



Downtown Partnership City Council Candidate Survey

Matt Zelenok, District 5

1. If elected, what will be your top three priorities as a City Councilor?

Transportation, Public Safety and Economic Recovery and Development.

2. What are the critical issues for Colorado Springs Utilities in the next few years in ensuring a clean energy future, and in what ways can CSU foster growth and development Downtown?

The main issue will be reliability and rate stabilization as we transition from coal power, to natural gas and eventually renewables. Aside from the 4 utilities; CSU is doing big things, including bringing a fiber optic network to their planned tech campus and the city as a whole. Being a competitive and modern city will give Colorado Springs the required edge to propel us into our economic future. By CSU providing clean energy and modern technology to all parts of town, I hope we are an attractive city for companies to relocate to Colorado Springs.

3. What are your thoughts on PlanCOS, and do you believe RetoolCOS contains the right provisions to achieve the goals of PlanCOS, particularly in advancing multimodal transportation and mixed-use development?

I don't agree with everything in RetoolCOS, but the multimodal transportation and mixed use development proposals are two components that I agree with. Firstly, the city government must have a clear line of sight for long-term transportation goals. The bike lanes so far have been ineffective as a whole, and most cyclists like myself are afraid to use them and migrate to side streets to ride their bikes. Likewise, only linking up small portions and segmented areas of town do little to combat the overall transportation issue in Colorado Springs. I would like to see a comprehensive and long term plan to link up the city in a true multimodal manner. In Europe it is common for residents to take their bike onto public transportation so they can utilize the bus or train, and actually be able to get to the end point destination without a car. This is a goal I would like to see accomplished when I am elected.

The mixed use areas so far in town are a great model for how we should be proceeding in the future. Gold hill mesa is a great example for mixed use, and I would like to see all new developments follow this trend. Likewise, seeing great things in the new RINO part of Denver, it is clear that residents of high density units are fond of mixed use commercial businesses right in their own building. Furthermore, I would like to find a way to attract a broad range of business that people use every day instead of only specialty shops like massage centers.

4. Small business is the backbone of our economy, and some industry sectors have been deeply impacted by the pandemic. For 2021 and beyond, in what ways can City Council ensure small business thrives in our city?

I believe in helping successful businesses in anyway possible as to minimize the effects of the pandemic. Whether it is through tax breaks, or other financial support, we must do what we can do prevent successful businesses from closing. The economic impact of giving short term assistance to businesses is a much smaller burden than the lost revenue on a long term basis. Likewise, I believe in prevention measures whenever possible. We must prevent businesses from closing, as it is a much hard position to attract new businesses to open, rather than to provide short term assistance to allow successful businesses to survive.

5. With the effects of the pandemic and the recession projected to be long lasting, what is the role of the city in supporting families and individuals who face eviction and potential economic devastation?

Again, I believe in prevention measures whenever possible. I would like to see the city set up a temporary organization to provide assistance to homeowners and renters in several capacities. Eviction and economic devastation doesn't just happen on its own, they have a root cause – typically unemployment. This is where the city can make a simple impact – helping our citizens get back to work through employment assistance. Likewise, I would like to see the city provide assistance to homeowners so they have proper guidance to cooperate and negotiate with their landlords and lenders. In a majority of cases citizens facing eviction and foreclosure feel helpless and take no action. This is extremely problematic, because in almost all of these cases - landlords and lenders are willing to negotiate in order to postpone an eviction or foreclosure.

6. What is the role of City Council in addressing systemic racism and fostering greater equity and inclusion? What would you change about current systems to lead to better outcomes?

I think this exposes one of the fundamental problems with our society today; if you're not specifically included – you are by definition, excluded. A lot of people in minority communities feel excluded, and that they aren't welcome, which I can understand. However, we need to break through these social barriers and get the community involved together. The question becomes how? How do we break these barriers? One mechanism I think is through the one thing that brings communities together is schools.

Schools are the one place where everyone's kid goes, and the bonds they make there carry from the school to the community. That being said, I think this is a great place to inject beneficial programs and further education. Our district D11 just voted to increase property taxes so schools will have more money – and I think this a great starting point. I'd like to continue to bring the community together more through the school system – and what a better place to advocate for a location for additional resources for kids.

I think there is a chance to help kids set realistic goals for themselves, and show them that there is a life between working at mcdonalds and going to Harvard. Most schools don't have a Vo Tech program. I have already had conversations with the builders about increasing their vo tech programs (and pay for them) at the high school level so kids can learn technical skills and enter the work force right after graduation – and to do so at a livable wage. Its ideas like these that are going to help close the gaps in our social system. A high school diploma doesn't do much for our kids these days sadly – and if you aren't interested in college or cant afford it – what else is there to do to get ahead? We need to start thinking outside the box, and help people stuck in the system without just giving handouts.

7. Identify specific initiatives you would lead or support as a City Councilor to increase the supply of affordable and attainable housing in the city.

I will advocate for the construction of high density housing in the downtown area, and in new developments around town. I believe in responsible growth that benefits us all, not just the developer. Likewise, I am a proponent of the flex and mixed zoning concepts in new developments, which again allow for more dense and diversified housing options. I am wary of overbuilding, as there are several factors at play currently driving the housing market – most notably the pandemic. Housing prices were on the rise prior to the pandemic, but since then the inventory of residential properties has plummeted by 60-90% which nearly instantly exacerbated the ongoing issue of housing in Colorado Springs. We must be cautious of over building in reaction to a potentially short term problem.

8. 95 percent of residents surveyed say they'd like more public art throughout the city, and 96 percent say it is important for families to experience art. Last year City Council approved its first ever public art master plan, yet the city allocates no general fund dollars toward fostering arts and cultural expression in neighborhoods. What should be the role of the city in ensuring all residents have arts and cultural opportunities?

As Colorado Springs grows, art plays a crucial role in the beautification of our city. I would like to see cooperation between the city and our educational institutes, whether college or k-12 schooling, to assist with cultural expression. While the city budget is very lean, I believe the city council could play a strong role in participating and advocating with non profit organizations such as; The El Pomar Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Pikes Peak Community Foundation to help find funding for art projects around the city.