

Overview of the September 19th Candidate Forum Hosted by Bend Chamber of Commerce [revised 9/27]

This summary is intended to overview the candidate statements and positions stated at this event. It doesn't try to take into account other forums or social media materials. The primary purpose is to call out "points of fact" statements that should be considered/clarified by current candidates and their campaign teams. This document is in 3 parts: first, fact-checking, followed by the candidate's main priorities. Lastly, a brief overview is included of the critical leadership junction our community is facing in this election.

I used my notes taken at the forum, the newspaper article and a transcript of the entire meeting. The first part relies heavily on my previous research on specific issues and includes embedded links to allow you to verify the basis for the points raised.

PART 1 - FACT CHECKING

Has the candidate made statements of fact that can be verified or objectively measured?

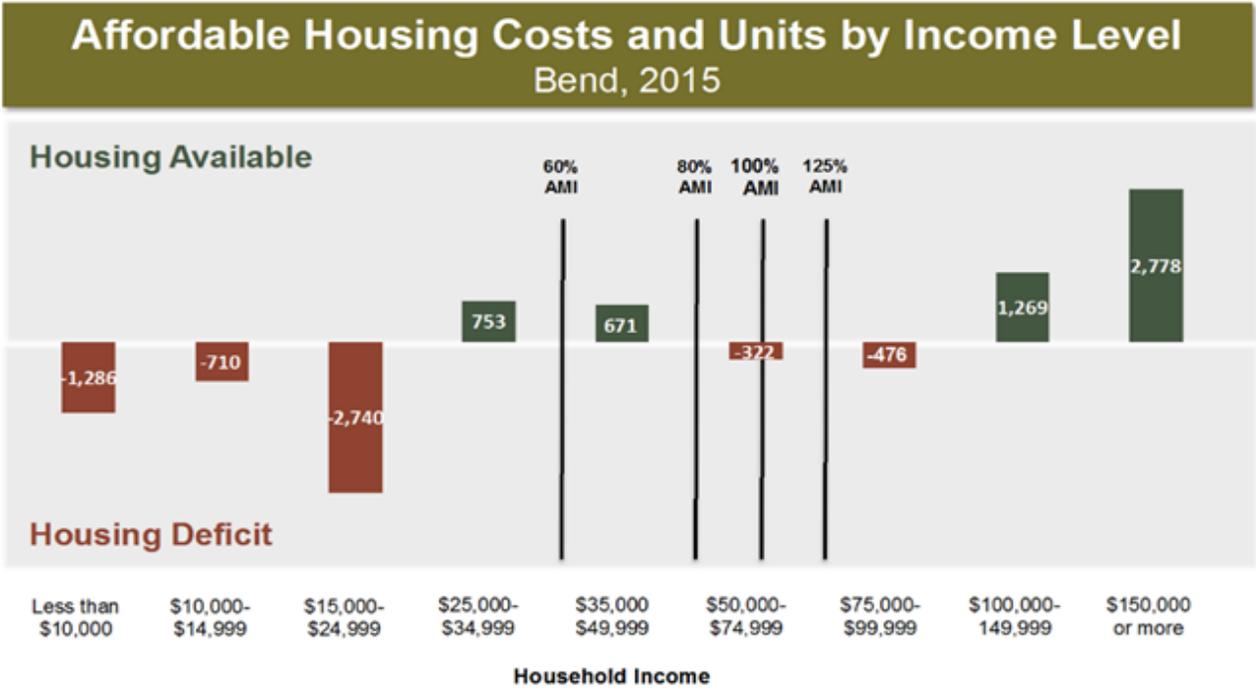
Below are the statements of "facts" that seem questionable. I didn't list "facts" which are likely true. Please be aware this review is not intended to offer an opinion on whether proposed actions will be effective. There are a number of actions called out which will probably not be effective and it would take too long to address them all.

Melanie Kebler:

- **HB2001 BDC amendments led to more housing types and more housing**
 - It did not lead to more housing types. Bend Development Code already allowed all five middle housing building types in all residential except for one scenario (Quad-plexes in RS zone). Here is a [link to a relevant Bulletin editorial](#). *(I authored this editorial. I was a member of a planning department citizen ad hoc committee for HB2001 and completed the research required by the Bulletin for publication. See [page 11](#) of this document.)*
 - There is no evidence that the amendments led to more housing. The city has a GIS platform called Bend Land Information System. Pre-2022 this platform allowed the user to look at specific housing types for whatever

time period the user chooses. Unfortunately, the platform has been modified to eliminate this important feature which allowed tracking.

- **Behind by 4,000 units?**
 - Melanie didn't state the source of this figure unfortunately. It may or may not be correct.
 - I can state the last "[Housing Needs Analysis](#)" was completed as part of the 2016 Urban Growth Boundary Expansion effort.
 - Following is an exhibit from the Affordable Housing webpage. It relies on data from the "needs analysis".



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- An update to this analysis has been delayed repeatedly.
- Shouldn't we be concerned why this seven-year-old data has not been kept up to date? (FYI, The 2015 date refers to when the data and report was completed. The UGB expansion was completed in the following year.)

- FYI. The state’s DLCD office is working on new rules for the what DLCD now refers to as “housing capacity” or “housing production strategy”. These pending rules call for the analysis to be centered on “equity.”
- Melanie said we have to be data driven and understand our community’s needs.
 - Is the Council/staff relying only on 2015 data?
 - In early 2015, Melanie complained about the “high cost of parking.” She claimed the consumer pays for parking in their rent. This concept is a popular blogging theme based on one researcher’s work. In my many years as a developer and as a landlord, I believed the rent/sale price is solely based on the market factors. When I needed to release a space, brokers would do market research. None would ask me what my project costs were. Instead of relying solely on my experience, I interviewed over 15 property managers in Bend and found all agreed that the market sets the prices, not the project’s cost.
 - Is Melanie’s “data” limited to what she can find in online blogs?
- **UGB expansion is not the answer (“*what immediate steps to address housing for Bend’s workers*”)**
 - Barbara Campbell highlighted the approval of expansion of the boundary to include the Steven’s tract in the Southeast which will include about 2,500 units plus 20 acres of affordable housing). The city recently approved an “Area Plan” for the elbow which will be an important expansion. There have been other expansions completed that were identified in the 2016 Urban Growth Boundary expansion.
 - Is Melanie stating all near future residential units should be restricted to just the “Opportunity Areas and “expansion areas” should not be brought into the city? Here is a very informative city document, [Bend Urban Growth Boundary Implementation](#).
- **Can’t build our way out (“relieve congestion question”). Mike and Ariel also repeated this slogan. Below is the title of the Resolution of the 2020 GO Bond that was submitted to the community and approved by voters in November 2020:**

Resolution No. 3217 – A resolution of the Bend City council submitting a ballot measure to the electors of Bend for the issuance of general obligation bonds for traffic flow, east-west connections, and neighborhood safety improvement.

Here is language in the introduction to the GO Bond city webpage:

This bond measure will pay to build priority projects in every part of the city to:

- *Improve traffic flow and east-west connections*
- *Improve neighborhood safety*

- **The Transportation System Plan was designed to “build our way out” by multi-modal biking, walking and transit, plus street improvements!**
 - The GO Bond is the first installment towards implementing the [Transportation System Plan](#). It was developed using the 2016 zoning including the expansion areas and opportunity areas, to provide housing for the forecasted 2040 population. Staff, Citywide Transportation Advisory Committee and Council spent over two years creating a plan to fulfill the needs of the forecasted population. FYI. Mike and Ariel were on the committee.
 - Most of us accept that **all** congestion issues cannot be addressed. However, Melanie’s (along with Mike and Ariel) statement clearly demonstrates that “congestion” has a very low priority to her.
 - Meanwhile the projects included in the GO Bond were intended to be a balance between congestion relief projects, neighborhood safety projects and multi-modal projects (walking, biking, and transit).
 - Below are some additional links to documents that provide the count of vehicles, walking and biking.
 - [Multi-modal shares webpage](#)
 - [Design elements of Low Stress Bicycle network](#)
 - **Time for a reality check. Read page 93 of the city adopted 2020 Transportation System Report.** With all the rhetoric about the emphasis on multi-modal, the report estimates the amount of shift from Single Occupant Vehicle trips to other modes is only 3.5%. Doesn’t this statistic imply that most of the transportation needs will continue to be satisfied by vehicles and the other modes didn’t save the day? The TSP demonstrates that vehicles will remain as the primary mode.
 - [Transportation System Plan](#)
 - Here is an example. The Midtown Crossing studies is a current GO Bond project which is demonstrating staff and their team of consultants don’t place priority on addressing congestion. The proposed “road diet” on Greenwood Avenue will increase congestion. Here a link to a recently [published Bulletin editorial](#). It is the footnoted version which was provided to the Bulletin to verify the findings within the editorial. A Council work

session is schedule for Oct. 19th for Council to give staff direction on which of the concepts staff should focus on the Midtown Crossing Concepts. It will rely on the July open house findings which admits the public feedback doesn't represent a statistically valid survey. It will include testimony from two advisory committees, CAAB and TBOC. Public testimony is not allowed in work sessions.

Chris Piper:

- “Ease the uncertainty” on what the city assistance will be to spur BCD. To be fair, this is half correct/half incorrect. Observers can point to a number of steps made to date.
 - Bend Central District development code amendments
 - Advisory Board in place
 - Assigned City Staff
 - Tax increment financing (TIF) through the establishment of an Urban Area Renewal district.
 - Property tax relief concepts being considered.
 - But Chris is correct to state a long list of tasks still need to be done to give developers a clear and complete picture of what they can expect to establish a “proforma.” All developers place a high priority on being in “control their own destiny.”

Barbara Campbell: She makes no questionable statements of fact.

Karon Johnson: She makes no questionable statements of fact.

NOTE: By now, some individuals might claim candidates are incorrect to state: a) “not listening” and b) “not applying the math.” There are numerous examples that can substantiate both claims. As Karon said, the devil is in the details. As mentioned in the introduction, this review is not taking on the lengthy task of providing the basis for all the correct statements of fact.]

Ariel Mendez:

- ***Average household spends 35% of their income on housing.***
- ***Average household spends 30% of their income on transportation.***
 - Ariel didn't provide his source of data. I made a quick scan of the American Community Survey website (U.S. Census Bureau) but struck out.
 - The typical rule of thumb to qualify for housing is housing rent or P&I cannot exceed 30%.
 - According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021 Consumer Expenditure Survey, American "consumer units spent an average of \$15,495.2 on food, clothing and health care combined, while paying an average in taxes of \$16,729.73 in total taxes to federal, state, and local governments. This data makes Ariel's figure for transportation expenses very suspicious.
 - He should provide his source. Why does he make this claim? This figure is probably intended to imply the average household spends too much on transportation and is the result of relying on personal vehicles. There are many bloggers who claim other modes of transportation as a more economical choice over a personal vehicle. Most of the bloggers don't provide solid evidence for this claim. Ariel has not made a case.
- **Can't build our way out.**
 - Same inaccurate statement as Melanie for the same reasons provided above.

Julia Brown:

- **Soft costs are 1/3 of the overall costs of a development.**
 - She blamed processing as the culprit. The typical source would be an actual complete proforma. In my forty plus years, I have never seen a proforma that would demonstrate "processing" would be 1/3 the cost. She should provide the source for her claim.

Rick Johns:

- **He states that the GO Bond projects are mostly about multi-modal transportation and less about "congestion" projects.**
 - I would have to disagree. In early 2020, I sat through the negotiations between the two supporters of multi-modal and the two supporters of primarily street projects. The City manager kept a scorecard to track how much was spent in each and to attempt to arrive at a 50/50 split.

[Rick was uncertain about what happened to Reed Market Road. He is in the majority of the community who are puzzled with what the community received from the original GO Bond and who are frustrated with the cost to essentially redo a portion of the street before the original bond is even paid off. I believe I know the history and will reach out to Rick. This is not really a fact check comment.]

Mike Riley:

- **A lot can't afford cars.**
 - Unfortunately, Mike didn't offer a % share but his use of "a lot" implies that it is a significant number. Melanie claimed it was 10% in one of her first Council meetings in 2021. Using the American Community Survey website, their number was 5%. Is that a significant number?
 - What will be the percentage in 2040? Who knows? There will be a lot of factors. Manufactures are planning to only produce EV cars long before 2040 but what will be the cost of EV vehicles? Will the government still offer subsidies? Will the implementation of the Transportation System Plan make it more convenient for doing without? Will Bend be a place where gentrification makes Bend a town of well-to-do retirees? Is his statement relevant to this election? Probably not.

Part II - Candidate's main priorities as presented at this forum to the best of my ability.

Melanie Kebler:

- Application of an equity lens including on make appointments over merit
- Anti-sprawl / no UGB expansion /climate friendly, but provide housing for workers
- Promote biking, walking and transit (can't build our way out)
- Parking should not be free (Spring 2021 comment)
- Anti-gentrification
- Continue the implementation of the homelessness code work created by the current council.

Chris Piper:

- Common sense approach
- Engage neighborhood associations
- Bring a balance and openness to city government
- No political agenda
- Focus on fundamentals of traditional city governance
- Hold the Transportation Bond Oversight Committee accountable
- Increase housing affordability (Expand the UGB and streamline process)
- Foster a collaborative environment (with building industry and businesses)
- Complete multi-modal and street projects of the GO Bond
- Strategic homelessness plan that is matrix-based with accountability

Barbara Campbell:

- Build out Bend Central District as planned (In the 6 years after zoning in place, no tall mixed-use residential projects were built?)
- Protect environment
- Staff adequately
- Follow advisory boards recommendations
- Diverse advisory boards [in separate source, she fully supports the equity lens application the council has applied very broadly]

Karon Johnson:

- Public Safety
- Council not listening
- Devil is in the detail (data-based decisions)
- No one is performing the market analysis to solve housing
- Don't reinvent the wheel (look for effective examples in other jurisdictions)
- Revise portions of the new homelessness code
- Shelters need supervision

Ervin (Madison Bergen, campaign manager)

- Bold actions
- Provide affordable housing
- Increase resources and support for homelessness
- Work together

Ariel Mendez:

- More affordable housing (no specifics given)
- Biking that works for children
- Can't build our way out (congestion)
- Reduce the need for cars

Sean Sipe:

- Bring a business perspective
- Non-partisan (no political agenda)
- Knowledgeable in housing
- Fiscal accountability
- Providing housing can't be just about small dwellings. It is all sizes of residential units on a variety of lot sizes. [2020 community survey found majority still want single family residents].
- Businesses feel disregarded.
- Current homelessness impact to the community cannot continue in the same way.
- Don't turn Bend into Portland.

Julia Brown:

- Denser housing reduces the need for cars
- Reduce the cost of permits and complexity of city codes

Rick Johns:

- Community voices not being heard
- No personal agenda
- Permits are too hard to get
- Reduce congestion for vehicles instead of banking on biking to reduce congestion
- Apply a business approach (instead of politically correct approach)
- Use a voice of reason
- Ask the right questions

Mike Riley:

- Grow but respect the culture
- Implement the GO Bond
- Follow the adopted Transportation System Plan and Comprehensive Plan with its complete neighborhoods).

- Prevent sprawl
- Implement and enforce homelessness code (starts with compassion)

Part III - The City of Bend is at a junction point for our community's leadership:

The candidate's positions offer a clear distinction between two groups of candidates: **Status quo** vs a **return to common sense**

#1 Stack the deck or our community needs a "balance."

Our current leaders have the same perspective and that perspective is repeated in the appointment in city advisory committees. **The best governance is a product of multiple perspectives which represent all the community, not just one view.** Opposing views lead to a "tempered" product, one where healthy debate has taken place.

#2 Lip service or our community needs to be engaged.

The current council has failed to engage the community. Their attempts to do so often amount to "thank you for your comments and now, sit down and shut up". Their example is repeated in many of the inadequate community engagement of staff and advisory committees.

"I believe that development code amendments should be left to the professionals."(Planning Commission Chair testimony to Council on HB2001 code amendments. The Planning Commission is the designated "community involvement" committee.)

#3 Trust but not verify or city governance accountability to the community.

Accountability to the community begins with a Council motivated to ask the right questions of staff and consultants. To remember *who* they work for. As an example, **staff participant(s) on state advisory committee advocate for limiting or eliminating local input on rules** or "*Our community, our code*" (City of Bozeman)

Does our city ensure compliance with statewide goals?

Goal #1 - community involvement in their community's land use planning

Goal #2 - A process that ensures a basis exists for decisions made

Goal #10- Provides housing need for all income levels

#4 Political agenda or community agenda

Compare candidates priorities with community priorities from statistically valid surveys. Find ways to incorporate the non-statistically valid surveys to learn more about community desires [\[Dec 2020 community survey\]](#).

#5 Anti-sprawl top priority or affordability priority

Why is Juniper Ridge not being used as an asset to reduce the barrier to low cost land? Do we have a housing shortage or a job shortage!

Per 2011 U.S.Census Bureau data, nearly half of Bend employees commute from outside Bend.

#6 Equity priority or merit priority

Council appoints members to Council Advisory Boards and other committees based on "DEI" instead of qualifications. Appointing qualified individuals while still ensuring common sense equity results is possible.

#7 Selected data based decisions or objective data based decisions

When tasked with investigating topics, does Council and/or staff choose data to justify the Council or staff *desired* outcomes? Do individual priorities guide solutions?

#8 Enabling a homelessness lifestyle or a holistic strategy to create a path to self-sufficiency that includes compassion and personal accountability.

#9 Focus on biking, walking, transit or focus on streets along with biking, walking, transit