important.

(KSB): Yes. A family member relies on DART and they have to go Downtown to go west. It's not efficient and needs to accommodate the nearly 3 million trips they do a year.

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

(RB): I believe that we can lead the way on sustaining DART for the next generation of riders through thoughtful, persistent engagement with council members in other communities.

(CC): DART is broken and it needs a transformation. The region made a strategic mistake when they adopted a new governance system without a new funding system. I am the only local citizen to be elected to lead four Regional Boards that are coordinated by many local governments. My experience in developing successful regional relationships can bring about a new successful era for DART and its customers. We need a strong DART.

(KH): With more and more businesses taking their tax dollars out to the suburbs, and fewer people working in offices, I'm not sure the responsibility for creating and maintaining a regional public transportation network falls on the shoulders of Des Moines. Public transportation is a great tool in the fight against global warming, but it's time for the suburbs to step up with all of their resources and support transportation options for their residents. They have the resources to build sports and entertainment districts, so maybe they should use those resources to find ways to get people to those sports and entertainment districts.

(KSB): Just like with our Parks Department, we need to strive to have more equity in our community by investing in our community.

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?

(RB): I'm open to this idea and would want to have more conversations with my counterparts in Denver. For a project like this, equitable opportunity to benefit is important to me, in addition to access to e-bikes in the city.

(CC): Yes! I purchased an e-bike 18 months ago. I love it. Not only does it make me feel like a fourth-grader again, I have used the bike to travel nearly 600 miles in and around the city this year I otherwise would have used a car. By riding, I have also seen and reported the many safety issues I see on our lanes and trails. Speaking of DART, this would be a great regional program funded with the DART levy.

(KH): This is a very interesting idea. Denver is a larger metro with a bigger tax base, so they have more resources to put towards a program like this, but in thinking about a long-term sustainability plan, we should definitely be considering the feasibility of a program like this. It would be important to consider who would be in the best position to take advantage of this program and if the dollars would end up going to our neighbors with the most need.

(KSB): Yes. It supports local business and we have a number in Des Moines that are ready to serve.

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?

(RB): I'm supportive of the four projects the City has proposed funding if awarded a Safe Streets for All grant by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Three of those projects are located in Ward 1: MLK Parkway and 19th Street; Douglas Avenue; and Forest Avenue. I have firsthand experience with Forest Avenue. My preferred route to work when I ride my bike is on Forest from Beaver to 9th Street. These projects are all ready to be implemented with the preliminary engineering and concept development completed. They each also promote equity for populations in Ward 1 that would benefit from safer routes to work, school, and home.

(CC): I think we should do less of the projects that help out-of-towners get out of town quickly without enjoying our city and supporting our businesses.

I think we should do more of the projects that improve existing roadways for safety.

(KH): The city should focus less on distance commutes. I don't think the suburbs and counties do enough to support large scale travel into and out of the city. We should be able to get more support from the region when it comes to projects that support distance commuters. I have seen several traffic calming/road diet projects the city is planning and they include walkability and biking considerations. I would like to see more of those projects fully funded and moving forward. We should support travel within our neighborhoods to build community where we need it. We could also better support clearing snow from bus stops.

(KSB): I'd like to look closer at projects around the city that involves buying up or acquiring land to build more lanes for cars when we can look at projects that allow for active transportation. The city has a great engineering department but we need them to look through the lens of seeing biking and cycling as deserving a seat at the table when projects are envisioned.

Personal Travel Habits

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

(RB): Weekly

(CC): Weekly

(KH): Yearly

(KSB): Yearly

How often do you ride public transportation in the city?

(RB): Yearly

(CC): Yearly

(KH): Yearly

(KSB): Yearly

How often do you drive a car in the city?

(RB): Daily

(CC): Daily

(KH): Weekly

(KSB): 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?

(RB): Yes

(CC): Yes

(KH): Yes

(KSB): Yes

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

(RB): I have the privilege of having flexibility to work from home or my office. If I decide to go to my office and the weather is poor or if I have meetings around the city, then I will drive. If the weather cooperates and I do not have meetings all around the city, then I will ride my bike.

(CC): I am blessed to have been able to make decisions that allow me to live just one mile from work. Intentionally. Most days I drive, but many days I walk or bike. It usually depends on weather and my appointment schedule. When I am at work, I am also blessed to have great Ward 1 eating options just outside my door and around the corner....so I usually walk to lunch and the coffee shop for meetings.

(KH): N/A

(KSB): We walk our daughter to school daily, drop son off at pre-school and take our two babies to daycare and get to work by 9am. With four children it's hard to commute by bike but we look forward to a day when we are able to.