



Questionnaire Responses: IAN THOMAS

1. Do you have a fundraising goal? *No*
2. Do you have a campaign committee formed? *Yes*
3. Who is your campaign Treasurer? *Richard King*
4. Do you plan on campaigning door to door? *Yes*
5. What is your position regarding property owners' rights and eminent domain?

There needs to be a balance between property owners' rights and the public good. In general, I believe that eminent domain is a legitimate process for determining whether the public benefit of a proposed project outweighs the burden on the private property owner.

6. What role do you feel Regional Economic Development Inc, (REDI) should play in attracting new employers to Columbia and what tactics would you encourage REDI and the City to use?

I support REDI's efforts to help entrepreneurs establish themselves and grow local businesses. However, I am skeptical of the community benefit of offering tax abatement to attract employers to relocate to Columbia.

7. New development fees and fee increases add to the cost of both rental and owner-occupied housing, and many of those fees are passed on to the end user of a property. How would you balance the need to pay for infrastructure vs. the need to keep housing prices of all kinds (rental & owner occupied) affordable and supply?

It is true that logical and fair development fees would add to the cost of new housing. However, this policy would substantially reduce costs for residents of existing housing, who are currently providing tens of millions of dollars annually to subsidize the expansion of public infrastructure systems (roads, electricity, schools, etc.) for growth. Most Columbia tax-payers and rate-payers are unaware that they are paying 80-90% of the cost of these expansion projects, which are only necessary because of growth. I believe we should track these costs and let the community decide whether to provide a subsidy (and, if so, how much). Without a subsidy, the fees would add \$20,000 - \$30,000 to the price of a typical new home, and I would support amortizing the payments through tax-billing the new home owners, possibly over a 10-year period. I believe the fees should be waived or reduced for truly "affordable housing," but it is important to note that precisely zero affordable housing is currently being produced by the private market, even without any significant development impact fees.

8. How do you believe the Urban Service Area from the Columbia Imagined Plan should be interpreted regarding City annexation and development? When should the boundaries be expanded? Should the city require a pre-annexation agreement when sewer services are extended to homes and businesses outside the corporate limits of Columbia?

My vision is for Columbia to be a welcoming and inclusive community, with a high quality of life for everyone. If that means people want to move here, we need to anticipate and plan for that growth – that should include an open and honest conversation about how to pay for public infrastructure expansion and an analysis of the community benefits of compact development versus sprawl. The Urban Service Area is intended to encourage infill development, which reduces infrastructure costs and creates more walkable and transit-oriented design, and I would like to see those efforts strengthened.

9. What is your position regarding historic preservation and what authority should the Historic Preservation Commission have?

I believe historic buildings should be preserved if they add value to the esthetic and cultural experience of living in or visiting Columbia. I support the Historic Preservation Commission and City Council having more authority in this area.

10. What are your views about the Community Land Trust organization created to bring additional affordable housing to Columbia and how should it be funded? What other opportunities exist to increase home affordability? Should the Community Land Trust consider adding rental properties to its portfolio?

The Columbia Community Land Trust (CCLT) is a creative and effective way to increase affordable housing, by distributing our (rather small) federal housing subsidy among more families. However, CCLT is only capable of adding a handful of new units of permanently affordable housing to our portfolio every year, and we need to do more to address the current shortage. Because Columbia is a growing city, an “Inclusive Zoning Policy” would add affordable housing much more rapidly – it would also create more integrated neighborhoods, bringing many social benefits. I am interested in exploring the option of CCLT managing rental as well as owner-occupied homes.

11. The Unified Development Code (UDC) has a section regarding neighborhood protections. What are your views of neighborhood protections included in the UDC? Do neighborhood protections inhibit the opportunity for infill development and the creation of diverse and inclusive neighborhoods?

Yes, I believe the “neighborhood protection standards” prevent/limit compact, mixed-use development, which would reduce our per capita infrastructure costs, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and create numerous social benefits. Residents of “first-ring” neighborhoods support these protections because they are concerned about the esthetic and traffic impacts of denser development – we could overcome those problems by adopting a citywide form-based zoning code and making a transformative commitment to quality public transit services. I favor reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements along main roads to encourage higher density and “transit-oriented development” at intersections.

12. Have you seen any unintended consequences for the Unified Development Code regarding the impact of home affordability with requirements such as a supermajority council vote, floodplain overlay, tree preservation, sensitive areas and/or land analysis as possible examples?

I'm not sure whether or not they were unintended, but two elements of the Unified Development Code that have the effect of limiting housing density (the "neighborhood protection standards" and the increase in minimum parking requirements for downtown development) have had negative impacts on home affordability.

13. The City of Columbia made the process easier for a property owner with a residential use property to downzone their property to R-1. Does this process lead to spot zoning and unfair restrictions on neighboring properties to Neighborhood protection provisions in the UDC?

I have some concerns about this process because it limits residential density and housing affordability. At the same time, I understand and support the desire of home-owners (especially in older neighborhoods) to have some control over development and redevelopment in their neighborhoods. I believe a citywide "Form-Based Code" would help resolve this conflict.

14. The City Council heard a report from a utility consultant during the last year who reported on electric connection fees for new developments. Should an electric connection fee be added to a building permit?

Yes. According to data provided by Utilities Director Tad Johnsen, the Electric Utility spent \$26 million over a recent 4-year period on capital expansion projects for growth. Because the City does not collect an electric connection fee from new development, that entire expense was paid for by existing customers in the form of inflated rates, averaging an extra \$12 per month for every customer over and above the true cost of their own electric service. This is very unfair for low-income customers, who struggle to pay their utility bills and live with the threat of disconnection.

15. Do you support increasing property taxes for public safety?

It appears we need additional funding for police and fire services, but I am not ready to call for a tax increase until a new administration at the Columbia Police Department, which is supportive of community policing, creates a long-range plan. In general, I prefer property taxes to sales taxes and would like to see City funding move in that direction.

16. Last year, voters in the City of Columbia approved a water bond for capital improvement projects which will increase water rates by 11% over the next four years. The City Council just passed a water rate structure that will increase fees on water users of more than 8 CCF's. Do you feel the city should have been more forth coming about water rate increases when asking voters to approve the water bond?

Yes, I do. I was disappointed with the Water Utility's processes for designing the projects and assessing and communicating the rate impacts.

17. The City is currently working towards an ordinance to regulate “short -term” rental property via the Unified Development Code. The draft ordinance, in its current form, will create different rental standards based upon the term of tenancy, in addition to some uses requiring a conditional use permit. How do you view the draft ordinance affecting property owners’ rights, and should the City have differing rules for long-term and short-term rentals?

I have not studied the draft ordinance, I do not have a firm position on regulating short-term rentals, and I am interested in hearing from all stakeholders on this issue.