

Colorado Springs City Council Candidate Survey



Candidate name: Matt Zelenok

District: 5

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1. Do you support or oppose increasing taxes or fees, or the establishment of new taxes and fees? If you support increasing taxes and fees (or establishing new taxes and fees), what would be acceptable reasons to you?

Taxes are a necessary component for the government to operate. Without having a specific example - I cannot comment of whether or not I will blindly support a new tax or fee. What I can say is one of my top priorities as a council member will be to increase financial transparency and hold our government accountable for spending taxpayer dollars.

2C is the greatest example of how the city duped our citizens into paying a tax, while breaking the promise of how this money will be spent. Half of the funds from 2C have been redirected from roads where they are desperately needed - to sidewalks, curbs and gutters. What was advertised as a road tax, is not being spent as promised. As a council member I vow that any tax or fee measure I would vote in favor of to make it on the ballot, for voter approval, will be as concise as possible as to where dollars can and cannot be spend. Likewise, ballot initiative 1 if passed will increase transparency taxation and spending, which I am also in favor of.

2. What is your position regarding the elimination of motor vehicle traffic lanes (road-dieting) in favor of installing bicycle lanes? Please explain.

We need a comprehensive plan for bike lanes in Colorado Springs. To mindlessly delete road lanes in a high traffic area such as Cascade Ave through the downtown area is a great example of the "READY – FIRE – AIM " tactic used in our government. We must be cognizant of the benefit and costs of every

action we make in city hall. Likewise, it will be crucial to examine the “value added” of these decisions. Does constricting traffic flow in a high volume area benefit ALL of our citizens when only 0.5% ride bicycles consistently? These are the questions I will ask our mayor and our city council once elected – are we keeping everyone’s best interest in mind?

3. What is your opinion of infill projects that receive opposition from neighbors? Should zoning change projects proceed – even with opposition from the majority of neighbors living there?

Again, without a specific example this is an impossible question to answer. Every infill development is different and no two parcels are alike. I believe in a balance between homeowners and developers. I think a large portion of retoolCOS eliminates homeowner rights and puts even more power into the hands of the developers. To remove someone’s ability to comment publicly on projects that will be adjacent to their property is absurd – and retoolcos permits this ability – especially in the R2 / Rflex Low areas where 4 plex units could be constructed without any input from the neighbors.

4. As Colorado Springs expands in population and infill projects press forward, infrastructure is stressed. What is your solution for financing new infrastructure?

We need a culture shift in city council and our government. Several current council members have commented that the non-compliant curb and sidewalk infrastructure that is being funded from our 2C road tax is a direct result of a lack of developer contributions.

I believe we need to take a look at impact fees are being assessed on developers. The argument I hear against this idea - raising impact fees will dis-incentivize developers from building more housing, and housing prices will increase. I find this argument to be bogus, as we live in a free market economy. If a developer isn’t satisfied with profit they are making, then I am absolutely positive someone else will be willing to fill their place. We also need to hold developers more accountable for the quality of infrastructure they are contributing. They must complete construction of roads, sidewalks etc. to the highest of quality so that the tax payers are not liable to pick up the tab for repairing crumbling roads 5 years after they are built. This is especially true as heavy construction machinery exponentially increases wear and tear on these roads as development continues.

5. As COVID-19 closures and restrictions persist, many local businesses are suffering. What should be done for businesses and their employees?

I believe in supporting our local businesses, large and small, in any way we can. At a minimum, I would support an extension of the sales tax rebates provided to bars and restaurants if they are effective in assisting eligible businesses. Likewise, I would encourage business owners to come forward to communicate with City Council of their needs and suggestions in ways the city can help. There are a

number of local programs to assist the recovery of small business such as “Survive and Thrive” and it is crucial we communicate these programs to our local business so they are aware of the resources available to them. Likewise, the federal government still has Paycheck Protection Programs in affect from the pandemic relief package, which I believe are being underutilized. I would advocate for the Small Business Development Center in playing a stronger role in connecting businesses with relief funding

6. Local activists raised the issue of defunding the Colorado Springs Police Department. Do you support or oppose increasing the number of Colorado Springs police officers? Please explain.

I would never defund the police or any public safety group in our City. I support increasing the number of police officers, and I also support improving their training so they have the ability to deal with complex situations especially those regarding individuals with mental health problems.

7. Colorado Springs has a stormwater fee of \$5 per home, and \$30 per acre for businesses. The current council members appear to be in favor of a fee increase and will likely increase it soon. Many of the violations ruled on in a recent EPA lawsuit found that the City failed to enforce requirements that construction site operators implement appropriate measures to prevent polluted stormwater from running off active construction sites. During your term, will you vote to raise the stormwater fee?

Unfortunately at this point in time, the developers are off the hook for these expenditures. If the options are: face a multi million dollar EPA fine - or ask citizens to pay for what the developers should have contributed in the first place, I think the answer unfortunately yes, we will have to ask our tax payers to pick up the tab. Again I am in favor of a culture shift downtown to hold developers accountable for this infrastructure so we are never faced with these lose-lose choices again.

8. Do you support or oppose the implementation of recreational marijuana within the City of Colorado Springs in order to capture additional tax revenue?

No. Individuals who wish to have recreational marijuana in Colorado Springs are free to collect the necessary signatures required to get the initiative on the ballot. I would not vote in favor as a council member to authorize recreational marijuana in Colorado Springs.

9. There is a push in the City for separate affordable housing complexes. According to the National Association of Realtors, the average price of a home in Colorado Springs increased from \$175,000 to \$371,900 in 10 years. Wages have not kept up with that increase. What is your solution to help residents afford housing?

Affordable housing is a complex issue that is a result of many components. 1. The pandemic has really exacerbated the housing issue in Colorado Springs, and it is uncertain at this point in time if this is a short term of a long term trend. Regardless the city needs to find creative ways to increase the mid range housing supply in Colorado Springs. City Council has the ability to pass or reject nearly all land use proposals in town and if we use this power appropriately – our city government can indirectly increase housing supply. Likewise, affordability is an index. What you can “afford” is based on your income. The more you make, the more you can afford. Therefore we must also focus on our economic development to ensure we are attractive city for companies that will increase the number of high paying jobs in our city.

10. Is there anything else you want the taxpayers to know about you, or is there an important topic we didn't ask about that you want to share?

As City Council makes decisions on highly technical issues around the city, including serving as the board to CSU, I believe District 5 needs an individual who can fully understand these issues and make the most educated decisions possible on behalf of the community. As the only candidate in District 5 with a technical education or background, I believe this helps qualify me in a unique way. Through my education at the University of Colorado and the experience gained working for the U.S. Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratory - I have learned to collaborate with a multitude of individuals from varying backgrounds in order to achieve a common goal. I believe this is what sets me apart; I possess the ability to process technical information and translate it to members of my community so they may fully understand how decisions being made in our city government will impact them. Growing up in a military family, my father David Zelenok taught me to hold integrity and honesty above all else, and still live by these virtues today. I will listen to all sides of every argument to make the most balanced decisions possible for the community while always holding our community's best interest as the top priority.