

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PLANNING COMMISSION CANDIDATE

CANDIDATE: Robert Bierma

PLEASE RESPOND IN WRITING BY: Thursday, December 30, 2021, at 5 p.m.

PLEASE SEND TO: Lynda Rose
Assistant to Mayor Chuck Bennett
VIA EMAIL: lrose@cityofsalem.net
OR VIA FAX: 503-588-6354

1. Please explain your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Planning Commission.

My understanding of the role of a planning commissioner is to evaluate whether zoning and land use decisions meet the city's codes and planning goals. Based on this evaluation a recommendation for city council on what action(s) will be voted on and forwarded to city council. Another role is to help evaluate the current city code and, within a comprehensive process, make recommendations for changes to the code to the city council that better promote the city's vision goals for itself. I see a commissioner's responsibilities as executing these two primary roles to the best of my ability. Another responsibility as a commissioner is to stay informed of relevant information for making planning decisions. This being primarily in two buckets, one current best practices in the field of planning, and two everything local happening in the city and region.

2. What skills, knowledge and perspectives do you possess that will enable you to be an effective member of the Commission?

I was on both the bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee, and the urban renewal advisory committee in Medford, OR. I also participated in the tail end of Medford's transportation system planning process as well as engaged as a citizen on many planning efforts happening in Medford. I will also say I have stayed up to date watching all of the Salem planning commissions meetings since I moved to Salem in late spring. Beyond this I will say that for that last decade one of the biggest passions for me has been urban design and the built environment. A very large portion of the content I consume is about the built environment in some way or another and I hope to use this information to help make better planning decisions

3. One of the most common application types you will hear at the Planning Commission is a Comprehensive Plan Change and Zone Change, where an applicant wants to change their

zoning to facilitate a development proposal. What is your perspective regarding responding to the current market versus maintaining a long-term vision?

In general I would say I favor maintaining a long-term vision. As I understand it, legally, decisions must be made based on what the code says at the time of the application and the place to address potential misalignments between the code and the community's vision for the city is part of a comprehensive planning process and not one off decisions. All that being said I understand that sometimes there are cases where there is some amount of ambiguity in the code or there are different code objectives that come into conflict with each other. In such cases I will try to look at the decision comprehensively and use my best judgment, with a prioritization on what decisions create the greatest long term community value.

4. What are some examples of how you believe Salem has done a good job of land use and transportation planning? What are some areas for improvement?

I will start out by saying that part of the reason my wife and I have decided to locate and are planning on making Salem our long term home is the effort that has been put into strategically investing and revitalizing downtown and the urban core of Salem. While there's so much more to be done on this front, the decisions made so far have put Salem in a good position to see a substantial amount of its new growth happen in its urban core.

Of particular noteworthiness has been the city's park system, with the waterfront and Minto Brown being the best example. I really think getting the Pringle Creek trail connected to the waterfront needs to be a major priority.

I would also say that I am generally very happy with the code changes being made in the latest code update.

I would argue like most cities, the area with the most challenges and frankly missed opportunities is in the city's transportation planning. I would like to see a much more robust pedestrian and bicycle network across the city. I am glad that the city council rejected the proposed new bridge. I think there's an opportunity to consider a bridge head redesign for the existing bridges that would facilitate great capacity as well as make the land of either end better designed for redevelopment.

I have a lot more ideas, big and small, but I won't get into them now. I will just say my mind is almost always looking at ways the built environment could have been designed better.