

Jessika Buell
Candidate Questionnaire
For Durango City Council

1. Why are you running for Durango City Council? What qualifications do you bring?

I am what Durango is- a real life, hard-working mother, business owner, and community member. It's been an honor serving on City Council the last 4 years, and I want to continue the good work the city is doing. I have had a particular focus and spearheaded initiatives when it has come to in terms of affordability, an engaged & informed community, and preserving the spirit & character of Durango and with my knowledge of council, processes, and government- I can accomplish even more in the next 4 years. Specifically:

Continue my efforts with affordable and workforce housing. I pushed for incorporating affordable housing into our Strategic plan, have supported all efforts for workforce and affordable housing since my first day on council. I want my boys to be able to afford a home in Durango if they choose to work and live in Durango as adults- it was why I ran for council 4 years ago and why I want to continue doing this work.

Work and focus on 2A getting passed so we can continue to have the best Parks and Rec offerings and facilities and upgrade our much needed Police Facility and preparing for the growth and streamlining City offices.

Small business/local business focus: I want to continue to bring to the Council my entrepreneurial experience as an employer and local business owner, as well as my out-of-the-box thinking which helped my businesses prosper over the past 10 years. I am the owner and operator of two businesses in the City of Durango. I want to continue to use my business knowledge to help eliminate bureaucratic red tape and spur job creation.

2. Do you agree with the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Colorado? If you do not agree with one or more of these principles, please identify and explain why.

Yes, I wholeheartedly agree with the seven principles that Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Colorado. These principles resonate deeply with my own approach to governance and my commitment to serving the community.

Specifically:

- Vigorous competition over ideas, but finding common ground: This is essential for a healthy democracy. We need to be able to debate our differences, but also work together to find solutions that benefit everyone. I have consistently demonstrated this by [mentioning specific examples of working across differences].

- Facts and evidence-based decision making: This is the only way to make sound policy decisions. I am committed to relying on data and evidence, and to being transparent about the information I use.
- Open communication and negotiation: No one has all the answers. I believe that we need to listen to diverse perspectives and engage in good-faith negotiations to find the best solutions. My time on city council shows that I am always willing to listen to all sides.
- Public interest over party interests: This is the core of public service. My primary focus is always on serving the needs of the community as a whole.
- Combating extremism: Extremism undermines our democracy and divides our community. I am committed to promoting moderate and balanced solutions.
- Respectful political discourse: Threats and harassment have no place in our political system. I am committed to upholding the right of all citizens to participate in the political process without fear.
- Personal responsibility and community: We all have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of our community. I am committed to serving my community and to encouraging others to do the same.

These principles are not just abstract ideals; they are the foundation for effective and responsible governance. I am committed to upholding these principles in my own conduct and to working with others who share these values.

3. How will you support the Durango City Council’s strategic plan objective to “Foster strong community group partnerships through effective communication and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity efforts while focusing on increased accessibility of services for underserved communities?”

Supporting the Durango City Council's strategic plan objective to foster strong community group partnerships through effective communication and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity is paramount to building a thriving and equitable Durango. Here's how I will contribute to this objective:

1. Championing Inclusive Communication:

- Proactive Outreach: I will advocate for proactive outreach strategies that reach underserved communities, ensuring they are aware of and have access to city services and opportunities. This includes utilizing diverse communication channels, such as multilingual materials, community-based events, and partnerships with trusted community organizations.
- Accessible Platforms: I will support the development of accessible platforms for communication, including online resources that are user-friendly for individuals with disabilities and those with limited technological access.
- Listening Sessions and Town Halls: I will actively participate in listening sessions and town halls specifically designed to engage underserved communities, providing

opportunities for direct dialogue and feedback. I spearheaded with our Community Engagement Specialist the Mayor Walk and Rolls to go to neighborhoods and walk with residents and be approachable and relatable in person.

2. Strengthening Community Group Partnerships:

- Regular Meetings and Dialogue: I will foster regular meetings and open dialogue with community groups, including those representing underserved populations, to build trust and understand their needs.
- Collaborative Initiatives: I will actively seek opportunities to collaborate with community groups on joint initiatives that address shared challenges and promote equity.
- Resource Sharing and Support: I will advocate for resource sharing and support for community groups, including funding opportunities and technical assistance, to enhance their capacity to serve their communities.

4. Increasing Accessibility of Services:

- Language Access Services: I will support the provision of language access services, including interpretation and translation, to ensure that individuals with limited English proficiency can access city services.
- Accessibility Assessments: I will advocate for accessibility assessments of city facilities and services, to identify and address barriers to access for individuals with disabilities.
- Transportation and Outreach: I will support initiatives that improve transportation and outreach to underserved communities, to ensure they can access essential services.

By prioritizing effective communication, building strong community group partnerships, promoting DEI, and increasing accessibility of services, I am committed to creating a more inclusive and equitable Durango for all.

4. If elected, what actions will you take to help find common ground with your fellow elected officials?

Building and maintaining strong relationships with fellow elected officials is crucial for effective governance. I'm fortunate to have a proven track record of fostering positive relationships and finding common ground.

During my previous four years on the Durango City Council, I served alongside six different councilors. I'm proud to say that I consider five of them to be my friends, and I continue to maintain strong relationships with them to this day. This demonstrates my ability to work collaboratively with individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Specifically, I:

- Prioritize Open Communication: I believe in open and honest communication, and I make a point of actively listening to my colleagues' perspectives.

- **Seek Common Ground:** I focus on identifying areas of agreement and building consensus, even on complex and challenging issues.
- **Value Respectful Discourse:** I believe that respectful dialogue is essential for productive collaboration. Even when we disagree, I strive to maintain a respectful and professional demeanor.
- **Build Personal Relationships:** I believe that strong personal relationships are the foundation for effective collaboration. I make an effort to get to know my colleagues on a personal level and to build trust.

My relationships with former councilors Barbara Noseworthy and Melissa Youseff are a testament to my ability to build lasting connections. The fact that Melissa and Barbara wrote letters of endorsement for my current campaign speaks volumes about the positive relationships I cultivate.

I am confident that I can continue to build strong relationships with my fellow elected officials and to find common ground on the issues facing our community. I believe that by working together, we can achieve great things for Durango.

5. If elected, how will you listen to and represent the concerns of constituents who don't agree with you?

Representing the concerns of all constituents, even those who disagree with me, is a fundamental responsibility of elected office. I believe that effective representation requires active listening, open communication, and a genuine commitment to understanding diverse perspectives.

I've demonstrated this commitment in my previous term. For example, during community meetings regarding the Library Neighborhood, there were residents who strongly disagreed with my position on certain issues. Despite these disagreements, I made sure to:

- **Listen Attentively:** I actively listened to their concerns, asked clarifying questions, and sought to understand their perspectives.
- **Explain My Reasoning:** I clearly and respectfully explained my own reasoning, providing context and evidence to support my position.
- **Maintain Respectful Dialogue:** Even when disagreements were strong, I maintained a respectful and civil demeanor.
- **Emphasize Shared Values:** I emphasized our shared commitment to the well-being of the community, reminding everyone that we all care deeply about Durango.

By the end of those meetings, even those who disagreed with my vote understood my thought process. They knew that I had listened to them, that I had approached the issue with curiosity, and that, most importantly, we all shared a love for this community.

Moving forward, I will continue to:

- Hold Regular Town Halls and Community Meetings: To provide opportunities for constituents to share their concerns and engage in dialogue.
- Maintain Open Communication Channels: Through email, social media, and other platforms, I will ensure that constituents can easily reach me.
- Seek Out Diverse Perspectives: I will actively seek out and listen to the voices of those who may not always agree with me, ensuring that all perspectives are considered.
- Prioritize Transparency: I will be transparent about my decision-making process, explaining the rationale behind my votes and actions.

I believe that by fostering open communication, demonstrating respect for diverse viewpoints, and prioritizing the well-being of the community, I can effectively represent all constituents, regardless of their political beliefs.

6. What do you perceive as the top three issues facing Durango that you propose to address, and how would you address those issues if elected?

If re-elected, I will prioritize addressing the following top three issues facing Durango:

1. Affordable and Workforce Housing:

- Problem: The escalating cost of housing is pricing out our workforce, families, and long-time residents, impacting our economy and community vitality.
- Proposed Solutions:
 - Creative Partnerships: I will continue to foster and expand partnerships with non-profits, developers, and regional entities to leverage resources and implement innovative housing solutions.
 - Staff Collaboration: Empower our city staff to be creative in finding solutions and continue to grow the housing division.
 - Expand Housing Inventory: Explore diverse housing models like ADUs, tiny homes, and land trusts, and incentivize development of affordable units.
 - Strategic Funding: Seek out and secure diverse funding streams, including grants, public-private partnerships, and innovative financing mechanisms.

2. Childcare Crisis:

- Problem: The lack of accessible and affordable childcare is a significant barrier for working families, impacting our workforce and the well-being of our children. I want my boys to be able to afford a house in Durango if they want to make Durango their home after college. It was one of the reasons I ran, and there is still work to be done!
- Proposed Solutions:
 - Collaborative Approach: I will work closely with the Early Childhood Alliance and other community partners to implement the Alliance's strategic plan for addressing the childcare crisis.

- Public-Private Partnerships: Explore and develop public-private partnerships to expand childcare capacity and affordability.
- Incentivize Childcare Development: Implement policies that incentivize the development of childcare facilities and programs.
- Advocate for Funding: Advocate for increased state and federal funding for childcare initiatives.

3. Sustainable and Expanded Transit:

7. Problem: Our current transit system needs to be fully funded to become sustainable and expanded to serve our most needed areas, reducing traffic congestion and improving accessibility for all residents.
8. Proposed Solutions:
 - a. Full Funding: Champion the full funding of our transit system to ensure its long-term viability.
 - b. Service Expansion: Advocate for the expansion of transit services to underserved areas, improving accessibility for residents and reducing reliance on personal vehicles.
 - c. Multimodal Integration: Support the integration of transit with other modes of transportation, such as biking and walking, to create a seamless and sustainable transportation network.
 - d. Community Input: Engage with the community to identify transit needs and priorities, ensuring that our transit system meets the needs of all residents.

9. Multiple individuals were convicted by our judicial system for their illegal activities on January 6th. Do you support the president's action to commute sentences for specific individuals and the full and complete pardon of all other participants?

The events of January 6th were a serious attack on the democratic process, and those who engaged in illegal activities should be held accountable. The judicial system has a responsibility to ensure that justice is served.

Regarding the question of presidential pardons or commutations, I believe that:

- The rule of law must be upheld. Those who broke the law on January 6th should face the consequences of their actions.
- The independence of the judiciary must be respected. The judicial system should be allowed to function without undue political interference.
- Any decision regarding pardons or commutations should be made on a case-by-case basis. Factors such as the individual's role in the events, their level of remorse, and their potential for rehabilitation should be considered.
- The severity of the crimes committed on January 6th needs to be taken into account. The attack on the capitol was an attack on democracy itself.

Therefore, I do not support a blanket pardon for all participants. I believe that any consideration of pardons or commutations should be done with careful consideration.

10. Is there a current policy, platform plank(s), or pieces of legislation that the Durango City Council has endorsed or supported that you disagree with? Why?

As a member of the Durango City Council for the past four years, I've had a direct role in shaping our current policies and strategic direction. I've been deeply involved in the development and implementation of our strategic plan, which serves as the overarching framework for everything we do.

Therefore, I can confidently say that I fully support the vision, mission, values, and strategic plan of the Durango City Council. It represents a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities facing our community.

This strategic plan is not just a document; it's a living roadmap that guides our decisions and actions. It reflects the input of our residents, businesses, and community partners. It embodies our commitment to:

- Sustainable Growth: Ensuring that Durango grows in a responsible and environmentally conscious manner.
- Economic Vitality: Fostering a diverse and thriving economy that benefits all residents.
- Community Well-being: Enhancing the quality of life for all Durangoans.
- Effective Governance: Promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

I believe that the strategic plan provides a strong foundation for our work, and I am committed to its successful implementation.

While there may be specific nuances or implementation details where reasonable minds can differ, I am in complete agreement with the fundamental principles and objectives outlined in our strategic plan. My efforts on the council have been, and will continue to be, focused on bringing that plan to fruition.