
From: Tim Sarmo

Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2023 9:48 AM

To: John Traylor; robwash50@gmail.com; someoneingj@yahoo.com; Norma West; Kirk Rider; Dennis Kirtland

Subject: Fw: Candidate Questionnaire Grand Junction City Council

Jamie Porta's responses.

Tim

From: jamie porta <jporta281@live.com>

Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2023 11:31 PM

To: restorethebalance@outlook.com <restorethebalance@outlook.com>

Subject: Candidate Questionnaire Grand Junction City Council

1. What qualifications and experience do you have that can give voters confidence that you should be a member of the Grand Junction City Council? Please be specific.

Past Executive board member and past Vice President of IBEW local 111, the electrician's union representing 4,300 members under 40 different working contracts with monthly disbursements around \$500,000 and a general fund of \$7M. Past executive board member, past vice chair and current secretary of Mesa County Democratic Party. Serving on Mesa County One Riverfront volunteer advisory board term 2022-2024. My real experience is having worked, played and lived here for 25 years and creating connections with people who work for and with the city.

2. By now, you have read and considered the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado.

a. Do you endorse each of the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Western Colorado?

YES!

b. If you endorse them all, please explain how you will work to execute these principles.

I will strive to always get the facts and consider the source, methods, biases and motivations behind the information. I am a good listener and believe it's important to make sure that all stakeholders are represented and feel welcomed, safe and valued at the 'the table'. I will happily push back against BS and admit when I make mistakes. I know that we all have more in common than not and I generally try to assume the best of everyone.

c. If there are one or more principles you do not endorse, please identify them and explain why.

Parts bother me...I cannot always understand both sides if one of those sides believes that some people are less worthy of compassion and respect. I will hold my values of equality and justice higher than trying to understanding hate.

3. It is important to let people know that you put the public interest first. In looking back over the past year, are there any decisions the Grand Junction City Council has made that you do not agree with? If yes, how would you have changed them?

The Junction, at the old city market building was originally presented as 10% of the units would be "affordable housing". City Council pivoted to touting the project as an economic development project rather than an affordable housing project and it feels like a bait and switch. With all the concessions and \$2.4M from our general fund and \$3.5M from DDA, I would have insisted on 10% affordable units, or else we should've focused that money towards real affordable housing solutions that we've needed for a long time now.

4. In the aftermath of the January 6th insurrection, studies and security experts are citing increased risks to local governments from extremist groups who now target meetings of city councils and school boards for potential violent protests and demonstrations around false election fraud and conspiracy theories.

a. How would you as a local government official push back against those who are undermining public confidence in free and fair elections?

I attended election judge training in 2018 and have full faith in that institution and tell people to sign up and learn. This seems like a bigger issue than a council member can address. Transparency is always a good thing but until we can force changes to social media algorithms and make 'the media' go back to objective truth and limit so much opinion-based rage baiting, I look to groups like restore the balance. I ask that you do the research into candidates and call out election deniers often and early in the election season.

b. What should be done to protect elected officials and the public from those using harassment to stop civil engagement and the exercise of democratic processes?

Tough question because of the need to balance freedom of speech, and that judging levels of harassment are subjective. I was also on the east side of 5th Street in June 2020 and it was intimidating to see all the guns and people yelling from the west side. You can say that no harm came from that, but multiple black families moved away from GJ within the following year citing issues of safety and bullying in the schools. If there is proof of harassment, I think safety must be prioritized and the people doing the harm should be assessed by a legitimate, trained nonpartisan team and a mediated meeting would be a potential start to a solution. Red flag laws can be used in extreme cases.

5. The City of Grand Junction Charter provides that council elections are to be nonpartisan. What do you think about local political party organizations supporting or opposing council candidates? Will you reject political party endorsements and/or direct contributions to your campaign from political parties; why or why not?

As an active Dem in a very red county, I am proud to say that I believe in the local party's platform and also point out how often we work with unaffiliated voters and independent nonpartisan groups. The Dems rarely endorse local races because it often would do more harm than good. The local GOP prominently has a place on their website for their candidates and it is the right of political parties to endorse whomever they want, regardless of what the candidate

thinks. I am not accepting any contributions, because the election industry is a sad ridiculous waste of money. Every political billboard is money that should've gone to the food bank or a local nonprofit, think of that as you drive around town the next few weeks.

6. In the wake of the recent Orchard Mesa Pool controversy, the question of resolving multi-jurisdictional conflict has arisen.

a. What are your feelings regarding intergovernmental cooperation in the Grand Valley on this or other issues?

I am on the board of One Riverfront and there is so much good work that happens through the intergovernmental agencies. It can be slow and frustrating but every group brings a perspective from their area of focus and expertise. When it works, the benefits are multiplied and the risk and blame is diluted. When it doesn't work you get the OM pool debacle or the fire training center in Whitewater. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities at the onset of these collaborations is critical as well as planning out what happens if any partner fails in their responsibilities. A good mediator with binding arbitration should always be included in the legal language of partnerships to make things fair when no resolution can be found.

b. What approach would you take in dealing with intergovernmental relations and resolving intergovernmental conflicts?

I am a huge proponent of arbitration and mediation. Clear purpose, and regular check-ins with all parties, is necessary to make sure plans develop and stay manageable as organizations and leadership positions change.

c. How would you protect Grand Junction's interests while still serving the most people in the most efficient and cost-effective way?

The people of GJ are also people of Mesa County, and the homeowners are all paying into D51 so in many ways it's all the same money, the people's money, just in different buckets. Always keeping that in mind, work with all the groups, find the original documents and determine what is right. Move quickly to mediation when you get stuck, knowing that lives are being disrupted while all the details get worked out.

7. Homelessness and affordable housing have been identified as problems in Grand Junction that affect large segments of our City's population; including young people, families and the elderly. What actions do you think the City should take to address these problems?

First realize and acknowledge that these problems are the end results of a lack of jobs that pay a livable wage. Some actions would be to limit whole house short term rentals, and make it easier to convert existing structures to ADUs. Enforce existing codes and assess nuisance fees on vacant property owners who neglect their property, lower the neighbor's home values, and sit on property until it's more financially advantageous to sell or just use it as a write off. Remove the city code regarding group living that limit unrelated cohabitators to 4 people. Any new developments must include 10% affordable units or they get zero incentives or concessions. Limit how much rent can increase without proof of improvement. Educate renters on their rights and pressure landlords and property owners to maintain their rental units.

8. Economic development is listed as one of Grand Junction's strategic priorities. According to the City's 2023 adopted budget summary, economic development spending will constitute 8% (\$19.5 million) of the total combined budget.

a. What means would you utilize to evaluate the merit and effectiveness of the city's economic development strategy?

If it creates jobs that pay a living wage that will keep up with the cost of living. If it fulfills a need of the community, such as another grocery store, affordable child care services, mental health support, etc. Have a feedback group of local activists that represent stakeholders and marginalized groups to get their input on how they feel their communities might be impacted by such economic developments in the very beginning stages of planning and thru to completion.

b. What steps would you take to determine that the level of funding for the city's economic development strategy is appropriate or should be increased or decreased?

The cost of inaction must be considered. There must be a feedback loop to constantly assess the value and benefits of the strategy to all stakeholders. Create a safe open communication with the city employees, they have so much experience and see all of the city, the waste and the areas that could be improved. There is a resource of knowledge and insight in our city workforce that we should use and reward.

c. If elected, how would you ensure that funding the city's economic development strategy is fair to new businesses, existing businesses, taxpayers who are not business owners, as well as well as pro-growth and no-growth interests?

Focus on the quality of life of the people that live and work here. I support the strategic plan and if we focus on that as the guide, then it's as fair as you can get it. Make sure the planning includes the stakeholders, the people that will be doing the actual work, input from vulnerable communities and ways to hold entities accountable if they misrepresent their interests or misuse funds. Keep developers off of community boards as it presents huge conflicts of interest.

9. Are there City expenditures that you think could be reduced without sacrificing City residents' quality of life or fiscal responsibility? Are there City expenditures that you think should be increased?

Reduce spending: I know that there are and the city employees could provide and extensive list if they felt valued and safe communicating that either in person or anonymously. Listen to the workers and we could make huge improvements and savings in every department, increase morale and safety. My random suggestion is to stop fluoridating the drinking water as Palisade did in 2012. Do an extensive water audit. Stop watering at 5th street/ riverside parkway interchange, install art instead. Lighting audit, support dark sky initiatives and lower the city's power bill.

Increase spending: Pay the police enough to fill all the open positions and put a cap on overtime. Build more fire stations and staff them adequately to be responsive to our population as well as all the support work they do for surrounding areas. More street sweeping of bike lanes to encourage usage as we have the climate to be a much more bike friendly city.

10. What do you feel are three OTHER important issues and or concerns facing the City of Grand Junction and what solutions do you have in mind?

1) We need to have access to the canal roads for safe public travel, and safe routes to school, reference H.R. 3684 to get it done, and protect the irrigation companies from liability. 2) Educate and implement rank choice voting for city municipal elections. This is a tool which can help break the political duopoly that is tearing us apart. 3) City employees and contractors should adopt project labor agreements that use best value matrixes, prevailing wages and hire locally. I remember when SEMA won the Riverside parkway project because they had the lowest bid and it was a mess. They brought crews from Denver that didn't care about quality, caused extensive damage to existing utilities that were stuck with the cost of repairs, and then took all our tax money back to the front range. Skilled labor isn't cheap, and cheap labor isn't skilled.

- Jamie Porta