

Street Collective 2023 Des Moines City Council Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name	A J Drew (AD)	Carl Voss (CV)
Pronouns	N/A	N/A
Website	www.theajdrew.com	www.carlvoss.com
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/ajdrew	https://www.facebook.com/CarlVossDesMoines/
Twitter/X	https://twitter.com/A_J_Drew	N/A
Instagram	N/A	https://www.instagram.com/carlvossdesmoines/

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?

A J Drew (AD): While I am all for safe sidewalks and filling gaps, I have seen directly the potential impacts of how the city is trying to implement this plan. I think the city needs to look at each property and come up with a plan that is not destructive to the home owners.

Carl Voss (CV): A goal of 2040 seemed realistic when first discussed. Our cost per yard of sidewalk improvements has really escalated—sometimes the project also involves a retaining wall, which really ramps up the project costs.

Maybe something innovative will come forward via Vision Zero. But not everything can be #1 Priority. It's a battle for all sorts of worthy projects—many of them safety related. I welcome your ideas!

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?

(AD): While I understand the thought for this question. Des Moines is not New York or Los Angeles. In some areas, such as downtown encouraging walking due to space constraints. However, most of Des Moines just needs better traffic management. By traffic management, I do not mean just changing roads to one lane. While I am not certain at this moment what the best plan is, I think the city can do better.

(CV): I support removing parking minimums. No fear for Des Moines to be the first to enact! Here's just another example of what other cities are doing. <https://www.planetizen.com/news/2023/06/123753-richmond-repeals-parking-minimums-encourages-street-parking-and-transit>

There are a lot of former Wells Fargo surface parking lots south of downtown. It will be interesting to see how those get repurposed. I certainly will be one supporting better use. And yes, multi-family developments would be at the top of my dream list, should developers bring forth ideas.

Earlier this year, I hosted two morning roundtables with developers, architects, and civil engineers (no City staff in attendance—by intent). The consensus: There will be more multi-family developments and fewer mixed-use buildings (retail on the first floor). We will see.

More later about parking minimums.

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?

(AD): The largest gaps for biking in Des Moines are locations to safely park bikes. If you want people to use bikes instead of cars. So, more than just an hour a week, you need a place to hold the bikes at destination other than the parking lots people use to access the trails.

(CV): Many of the trail gaps have been closed recently. Great when that happens! But trails don't lead to jobs, grocery stores, libraries and other logical, bikeable locations.

City-wide: There are parts of Connect Downtown that haven't been funded. Doing so is really, really important to close gaps in the bike network. I will continue to support, nudge and cajole.

Example of good things in the works: Great to see a downtown connection for Sixth Avenue south of University in the planning stages. And Sixth Avenue again: north of Hickman.

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?

(AD): I believe that dividers can have a positive impact. I think how wide those dividers are depends on the location and the state of the streets. Not all streets need a physical divider.

(CV): Yes, I support protected bike lanes. I've seen some Midwest cities use concrete barricades that can be removed before snowfalls (easier to clear streets). That takes away one argument about protected bike lanes and clearing snow.

So far, buffered bike lanes appear to about as good as it gets within budget constraints.

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?

(AD): This depends on what you mean by "rightsizing". If you mean reducing the number of lanes in the existing roads, then I would say no I would not support this for Euclid and Douglas. If something else is meant, it would depend on that definition.

(CV): In a word, yes. Transforming four-lane roads to three is successful on city streets where the Average Daily Traffic is 20,000 or fewer.

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

(AD): I don't mind the cameras, but don't think there is any replacement for police patrols of the streets. I think there are more than just speeding to be concerned about in regards to traffic and traffic rules.

(CV): If you don't want a speeding ticket, don't speed! I've long supported more speed cameras, but that's not the current posture of the Iowa legislature. Wish it wasn't that way. Also, speed cameras are the best, safest tool for enforcement. An officer approaching a stopped vehicle is always an anxious, scary moment. Huge unknowns!

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?

(AD): I am not sure of this one. I grew up relying heavily on DART and feel it is a good option for public transportation for Des Moines. I feel strongly that it serves a need in the community, so it does need to be funded. I would have to have a better idea about the current situation to be able to say what I think is the way forward.

(CV): I think DART funding will be one of the most difficult discussions the City Council will face in 2024—or, possibly as early as December. And, I suspect the discussion will ripple to our suburban and exurban neighbors, too. This is complicated (eyes glaze over).

We (Des Moines taxpayers) have bumped up against the maximum levy (\$0.95) for DART support. We also cover a portion (\$1.4 million recently) of the DART budget to fully fund Des Moines' DART contribution.. Support at this level is not sustainable.

One new DART funding source (recently received legislative approval) could be up to 2.5 percent franchise fee attached to all utility bills (includes entities that don't pay property taxes). This route—if approved by council—could allow the DART levy for the City of Des Moines to drop below \$0.95 for at least a few years.

Current thinking: DART is unable to maintain its current service level without the franchise-fee funding.

Suburban councils will likely have lively discussions on DART support.

One more DART topic in the mix: A new DART maintenance building—long overdue—is planned for an extension of ML King Jr Parkway and approximately East 35th (road not completed yet). DART has a \$17 million federal grant with a local match to begin Phase 1 of the project.

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

[\(AD\)](#): N/A

[\(CV\)](#): First, we'll have to see what the new DART leadership (Amanda Wanke, newly appointed CEO) brings forward with her team. I certainly embrace regional cooperation. We will have to wait to see if our suburban neighbors want to act as a regional body and invest annually? We need "all-in" participation to make this work—especially for residents who rely on public transit.

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?

[\(AD\)](#): I would want to see if there would be a way to determine potential impact and benefit to the Des Moines area before rebates or money is offered to people to purchase new bikes.

[\(CV\)](#): I floated a trial balloon for a similar e-bike program for the current fiscal year (2023-24) but didn't find enough support to move forward. But, I don't give up easily! I proposed a pilot program of \$100,000 to \$200,000 to support an e-bike pilot program for the FY 24-25 department asks. Too early to say if this will get traction.

One of the challenges for Des Moines proper: with one exception (Ichi Bike), most of the e-bikes are sold by suburban retailers. So, depending on how you define "helping the local economy," buying e-bikes locally could primarily benefit suburban shops (with the Ichi exception.)

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?

[\(AD\)](#): N/A

(CV): At the top of my list: remove parking minimums for more or all zones. Not only can we do this, we *should* do this. For a look at what other cities have done:

https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2021/11/23/a-new-way-to-look-at-minimum-parking-requirements?apcid=0060f5c444b5b5bba40b1401&utm_campaign=230508-monday-email&utm_content=230508-monday-email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=orto

The [Strong Towns website](#) is packed with information on how other cities—many the size of Des Moines—have accomplished this. Let’s get on with the discussion.

And another “less:” How ‘bout less speed? For starters, reduce speed in school zones to 15 or 20 mph. And enforce.

I hope we will begin a conversation about lowering the speed limit on residential streets to 20 mph (Twenty is Plenty). But an important part of that effort will be enforcement. We haven’t talked about that—yet. Some cities that have been successful with 20 mph posted speed limits also embrace speed cameras for enforcement. That’s a leap for now, given the current thinking of Iowa Legislature leadership regarding speed cameras.

What should it do more of? I would embrace more projects similar to those awarded funding in the initial round of Safe Streets For All (SS4A) awards. Pretty incredible projects—if you haven’t had a chance to review. So yes, I’d like to see more of similar projects. The five City projects in the High Injury Network (HIN) we applied for via SS4A is a good start. (See June 26 council action for a better description.)

And another more: How ‘bout increasing our paint budget? Continental striping of at least key intersections and crosswalks should be standard—not the exception. And let’s refresh the long lines and crosswalks more frequently. I hope paint will be part of the Vision Zero discussions.

Overall, I think we’re doing a better job of referring to Move DSM and the primary core and secondary bike network when planning improvements. In practice, however, it appears the protected bike lanes receive little consideration. Are buffered bike lanes as good as it will get here? It will take many more voices to get support for protected lanes. Or maybe more decisionmakers seeing protected lanes in other cities? Again, we’re not breaking new ground with protected bike lanes.

Personal Travel Habits

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

(AD): Never

(CV): Daily/Weekly. I haven’t kept track recently. Depends: There are many days that I’m in my Element and on my bike. At one time when there were larger Bike Month competitions, I went 10 days without being in an automobile. And on nights I attend three or more neighborhood meetings, it’s all windshield time.

How often do you ride public transportation in the city?

(AD): Yearly

(CV): Yearly

How often do you drive a car in the city?

(AD): Daily

(CV): Daily. A good day for me: no miles in the car. I had few of those “Carl’s car-less days” before I began knocking doors most evenings, starting in June.

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?

(AD): Yes

(CV): Depends. For example, we have many public meetings for proposed improvements (streets, storm sewers, etc.) hosted at a neighborhood location. A school or library, for example. I’m not sure each and every one of those locations are on a bus route.

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

(AD): Right now, I drive to work, but hope to ride my electric bike soon.

(CV): When I attend meetings at City Hall, I walk approximately five blocks. Easy-peasy. Four coffee shops in walking distance. I’ve lost count of restaurants within walking distance. It’s a rare day I don’t get in 10,000 steps and at least 5 miles behind handlebars.

If the meeting is within a 3-mile radius, bicycling is my first choice—if there’s time! I can’t attend three neighborhood meetings in an evening and get there by bike.