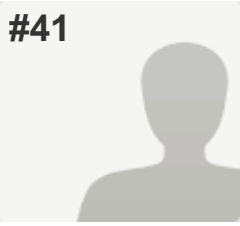


INC 2015 Candidate Survey

#41



COMPLETE

Collector: survey collector (Email)

Started: Tuesday, March 03, 2015 8:51:29 PM

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Time Spent: Over a week

First Name: Deborah

Last Name: Ortega

Email:

Custom Data: City Council

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Q1: What is your name please?

Deborah "Debbie" Ortega

Q2: Which Counsel district do you hope to represent?

At Large

Q3: Please tell us the best way to contact you if we have a question..telephone or email. Please provide either or both in the comment box below.

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Q4: Do you believe it is the ultimate obligation of City Council members to represent and advocate for their constituents in the neighborhoods they represent, rather than expedite the Mayor's office or private businesses that may benefit from these types of transactions between governmental entities?

Yes,

Comment:

City Council is the legislative branch of government that is the checks and balance anticipated when this governance structure was created by our founding fathers. I supported the need for a new school for the far southeast quadrant of the city, and for a domestic violence center; however I did not support the land swap of Hentzel Park for a downtown building owned by Denver Public Schools on 13th and Fox Street. As a seated member of City Council that was asked to vote for this land swap, I did not vote in favor of discarding precious open space that has been part of the city's portfolio of park land for many years. I asked the city to produce information on how many other "unprotected" parks existed (before the public hearing) and insisted that our Parks and Recreation Department immediately begin the process for city council to officially designate these parks. To date, most of them have been designated except those with conservation easements or similar restrictions on the property. The value of formal designation essentially requires a vote of the people of Denver before any of these parks can be sold.

Q5: Do you believe that preserving strong public neighborhood schools in each of our communities is very important to the viability and strength for the future of our neighborhoods?

Yes,

Comment:

I also know this is a value of parents across the city support, from a process DPS conducted several years when DPS held meetings in different quadrants of the city when they were identifying priority project needs for their last bond issue. I attended several of these meetings and heard this sentiment echoed quite loudly from parents across the city. These parents represented the diversity of students within the DPS system. Families select the neighborhoods they choose to live in based on the reputation and performance of the schools in the neighborhood; however there are examples of where parents with small children have organized and mobilized their community to influence change in the curriculum of their neighborhood school by working with their school board member and DPS administration. Although DPS is not part of the city and has its own governance structure via the Board of Education; their decisions have much impact on the neighborhoods that the city serves. When I was elected to City Council in 2011, I insisted on regular meetings among the school board/superintendent and city council/mayor to discuss and work on overlapping issues. There have only been a few of these meetings over the last four years. I have a vested interest because my grandchildren are students in the DPS system. I stay engaged and have seen schools close and be replaced with a "new" school that did not have a proof of concept; therefore our children were used to test these education models. An example was Del Pueblo and Greenlee elementary schools where the curriculum leadership and teachers changed two years in a row, which had significant disruption to the lives of the students in the Lincoln Park neighborhood.

PAGE 5: I. DESIGNATION OF UNDESIGNATED PARKS, PROTECTION OF OPEN SPACE, MORE PARKLAND

Q6: INC, in response to a request from the Department of Parks and Recreation, formed a committee to aid the department's effort to designate undesignated parks. While this committee has made progress over the past two years, the work is not finished. Would you support a concerted effort within all city departments affected to complete the designation of all undesignated Denver parks that are legally available for designation?

Yes,

Comment:

See comments on previous question about Hentzel Park land swap.

Q7: In addition to designating undesignated parks, we also need to prevent the transfer of open space within designated parks to institutions within parks. Over many years, open space in designated parks has been re-allocated by the Manager of Parks and Recreation to institutions within parks such as recreation centers, museums, and zoos. It is important that open space within parks is protected. Would you ask for policy changes to protect open space within designated parks?

Yes

Q8: There is inadequate urban parkland in Denver given the size, density, and expected growth of Denver's population. For example: The city had 555,000 residents in 2000 and is projected to have 700,000 in 2020. While the Hancock administration may add additional parkland to the park system, the current plans focus on the acquisition of land at the periphery of Denver. We need parkland in the center of the city where the population is growing and "density" is a goal of the administration's urban development plan. Would you support the acquisition of additional parkland and open space within the center of the City of Denver?

Yes,

Comment:

Any of our community gardens that are not owned by Denver Urban Gardens should be protected. this is open space that plays a vital role or providing healthy food, especially in food desert neighborhoods. I do support using some of our flower gardens for growing food - as is done in Civic Center Park. DURA proposed to buy a parking lot downtown across the street from the convention center for \$15 Million. I spoke in opposition to the amount this would cost for a small piece of open space downtown. I would target any such acquisition to neighborhoods that are park deficient, similar to when Cuernavaca and Commons parks were developed to serve the northwest part of District Nine. It is also important to insure that the city can afford to staff and maintain all of our parks. I consider our the Platte River and tributaries with bike trails a part of our park and open space system which is an incredible asset that links us to a network throughout the metro area.

Q9: The urban parkland that does exist is viewed increasingly as a site for multiple and oftentimes conflicting purposes-- opportunities to experience nature, spaces in which teams can play, and sites for large festivals. These uses of the same land has created problems within our parks including damage to parkland and vegetation, limitation of public access to parks, and distress for neighborhoods bordering parks (eg., unacceptable levels of noise, traffic congestion, threats to public safety, and problems parking). As a result, a site is needed for large ticketed events such as festivals that is not located within neighborhoods. Well-lighted playing fields with bathrooms and parking outside of city parks are also required. Would you support the development of a Festival Site?

Yes,

Comment:

But, identifying a site with enough land and parking (including access to transit), and determining how we pay for it would be the biggest challenges. I think a festival site could serve as a dual purpose venue with ball fields. see my comments on #10

Q10: Would you explore opportunities for and support the development of playing fields outside of city parks for Denver citizens?

Yes,

Comment:

First, we need to maintain the ball fields we do have and be competitive with neighboring counties for adult leagues that help generate revenue - that don't conflict with times for usage by our youth sports teams. Many of these fields have historically served the sports teams from our recreation centers and the Police Athletic League (PAL) - which in large part have served low income youth. The challenge is finding enough land that is not outrageously priced, like the example used earlier. There is a huge need for fields that serve multiple purposes, including indoor soccer and hockey. In neighboring counties, these are revenue generators - it costs a child/parents an average \$500 to play on a football team - which includes defraying costs for the use of the ball field where they play. These fields also include concessions that make a lot of money from parents often there for more than one game. These fields have hundreds of parents watching multiple games underway simultaneously. We've had requests from Stapleton, for example, to have a location set up near their ball fields for food trucks to be available to provide a variety of food options to parents who are often at these fields for hours. Denver would compete for play time on these fields with teams from neighboring communities because most of their teams travel to ball fields throughout the metro area. The challenge would be to identify how we pay for the capital costs to build and assess how much revenue that a multi purpose site would generate to determine the rate of return on the investment.

PAGE 7: III. USE OF RECYCLED WATER IN PARKS

Q11: Would you ask the City administration to convene a panel of independent experts in plant physiology, soil chemistry etc. to evaluate the safety of the type of recycled water used in our parks and to report the results to the public?

Yes,

Comment:

Denver Water is a huge resource as is CSU that should be utilized. I would also use this information to determine for new and existing parks how the city can and should incorporate native plants to insure that we are using water only as needed, which will benefit our city during drought conditions.

Q12: If the risks of the type of recycled water currently in use are found to be too high, would you support all steps necessary to eliminate these risks?

No,

Comment:

If Denver is gardening food product in the parks, I think this information would be far more critical to address, otherwise, general watering of lawns and flower gardens that doesn't involve ingestion should be seen entirely differently. I would want to see the scope of work of the study. I would need to see what such a study would identify and recommend before making such a commitment. If we can reduce the need for water consumption overall, through the type of vegetation installed that requires limited or no water to survive, this would be a desired outcome, especially given much of the efforts on climate resiliency and climate adaptation due to impacts from climate change. As a policy maker that only adopts or changes the mayor's budget in this strong mayor form of government, I am cognizant that the budget is controlled by the mayor and Council members are expected to look at all of our needs with the delivery of basic city services - police, fire, trash removal, etc - always being an expectation of tax payers and a priority of every administration. I would hate to set expectations that cannot be achieved due to city priorities.

PAGE 8: IV. PARK ADMINISTRATION

Q13: Effective government requires citizen engagement. INC has received multiple complaints and over many years pertaining to the use of parks. Complaints include the difficulty citizens have in influencing park policies. A new Office of Special Events has been formed by the Mayor and its function will have an impact on what events occur in parks. Would you advocate for INC representation on an Advisory Board for the Office of Special Events?

Yes,

Comment:

I would also advise inclusion from neighborhoods that have any of these festivals.

Q14: Would you direct funds to the Department of Parks and Recreation to ensure enforcement of park rules and regulations within the entire park system?

Yes,

Comment:

This is already being done with funds from MJ revenues for park rangers.

PAGE 9: V. PARK FUNDING

Q15: Denver's park and parkway system is grossly under-funded. A broad range of funding sources must be pursued in order to sustain and to expand Denver' park system. This funding includes local and state-level dedicated revenue sources. Denver is surrounded by municipalities that fund their parks with a tax levy dedicated to parks. Would you support a tax levy to provide a stable funding source with which to acquire land for parks, open space, a festival site, playing fields, and for maintenance of all these for Denver's park system?

Yes,

Comment:

Yes, but the administration and Parks Manager will want to weigh in on whatever language and projects are referred to ballot as well

PAGE 11: Discretionary Projects

Q16: If elected, would you support an increase to Public Works funding for discretionary projects in neighborhoods?

Yes,

Comment:

Neighborhoods without neighborhood plans should request this tool to insure their projects get incorporated to the mayor's annual budget submitted to city council for approval.

PAGE 12: Committment to Vision Zero

Q17: Would you support Denver joining the ranks of cities that target elimination of traffic deaths and serious injuries as a moral priority by adopting a Vision Zero approach?

Yes,

Comment:

I am open to looking at this approach, but need to learn more about what all it entails. For example if it calls for narrow streets, particularly in residential areas, I want to make sure that neighborhoods continue to receive fire service, because narrow streets make it difficult for fire trucks to get through.

PAGE 13: Best Practices regarding sidewalk installation and maintenance

Q18: Would you support Denver pursuing and implementing best practices from other cities regarding sidewalk installation and maintenance, with the goal of increasing walkability?

Yes,

Comment:

I am a strong advocate of walkable neighborhoods and support the implementation of Denver Moves - a mobility plan for bikable/walkable neighborhoods. Denver should have an adopted policy that insures the same basic standards for all neighborhoods as a starting point, because we still have a number of neighborhoods, primarily in lower income areas that still do not have curbs, gutters, sidewalks and this often has the result of children walking in the street on their way to school.

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Q19: . Would you support the City of Denver engaging consultants to study the effects of parking on neighborhoods in areas where high rise development is contemplated prior to approval of the development. If so, what parking study process would you suggest?

Yes,

Comment:

I believe the need for parking studies are in saturated areas with proposed new development that are already parking challenged - and are not TOD locations.

Q20: Do you believe the 2010 Zoning Code adopted by City Council in 2010 has benefited all neighborhoods in Denver or some neighborhoods? Please cite examples.

Yes,

Examples:

The areas that have benefitted from the 2010 Zoning Code changes are areas of change such as the Brighton Blvd. corridor now known as River North or RiNo as defined in Blueprint Denver. This also includes the edges of neighborhoods and in particular the areas near TOD locations. Examples of this are TOD sites along the I-25 corridor, and we are beginning to see activity at other TOD locations such as Denver Union Terminal, North Lincoln, and soon to come, major changes to the Sun Valley neighborhood.

Q21: What changes do you believe need to be made to the 2010 Zoning Code, if any, and why.

Ongoing review and fixes to areas of the code that have been identified to need some attention. One example is how we address Air B&B units being used as short term rentals in Denver.

Q22: Will you urge the Mayor and city officials to appoint representatives of residential neighborhood organizations to all city boards, commission, advisory committees, collaborative groups and task forces which consider planning and zoning issues. If so, describe the efforts you would take to ensure such appointments are made.

Yes,

Comment:

Get me and other members of Council the names of people you are recommending for open positions so we can advocate for those individuals.

Q23: INC has been advised that the Director of Community Planning and Development is recommending Blueprint Denver be revised and updated. Do you support such a recommendation and describe what process you would support to ensure neighborhood participation.

Yes,

Comment:

Denver's conditions have changed since Blueprint was last adopted. I am not aware of the scope of what a revised and updated Blueprint Denver effort looks like from the Director of Planning's perspective. Clearly, if this effort is in the works, there should be an open and transparent process that includes the voice and active participation from neighborhood representatives, primarily because of the broad reach this document already has across the City.

Q24: Please describe your vision of "smart growth" for the City of Denver in ten words or less. The vision should capture stakeholder expectations of your anticipated leadership on City Council.

Housing for all (income levels), walkable/bikable communities with jobs & amenities nearby. This creates green communities by reducing trip miles when all people can live near where they work.

Q25: . Entertainment districts which extend the hours for alcohol to be served, often until 4:00 a.m., have been adopted in a few cities throughout Colorado. Would you support an entertainment district in certain areas in Denver? If so, where and until what time?

No,

Comment:

No, especially not without very robust and active participation from residential and business neighbors in any of the identified areas.

Q26: Short term rentals, that is rentals for less than 30 days are now illegal in Denver residential neighborhoods. Do you support the adoption of an ordinance which would permit short term rentals in Denver residential neighborhoods. If not, why not. If you would support an ordinance to allow short term rentals in residential neighborhoods, please describe the process you would support, including the process for funding.

No,

Comment:

Not until clear recommendations have been vetted with neighborhood input. City Council's Shared Economy committee has been meeting and is still working on proposed recommendations for this topic. I have heard pros and cons on both sides, so I want to keep an open mind and strongly encourage ongoing input and broad reach to Denver neighborhoods. I also think there needs to be a clear understanding of the impact this could have on our housing market and challenges with the lack of available rental and for sale units.