



## Applicant for Missoula County Commissioner Vacancy Questionnaire 2015

Missoula County Democrats believe “the well-being of future generations is the primary responsibility of government and the lens through which policymaking in areas as diverse as energy, transportation, education, health care, human rights and taxation should be focused.” We are asking you to complete this questionnaire to highlight your views. Questionnaires should be returned, with the resumes and letter of interest, to Todd Mowbray at [secretary@missoulademocrats.org](mailto:secretary@missoulademocrats.org) no later than July 17th before the Missoula County Democratic Central Committee applicant forum and meeting on July 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm in the City Council Chambers. Thank you for your willingness to serve.

Name: **Jim Parker**

Political Party

**Democrat**  Republican  Independent  Other Party  Prefer not to say

### Contact Information

Address: 1875 Missoula Avenue

City and Zip Code: Missoula, MT 59802

Phone: 406.396-0985

Email: [westridge@montana.com](mailto:westridge@montana.com)

**How long have you resided in Missoula County Commissioner District #2**

15 yrs

**Are you planning to run for County Commissioner in 2016?**  Yes  No

**If not, have you endorsed another candidate for that seat? Who?**

No I have not.

**What are your credentials for running as a Democrat?**

I've been a registered Democrat, and voting the Democratic ballot, since I began voting at age 18 (I am now 57).

I have been actively involved in Democratic politics in MT since moving here in 1989. I have supported local school board, city, county, legislative and statewide Democratic candidates as a volunteer and consultant since 1989. After starting my business, WestRidge Creative in 1999, I

have continued professionally to manage and run Democratic candidates campaigns for elected office locally and statewide. I have been involved in well over 100+ Democratic political campaigns in that time.

Additionally I have been a staff member for Union based organizations, and consultant for many local and statewide unions since 1989. I have supported and participated in Missoula County Democratic Party functions and activities since 1989.

**Please list people who have endorsed your candidacy**

Since deciding to put my name in to be nominated to serve out Commissioner Carey's position as a Missoula County Commissioner, and only serve the remainder of his term as a 'placeholder' candidate and not run for the office in 2016, I have called or met with all of the Missoula County Central Committee members who have voting rights towards the three names to be forwarded to the Commissioners. Many of these folks I have known since moving here in 1989 (or since then), as I have worked with many of them on Democratic candidate elections, and Democratic Party issues and events.

I have asked all of them for their consideration and vote in the nomination process.

I have also discussed my plans and hopes for the nomination with our Missoula Democratic legislators, elected office holders, and members on the City Council who hold Democratic leanings.

I have not asked them to officially endorse me but rather to vote for me and/or support me if they feel I am the best candidate for the job. I will await their decisions, based on my credentials, skills, and merit to holding this office.

**What is your vision for Missoula County's future? Please elaborate on short-term goals (over the remainder of Commissioner Carey's term) and long-term goals as well as the means available to achieve these goals.**

Since I will not be running for the job in 2016 I will speak to my vision as a placeholder candidate for the remainder of Commissioner Carey's position, roughly 14 months of public service.

My vision starts with, as State law dictates for this process, continuing to be a good Democrat. To this end I will state my full support for the state and county Democratic Party platforms, issues, policies, and ethics. I will be guided by these principles as I serve our citizens.

My vision, if nominated to the County Commission, will be to work closely with the other two Democratic Commissioners and support positive ongoing work already underway for the county's citizens. To this end I have been attending Commissioner meetings for several weeks in order to 'get up to speed' and do additional research on ongoing administrative and policy work so, if nominated, I can actively engage immediately with the other two Commissioners on ongoing work such as budget issues, subdivision regulations, the renewal of the Growth Management Policy. I also have great interest to support ongoing research and discussions that support alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders; and other county priorities already underway such as the DOJ requirements that the County enact to more effectively respond to and prosecute sexual assault cases.

I also envision bringing my skill sets into the discussions in order to enhance positive decisions affecting all of Missoula County citizens. I have a great deal of experience with: growth

management; parklands, trails, and open space; poverty, low-income and affordability concerns; and global climate changes and energy choices that will affect our lives in Missoula County. I will also serve with an absolute commitment to reject bigotry, racism, prejudice and discrimination.

I do not plan to come forward with 'an agenda' to try and push through during the remainder of Commissioner Carey's term of office, nor will I ignore the importance to make decisions compassionately, with the best interests of our citizens always at the forefront.

### **Why do you want to be a Missoula County Commissioner?**

I am seeking the current nomination, as a placeholder candidate, for several reasons:

1. Because I believe in the value of public service and I believe I am a qualified candidate for the job. It is also a good time in my life to serve and give back to the community I live in, and the citizens I am responsible to, should I receive the nomination.
2. Because I am a passionate Democrat seeking to fulfill Commissioner Carey's term in the most complete, productive and comprehensive way.
3. As a qualified placeholder candidate, rather than focusing on an election (in small or large ways), I will be completely focused and engaged in the County's current daily business and focusing on our citizen's concerns fulltime throughout the remainder of the term.
4. Because we have several qualified Democrats already announcing their intent to run for this office in 2016 I feel that the fairest way to support that democratic process is to choose a qualified candidate that will fill out the current term, but not run for the office in 2016.
5. Because I will do my homework and conduct necessary research in advance of the nomination so that, if chosen, I will be ready to serve fully from day one and will stay focused on the job at hand until the last day of the term.

### **What leadership or board experience has prepared you for serving on the Board of County Commissioners?**

I have been involved in city and county politics and policy since moving to Montana in 1989. I have served on several citizen organizations and government boards that were involved in growth management and open space work (Smart Growth Missoula, Citizen Advocates for a Livable Missoula, the Open Space Bond Committee and Open Space Advisory Committee); I have worked as a community and labor activist supporting labor unions, community groups and low income folks (Montana People's Action, Montana Community-Labor Alliance, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union); I served on the Casey Foundation Board for multi-cultural concerns; and over the years I have worked on campaign finance reform, greater access to voting rights, and the expansion of basic human rights for all. All these efforts speak to my community engagement and deep interest in our political process, as a leader and communicator.

In addition, for the last seventeen years I have worked with folks in our community volunteering to support kids and families that have lost a loved one (Tamarack Grief Resource Center), and as a hospice volunteer (Partners In Home Care Hospice). Most recently I have been serving on the Board of the Hospice Care Foundation supporting our community hospice and palliative care

organizations. These opportunities have deepened my appreciation and understanding of how important it is to support ways for all of us to live a quality life.

Generally and specifically I have been active over the years supporting public education issues, conservation and environmental issues, living wage campaigns, peace and social justice issues, global warming concerns affecting our future energy policies, and anti-discrimination ordinance campaigns. These are fundamental to Democratic Party beliefs and I am proud to have been a part of these efforts.

**What do you see as the three biggest challenges facing Missoula County and what would be your objectives in facing those challenges during the one-year appointment, if appointed?**

1. The re-write of the County's Growth Management Plan. I was part of the planning for and implementation of the first Growth Policy Plan for the City and County of Missoula back in the '90s. I remain steadfast that we must both grow in a way desirable to meet our county's needs and in a way that's sustainable and affordable for our county government and citizens. I also believe our growth must meet standards that protect our air and water quality now and for future generations. If nominated, I will be an active Commissioner throughout these discussions and will eagerly seek community comments and priorities that will help shape a plan we can all support and that meets our values and ongoing community vision.

2. The re-write of the County Subdivision regulations. This is an ongoing process that will continue well into the term I hope to be nominated to finish. The County has an exceptional planning department (CAPS) and staff. As a Commissioner I would look forward to rolling up my sleeves and engaging with our staff to both understand and advance the necessary changes to our subdivision regulations to produce clear, explicit, and efficient regulatory controls that will support the ability for developers to have certainty in the process while protecting the values our citizens seek, as we develop and grow our community.

3. Supporting the newly elected administrations in the County Sheriff's office and the County Attorney's office. The new leadership for these important county departments, offer great opportunities for our County residents. I whole-heartedly support the ongoing work these departments have been and are making to meet and exceed the DOJ's critical requirements for advancing pro-active responses to and prosecution of sexual assault cases in our community, in conjunction with the University and City.

I also intend, if nominated, to support ongoing work by the Sheriff's office seeking solutions to jail overcrowding and unnecessary incarceration for non-violent offenders.

These two initiatives need the full support of the Commissioners, and the public, to be successful and I intend to lend my time and support as needed.

**Following the City of Missoula and the University of Montana, the County is working with the Department of Justice in a settlement over the prosecution of sexual assault, how would you ensure that the county's actions go above and beyond the basic requirements?**

It is clear we have the right folks in place to work with the DOJ on this profoundly important issue facing our community. It will be the Commissioner's role to fully support the County Attorney's department and Sheriff's department as they complete the needed changes to support the DOJ requirements. And then it will be up to the County Commissioners to support the ongoing work and budget implications to support the new policies put in place by these departments. It may also fall, in part, upon the Commissioner's office to engage the public to understand and get behind the new policies and have knowledge and tools to act individually in order to prevent these crimes from occurring and knowing best practices to support victims of these crimes if they occur.

**Missoula County has had to pay out millions in settlements recently. How could the County Commissioners help county departments, and other County Elected Offices reduce harmful court cases and costs?**

The County Commissioners do not run county departments where leaders are elected by popular vote of the people, such as the County Attorney's department and Sheriff's departments. Commissioners do secure the budgets of these departments, but do not manage the day-to-day activities and decisions made to carry forth the business.

Settlements are most often the result of improper behaviors of one or more persons in various departments, sometimes the very same elected officials. It is difficult to reduce such offenses other than to support efforts, through voter education, to elect the best, most ethical and professional leaders to run our county offices. Yet, when these cases do arise we must, as a community and as elected officials seek justice for those either wrongfully treated or to discipline or replace those found guilty of wrongful behaviors.

**Due to diminishing Federal and state support, local property owners have had to pick up the tab on basic infrastructure. What are your opinions for Local Option Tax including the Local Option Gas Tax?**

I believe it's important to maintain the opportunity to utilize every tool available to local governments and citizens including Local Option Taxes. These tax options should not be proposed without specific needs expressed for their purpose and measurable ways to be implemented to meet those needs. If brought forward to the people for a vote it's incumbent upon the local government to present cogent and adequate education about these tax measures to insure voters can make good choices whether in support or opposition to the proposed tax.

**What, if any, tradeoffs do you see between agriculture and development? What, if any, regulatory approach should be taken given the tradeoff you perceive?**

I truly believe that maintaining a certain amount of agricultural lands is a benefit to citizens and our community, and that we should impose realistic opportunities, through regulations to maintain a stockpile of viable agricultural lands before they are gone. Once gone, they can never be restored.

If citizens value the ability to source food products grown locally then it's incumbent upon the leaders to propose ways to do so, with the least harm to those who currently own such lands and wish to sell them for development.

**How would you use development regulations to ensure a sustainable pattern of development?**

Sustainable development is a tricky phrase, meaning different things to different people. To me, sustainable development means we grow in such a way that we can afford to maintain and take care of both the developments that require public services, and the level of expected services folks living in these developments will need, to live well. And we need to do this without unduly burdening those who already live in our community and are already paying for services through their taxes.

**How would you work to build a spirit of shared community between the diverse segments of Missoula County, especially the rural and urban parts?**

I believe the county leaders already do a good job balancing the diverse needs and interests of our rural and urban populations in Missoula County. Through positive structures such as local Community Councils serving our rural populations, to greater communication between rural residents and the Commission and other county departments, much of the antagonism between rural and urban citizenry has been reduced. To that end we can always do more. I would add my commitment, to that of the other two Commissioners, to enhance responsiveness to rural concerns and management of county resources to respond as fully as possible to issues brought forward by Councils and individuals in both rural and urban settings.

**Missoula County recently decided to appoint, rather than assign to an elected clerk and recorder, election administration duties. Would you support making the election administrator an elected official again? And how will you evaluate the effectiveness of elections office as it exists today?**

Before critiquing the current system I would want to evaluate its effectiveness and discuss this issue with current leaders serving our citizens incorporating their best knowledge and reviews of the past and current system employed. Some positions should be elected through public voting and be directly responsible to the voters, and other positions are best appointed by those already acting as leaders who intimately know best practices. Ultimately my decision rests on the way that best responds to citizen's needs, through efficiencies and professionalism and ability to complete the job at hand.

**What are your plans for economic development in Missoula County?**

As a placeholder intending to finish Commissioner Carey's term, I feel the most responsible effort I can make in this regard is to follow and support policies already in place by our two elected Commissioners. These leaders were elected by the people to, among other things, manage

economic development to best serve the citizen's needs. As an appointed official, I believe that I should be a good team player. Yet, I will not withhold any suggestions I believe may enhance the work currently ongoing. For instance, as a marketing professional (I own and have been managing a small marketing/advertising firm since 1999), I may have some valuable suggestions on ways to implement policies intended to vitalize our economic development options. If that's the case, I would be proud to use those strengths to advance positive momentum to reach our goals.

**What is your opinion of the amount raised and allocation of the County levy to support poverty reduction efforts?**

Honestly and sadly, I can't imagine we'll ever be able to allocate enough resources for the needs we face as a County to protect and support those in great need. Yet, I believe our leaders are doing most everything they can with the budgets they have to manage poverty reduction efforts as well as possible. I would support ongoing collaborative efforts to manage greater resources between the city and county and nonprofit sectors to share the burden of costs while delivering the most beneficial and measurable poverty reduction efforts possible.

The current *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* is such an example. It has a lofty goal we can all support yet the amount of money and resources needed to act on the priorities identified will take more partners (beyond City and County resources available) than currently allocated.

As a community we will have to decide where our dollars are best spent to meet the compassionate goals we've identified to meet poverty reduction priorities.

**The guiding principle of the City of Missoula's growth policy for five years has been Focus Inward. What, if anything, should the County Commission do about that?**

The vision behind the *Focus Inward Initiative* is sound. Encouraging new growth in the direction of existing infrastructure, current neighborhoods, and public services just makes good sense both from an economic perspective and a quality of life sense. Citizens in Missoula County also value their open spaces, parks and trails, neighborhood configurations (and plans), and their unique opportunities presented from a more rural lifestyle.

Yet growth is occurring. Maintaining the distinctive and valued qualities of rural lifestyles identified throughout our county by its citizens must be a priority. Equally we must manage growth to sustain these priorities without endangering our values that include clean air and water. We do not, through unregulated growth, wish to destroy the very lifestyles we currently cherish, including the level of public services we seek. This is the county's challenge as we move forward.

Much as the *Focus Inward Initiative* suggests, we must reach a balance to address these concerns and recognize how they can support each other through consistent and sustainable policies.

I feel that City and County government leaders should, when possible, be supportive and complimentary partners to improve quality of life issues, objectives, programs, and goals for our citizens as we grow our community. Our government policies must be flexible enough to speak

both to the issues confronting our rural communities and the growth pushing into the county from the urban fringes.

**Should the County Commission continue its support for replacing the Maclay Bridge at North Avenue with a bridge at South Avenue?**

My understanding is that this is a project already supported by the County Commission with contracts signed for the first, and very important stages of due diligence work insuring this project will be safe, efficiently managed, staying within budget, and passing all state and federal regulations as to its management and development that will protect and safeguard both the land and water resources as well as providing for the least intrusive management decisions and interruptions for those who live adjacent to this project.