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Candidates Profiles

City of Omaha Municipal Elections 2021

General Elections
Tuesday, May 11th



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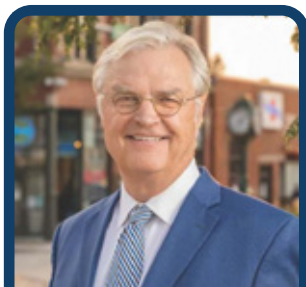


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City of Omaha Mayor



RJ Neary

Current Public Office, dates held: None. **Past Public Office, dates held:** Neary served 10 years on the City of Omaha's Planning Board, September 2004 to September 2014. He served as Chair twice: in 2009 and again in 2013. **Education:** BA in agricultural economics, University of Nebraska - Lincoln. **Occupation:** Chairman, Investors Realty. **Military experience:** None. **Volunteer experience:** Omaha Habitat for Humanity, board member; Catholic Charities Board & Foundation Board; Omaha By Design Steering Committee; Urban Land Institute, member; Nebraska Judicial Resources Commission; Roncalli Catholic High School Board of Trustees; etc.

Website: www.nearyforomaha.com



Jean Stothert

Current Public Office, dates held: Mayor of Omaha since 2013. **Past Public Office, dates held:** Omaha City Council, Four years (2009 - 2013); Millard Board of Education (Omaha, NE) - Appointed 1997 Elected 1998, 2000, and 2004 (Offices held: President (3 years), VP, Secretary, and Treasurer. **Education:** Bachelor in Science from Seattle Pacific University; Registered Nurse - Head nurse and Department Head - Cardiovascular Surgery, St. Louis University. Over 12 years of experience as a critical care nurse and nursing manager. **Occupation:** Mayor of Omaha. **Military experience:** NA. **Volunteer experience:** Millard Board of Education, NE Medical Guild, Metropolitan Area Planning Authority, League of Municipalities, American Nurses Association, Salvation Army Board of Directors, NE Humane Society Friend, South Omaha Business Association, Millard Rotary.

Website: www.jeanstothert.com

What should the city do during the pandemic to help citizens (e.g., mask mandate, employment/work projects, food rent assistance)?

NEARY: >Appoint a pandemic czar who will coordinate with UNMC, federal government, public health officials, academic institutions, employers, and other key stakeholders to provide all Omahans with access to resources for COVID-19 recovery. >Reallocate 5% of the restaurant tax into the Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote Omaha attractions for 2 years up to \$4,000,000.00. >Develop a small business recovery task force to build a city-led partnership. >Continue mask mandate. >Rent / utility relief.

STOHERT: Mayor's COVID Advisory Board has helped make wise decisions. Omaha is distributing over \$32 million in aid for rent and utility assistance, small business support, food, and COVID testing. Our 2021 Pandemic Recovery Strategy includes advocacy for vaccines, a mask ordinance and more (jeanstothert.com). Job training and work readiness programs helped lower our unemployment rate to 3.3% after peaking at 10.2%. We are providing the strong education and communication critical for recovery.

City of Omaha Mayor

What are examples of police reform you support?

NEARY: We must find a way to reconnect & strengthen neighborhoods. Let's empower neighborhoods to partner with police to help reduce violence where we need this help the most. I would take the lead in providing new funding (not taken from the police budget) to neighborhoods to help them help the police in reducing violence, while also partnering with police to coordinate and deploy best practices. If other innovative ways to reduce crime and keep the community safe are proven, we should look at them.

STOTHERT: Public safety will always be my most important responsibility, including improved training of police officers. Citizens have new ways to file complaints and the Citizen Complaint Review Board produces an annual report. We have reviewed and revised policies, required more law enforcement training, solicited public input, and are creating a strategic plan for diversity, equity and inclusion. More highly trained police officers are on the job than ever. All city employees will take bias training.

In what specific ways will you work to increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in Omaha?

NEARY: As mayor I will:

- Provide support to current programs that renovate existing housing stocks in order to keep elderly and low-income homeowners in their homes.
- Create 1,600 affordable housing units in 4 years.
- Identify more available and entitled sites for workforce housing units.
- Support and empower neighborhood associations. For example, we should re-allocate the \$250,000 neighborhood snow-watching contracts from engineers to One Omaha.
- Implement High Impact Low Cost projects every year.

STOTHERT: The city's role is to create an environment for and support affordable housing. The city offers incentives like density bonuses, Transit Oriented Development (TOD), and expanded Tax Increment Financing (TIF). The new TIF policy expands eligibility. Affordable housing projects underway are Nobility Pointe, The Overlook, Davis Ridge, Kennedy Square, and Canopy South, adding 100s of units. We committed to safe, affordable housing with the rental registration and inspection program.

Omaha City Council, District 1



Pete Festersen

Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Councilman 2009-Present. **Past Public Office, dates held:** Omaha City Council President 2013-2015. **Education:** B.A. Connecticut College, M.P.A. University of Nebraska at Omaha. **Occupation:** Vice President, CHI Health. **Military experience:** None. **Volunteer experience:** Saving Grace Perishable Food Rescue, United Way of the Midlands, Avenue Scholars, Omaha Childrens Museum, College World Series, Inc, NE Early Childhood Collaborative, NE Chamber of Commerce, NE State Trauma Board, Omaha Planning Board. **Website:** www.petefestersen.com



Sarah Johnson

Current Public Office, dates held: n/a. **Past Public Office, dates held:** n/a. **Education:** Bachelor of Journalism - Broadcasting 2003 University of Nebraska Lincoln. **Occupation:** Small Business Owner. **Military experience:** none. **Volunteer experience:** Co-founder of Mode Shift Omaha and served on the board of directors as vice chair and treasurer. Benson BID Board member and Neighborhood Association member. Benson Out Back group as well as Benson First Friday Green Team Clean up crew. **Website:** www.sj4oma.com

What are examples of police reform you support?

FESTERSEN: I am supportive of community policing policies that proactively engage the community and build trust with law enforcement. I am an active participant working on police community relations with organizations such as the empowerment network and have actively supported city contributions toward violence prevention including the police athletic league for at-risk kids (PACE). In addition to such community partnerships, we must continue to improve accountability and transparency within law enforcement including civilian oversight, recently adopted standard operating procedure reforms, and an easy to access public complaint process that results in expedient review and decisive actions when discipline or firing of an officer is justified. I have also supported additional training for police officers and amended the city budget to include funding for mental health strategies as the need is great and law enforcement shouldn't be the first contact for those in mental health crisis.

JOHNSON: I think it's important to start by addressing the fact that Black and Brown people are disproportionately affected by police violence and are over policed in general. Racism is sadly still alive and well in Omaha. We need to look at what public safety really means and I'm all for more compassion and care and less cages and surveillance. At a bare minimum a Citizen Oversight Committee is crucial for building trust between the public and the OPD. I think it's also crucial to look at the root cause of crime and handle issues proactively rather than reactively. We shouldn't criminalize homelessness or panhandling. We should allocate more resources to mental health (like the CAHOOTS model in Eugene OR), housing, addressing poverty, keeping kids fed & engaged in school. Omaha recently hired a Vision Zero coordinator who will hopefully address road design to curb speeding so there is less police/public interaction in general. No new prisons! Remove SROs. Demilitarize the OPD. End cash bail.

Omaha City Council, District 1

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

FESTERSEN: Safe and affordable housing is a key issue for the future of our community. As chair of the City Council's planning committee I led the effort to pass the city's first landlord registry ordinance and increased the number of housing inspectors. I am currently working on affordable housing strategies to address the estimated 80,000 unit shortage in our community that will include changes to tax increment financing policy and partnerships with the development and philanthropic communities.

JOHNSON: With a shortage of about 80,000 affordable units we need to look at multiple angles to address this crisis with urgency. TIF is currently misused and I think that affordable housing needs to be mandated if we're giving away (or rather, not receiving) tax dollars to developers. I also think that we need to allocate City funds to allow a right to counsel for all of our renters. We need to end exclusionary zoning and allow ADUs to be built. Prohibit retaliatory evictions. Update our housing plan!

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

FESTERSEN: I have been very supportive of the new ORBT bus system as a first step towards modernizing our public transit system and I passed transit oriented development master plan amendments to help ensure its long-term success. As we continue to assess its ridership and make necessary adjustments, we need to encourage a variety of other public transit enhancements so we are able to serve those that are most in need of convenient access to public transit and so we can attract our future workforce.

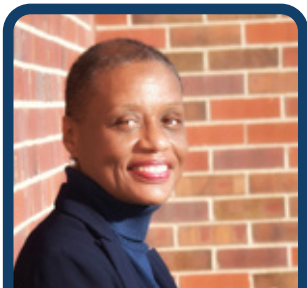
JOHNSON: Due to the pandemic it's off to a subpar start; a lot of riders aren't wearing masks which needs to be addressed. One way the City can better support ORBT and Metro transit in general, is by treating sidewalks as part of the transportation network. Right now they're not prioritized when it comes to crosswalk maintenance & snow clearing. This is unacceptable as clear sidewalks & ADA curb cuts are key to accessibility. We also need to mandate TOD instead of making it optional, and add a N/S ORBT.

Omaha City Council, District 2



Ben Gray

Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Council 2009-2021. **Past Public Office, dates held:** None. **Education:** 3 years college. **Occupation:** Omaha City Council Member. **Military experience:** Viet Nam Veteran, served 6 years. **Volunteer experience:** Co Founder of the Step Up Summer Jobs program. Gang Intervention work Volunteer at Frances House and the Open Door Mission through my lodge.
Website: www.Vote4BenGray.com



Jaunita Johnson

Education: Bachelor of Business Administration, MBA to be completed 2023. **Occupation:** Project Engineer. **Military experience:** NA. **Volunteer experience:** 1) President-Long School Neighborhood Association 2) Founder/Director-24th Street Corridor Alliance 3) Various Offices-Nebraska Chapter, Regional and National-Blacks In Government.
Website: www.votejuanita.com

What are examples of police reform you support?

GRAY: There needs to be on-going training for police in the areas of dealing with persons with mental illness, crowd control and continuing their diversity training. I must add this police department recognized the need for these kinds of training and began so several years ago. They recognize the need for continued training in these areas.

JOHNSON: • Promote better diversity training and education training for all officers. • Better law enforcement and prosecution of Officers who willfully break the law by violating civilian rights. • Include other professionals to work in concert with police. These professionals will assist with special cases such as individuals with mental illness issues, or individuals who should be medicated but or not on their meds.

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

GRAY: To me this is the most challenging issue we will face in the coming years. I have worked with Habitat for Humanity since being on the Council as well as Holy Name Housing and the Omaha Economic Development Corporation. The Council approved TIF financing for entities like the ones mentioned so they have the opportunity to build multiple housing with this valuable tool. In addition I have been working with real estate professionals to look tiny houses and shipping containers homes.

Omaha City Council, District 2

JOHNSON: • Refer constituents to local First time-homeownership programs and agencies. • Plan to host a variety of community meetings, homeownership will be on the agenda for each meeting.

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

GRAY: It's working well in the areas where it currently operates. It needs to be expanded especially North and South.

JOHNSON: PROPOSED NEXT STEPS: Due to the early completion of the Route the regions Long Term Transportation Plan (LTTP) has received substantial support from the public. To capitalized on this, we should proceed with the following steps:

Hold community outreach meetings for extending the Route into Council Bluffs IA, and hold outreach meetings for a potential ORBT route long Center Street. These options would greatly increase the City's ridership, and all would have a massive impact on families.

Omaha City Council, District 3



Danny Begley

Current Public Office, dates held: NRD Board of Directors, 2019- present.

Past Public Office, dates held: NRD Board of Director 2019 - Present.

Education: Cathedral High School - 1987 Attended University Nebraska Omaha and Metropolitan Community College. **Occupation:** Claims Adjuster - OPPD. Military experience: None. **Volunteer experience:** Special Olympics, Walk for Warmth, Blue Collar Boxing, Ancient Order of Hibernians; volunteer coach, Holy Cross Grade School; Open Door Mission food server; Salvation Army bell ringer.

Website: www.dannybegley.com



Cammy Watkins

Education: BA from Cornell College. **Occupation:** Nonprofit Deputy Director. **Volunteer experience:** Habitat for Humanity of Omaha Global Village, Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers, Spark CDI, OPS Inclusion Committee, Nonprofit Assn of the Midlands, and Council on Opportunity, Diversity and Equity.

Website: www.cammy4council.com

Omaha City Council, District 3

What are examples of police reform you support?

BEGLEY: We should increase access to mental health and substance abuse programming in our community. We should carefully review police contracts and address any areas of concern related to standard operating procedures and ensure officers are well trained and have a bevy of options other than force to assist them in their duties. It is also important to focus on community policing and making sure we have adequate diversity within the police force.

WATKINS: Similar to the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, OR and the STAR program in Colorado I would like to see Omaha work with local law enforcement and 911 dispatch to have social workers and other mental health professionals respond to mental health emergencies and other emergencies that do not require armed response. I also support reform plans which promote more of a prevention focus including investing more in community led safety initiatives and city design which limits the need for law enforcement intervention. Lastly, I think in order for us to address police reform we need to address the entire system of crime prevention. Too much of the focus is on punishment and not justice which glorifies solving violence with violence or fixing trauma with trauma. I would like the City of Omaha to research and study an anti-violence, trauma informed public safety plan that seeks to end violence in our city on all levels. This could save the lives of residents as well as officers.

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

BEGLEY: Omaha has a shortage of low-income housing and we must increase the number of units and increase code enforcement to ensure all units are safe living environments. We should also work to ensure that we have more jobs that pay a living wage in our city. The primary problem isn't that we have too few low-income units, rather, we don't have enough jobs paying a living wage so that people aren't struggling to make ends meet, and I want to work to increase the number of living wage jobs in our city.

WATKINS: There are numerous ways the City Council can support more equitable housing access. A few I want to consider: Set a basic standard and definition of affordable housing and give priority to capital development in new housing projects that meet these standards. Implement the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing recommendations to address neighborhood and development inequities. Support nonprofits involved in training and investing in small community developers for development and revitalization.

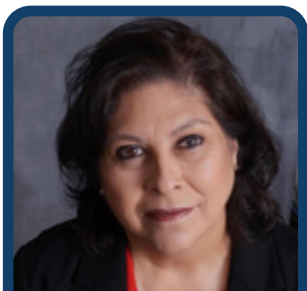
Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

BEGLEY: ORBT was a good place to begin improving our public transit system. However, additional investments in bus routes, shelters, and smart technology will be necessary to meet the needs of our community. I will advocate for additional investments that would expand routes and improve reliability in our public transportation system. I think we should also expand the cities other transportation options, enhance trails and protected bike lanes, and other multimodal transportation.

Omaha City Council, District 3

WATKINS: The ORBT bus system is working as best as its current design allows. However, only being accessible on Dodge St and with limited access to west Omaha. The line needs to be expanded to have North and South lines and also needs to reach further west for commuters and others who need access to mass transit across all areas of the city, as well as extend to the airport and Sarpy County. We also need the service to address the gaps in mobility and transportation for people with disabilities.

Omaha City Council, District 4



Becky Barrientos-Patlan

No response received.



Vinny Palermo

Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Council District 4, 2017-2021. Past Public Office, dates held: OPS School Board, 2016. Education: Attended University of Nebraska - Omaha. Occupation: Small Business Owner. Military experience: United States Navy Veteran, 1991-1995. Volunteer experience: Athletic Coach for P.A.C.E. to assist and prevent "at-risk" and disadvantaged inner-city children from becoming involved in street gangs, crime, drug use and victimization.

Website: www.vinnypalermo.com

What are examples of police reform you support?

BARRIENTOS-PATLAN: No response received.

PALERMO: I support community policing and think it's critical to have officers who live in the areas they are patrolling so that they are seen as part of the community. It is also important to increase diversity among the force so the officers look like and have a shared experience of those in the community they are policing. I also support looking at contractual changes to make sure officers are well trained and have standard operating procedures that reduce the chances for excessive use of force. I also support increasing mental health resources and social services which have been shown to reduce the need for use of force by police officers.

Omaha City Council, District 4

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

BARRIENTOS-PATLAN: No response received.

PALERMO: Currently, District 4 has the most affordable housing being built in the City of Omaha. I have worked to meet with developers, nonprofits and organizations to work together to find available ground and it is currently now in the process of moving forward. I will continue to advocate for the areas that can be built; working with groups and nonprofits to build affordable housing. Safety is also a priority; we passed the rental registry and additional housing inspectors were added to the budget.

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

BARRIENTOS-PATLAN: No response received.

PALERMO: Yes, we have made great strides to connect more people in our community to employment, education and activities with this efficient and safe transit option. I believe we can always advocate for increasing ridership and promote all forms of transportation. By prioritizing affordable public transportation, we can expand opportunities along the corridor and turn ORBT into transportation people want to use, more than they need to use.

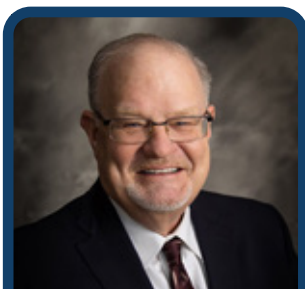
Omaha City Council, District 5



Patrick Leahy

Current Public Office, dates held: NA. **Past Public Office, dates held:** Metropolitan Community College Board of Governors 2000-2010. Chair 2002, Budget/Finance and Building/Sites committee chairs. **Education:** Master of Architecture, UNL. Bachelor of Architecture, UNL. **Occupation:** Senior Architect & Planner. **Military experience:** NA. **Volunteer experience:** 1. Habitat for Humanity construction and plans. 2. Mission Park HOA, secretary. 3. AIA, NE Chapter, Government Affairs Committee, Chair. 4. Nebraska Society of Healthcare Engineers, Education Committee. 5. FGI Facilities Guidelines Review Committee.

Website: www.Leahy4CityCouncil.com



Don Rowe

Current Public Office, dates held: N/A. **Past Public Office, dates held:** N/A. **Education:** Bachelor of Science - Business Administration University of Nebraska - Lincoln. **Occupation:** Vice President - Sales, Millard Lumber. **Military experience:** N/A. **Volunteer experience:** Hope International University - Vice Chair, Board of Trustees. Metro Omaha Builders Association - Past Board Member, Nebraska State Homebuilders Association - Past Board Member, Nebraska Christian College - Past Board Member.

Website: www.donroweomaha.com

Omaha City Council, District 5

What are examples of police reform you support?

LEAHY: I support Omaha police 100%. 1. Community Policing. 2. Fund more Training. 3. Provide correct health & safety Equipment. 4. Behavior Health Assessments of suspects.

ROWE: I want to come out in support of our police department. I like the reforms that came out of the last contract discussions. I support the use of Body Cameras and would encourage even expanded use of that tool. I also support the enhanced training and increased community interaction by our officers in the field. I really like the idea of having mental health co-responders at each of the police precincts. The two-year probation change will allow our police chief more flexibility in hiring the right people for the job.

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

LEAHY: 1. Missing Middle Housing should be allowed by code were desired. I have testified to this at Nebraska Unicameral. Provides multiple incomes and multiple home sizes in the form of single family homes, row houses, carriage houses, and more. 2. Use excess TIF money for infrastructure for affordable housing.

ROWE: I am a supporter of The Missing Middle Housing concept. We need to identify and remove planning and zoning barriers to this tried and true concept for affordable development. I think we can use TIF even more effectively to insure that developers continue to build affordable housing in our neighborhoods. We need to make it easy for our non-profits like Holy Name Housing and Habitat for Humanity fulfill their mission in providing access to affordable housing.

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

LEAHY: ORBT is working as well as designed, It can be better, needs to have increased routes east to west and north to south and well as cross town from higher density residential areas to employment center.

ROWE: I do not think we can make a fair assessment of the new ORBT system at this time. The Covid pandemic has caused a significant disruption to the way we work and play. Many of our downtown office buildings and restaurants are operating at a fraction of their capacity. Most of our employees are still working from home and do not need to commute to their downtown office. As things continue to open up, our restaurants may want to offer some incentives to use this mode of transportation.

Omaha City Council, District 6



Brinker Harding

Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Council- District 6.
Education: University of Kansas, University of Nebraska- Omaha.
Occupation: Commercial Real Estate Broker. **Volunteer experience:** Omaha Planning Board- Past Chairman. Nebraska State Athletic Association Official. JDRF - Past Board Member & Gala Chair. Midwest Swimming Board of Directors. Destination Marketing Corporation Board of Directors. Civilian Pension Board of Directors.
Website: www.brinkerharding.com



Naomi Hattaway

Occupation: Nonprofit Consultant. **Volunteer experience:** Women's Fund of Omaha leadership, POC Collaborative Board, RISE Board, Ripple Effect Images Advisory Committee, Room to Read Gala Chair.
Volunteerism: numerous PTA President roles, RISE Builder program, Habitat for Humanity.
Website: www.naomiforcouncil.com

What are examples of police reform you support?

HARDING: The men and women of the Omaha Police Department are the frontline to providing public safety for our community. I support additional training, equipment and other resources so that they may perform their duties in a professional manner, and protect and serve all in our community.

HATTAWAY: Continued diversification of recruit classes, including support of anti-bias and anti-racism training. Expansion of mental health responders along, or in place of law enforcement when appropriate (Wichita's HOT or Denver's STAR as examples). Mental health resources for victims/families, suffering from impact/trauma of violence in all forms, as well as police personnel affected by violence in the course of duty. Focus on safe neighborhoods for all, and reduced harm inflicted by officers.

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

HARDING: Studies indicate Omaha has a shortfall of approximately 80,000 affordable housing units. Some advocate that developers be required to include a small percentage of TIF proceeds on residential projects. This would accomplish little in making a dent in the housing issue: it would only apply, generally, to the eastern half of our city; and the number of units it would bring to market would be minimal. A more successful approach would include developing new incentives to spur development citywide.

HATTAWAY: Partner with landlord liaison efforts (education/resources for necessary repairs of current housing stock, ensuring safe/secure housing). Maximize incentives for home winterization, increase aging in place modifications for our elders. Champion infill work by small developers. Encourage economic support of small businesses, to holistically grow community health. Inject equity into housing policy: define "affordable housing", code enforcement education, and encourage estate planning.

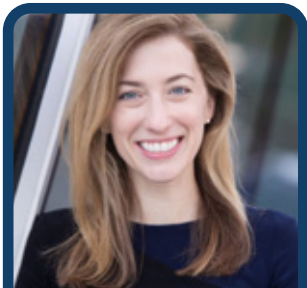
Omaha City Council, District 6

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

HARDING: Public transportation is an essential element as it relates to employment. We must provide the ability to move employees to and from areas of employment. ORBT is the first step to building a broader, more user friendly system to move people to jobs and commerce. It will be the "spine" off of which other routes will tie into in order better serve the metropolitan area. ORBT will also positively impact development and housing opportunities through Transit Oriented Development code amendments.

HATTAWAY: The launch was managed quite well, considering pandemic concerns and weather! I appreciated driver training for wheelchair/mobility aid users being a priority, as well as the how-to videos showing diverse riders. Improvements are needed concerning funding partnerships, West Omaha expansion, and accessibility to/from all ORBT stops, including mindfulness of all community members needing access. This includes snow removal and maintenance of the pathways and sidewalks surrounding the ORBT stops.

Omaha City Council, District 7



Sara Kohen

Education: J.D., with highest honors, University of Nebraska College of Law; B.A., summa cum laude, James Madison University (Political Science and Spanish). **Volunteer experience:** -Active member of Beth El Synagogue and Beth Israel Synagogue -Involved in projects of the Jewish Federation of Omaha -Helped welcome a refugee family resettling in Omaha -Volunteer Spanish interpreter at Blue Ridge Legal Services in college.

Website: www.saraforomaha.com



Aimee Melton

Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Council District 7 2013 to present. **Education:** B.S. Political Science University of Nebraska J.D. Creighton University School of Law. **Volunteer experience:** Essential Pregnancy Service Numerous Political candidates St. Robert Bellarmine Volunteer Lawyers Project Christ Child Salvation Army Nebraska Mock Trial Big Brothers Big Sisters Domestic Violence Council DCRP.

Website: www.meltonforomaha.com

Omaha City Council, District 7

What are examples of police reform you support?

KOHEN: I think we should all work together to make sure that our community is a safe place for everyone. This is a bigger issue than can be addressed fully in a quick answer, but I think that we need to start from a place of listening and then look at the data about what we can do to improve outcomes for everyone. Police officers often face dangerous situations that change rapidly. It's a hard job. We need to look at how we can invest in our communities—building people up and, hopefully, decreasing the need for police involvement in the first place—and looking at how we can give police officers the training and resources they need to do their jobs effectively. This is where I come back to following the data. Let's expand upon things that are working well—such as the mental health co-responder program—and if something isn't working as well, think creatively about how to improve.

MELTON: Police officers should be afforded additional training, resources and equipment to enable each officer to provide the highest level of safety for all citizens of Omaha. We need to increase the number of mental health co-responders that currently assist officers and invest in mental health training and mental health co-responders for other first responders. Community policing requires a diverse police force, we must focus on recruitment to ensure that our police department reflects the diversity of our community.

In what specific ways will you increase the safety and availability of affordable housing in your community?

KOHEN: The safety and availability of affordable housing in our community is a challenge that deeply affects individuals and families, but also has a broader societal impact. Working to ensure that Housing Enforcement has sufficient resources to address code violations is key to improving safe housing conditions. City government also should work with community partners to explore incentives and opportunities for partnering to increase the availability of affordable housing.

MELTON: Adding additional housing inspectors and providing them with the resources to increase enforcement of housing codes will ensure residents have a safe environment. Expand partnerships with non-profit organizations to educate, inform, report violations, and protect vulnerable persons/families living in substandard residences. We also need to increase the availability of safe affordable housing by expanding tax incentives that prioritize affordable housing.

Is the new ORBT bus system working as well as expected? If not, what improvements need to be made?

KOHEN: ORBT is an exciting development, though it will be hard to assess it fully until the pandemic abates. Numbers from January indicate that twice as many people are riding on ORBT as the previous bus route, despite the overall fall in bus ridership during the pandemic as people seek to avoid enclosed spaces. It's a promising move toward more modern, sustainable, and accessible transportation. I am interested in learning about potential benefits of expanding ORBT routes.

MELTON: The ORBT bus system was launched a few months ago. It was half funded by a TIGER grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the remaining funds came from private philanthropy, non-profit organizations and in-kind contributions by the city. The rapid transit system is expected to efficiently connect people to jobs, residences and entertainment. However, the system will need to expand north to south in order to provide transportation to all who need to utilize it.

If you are voting early, you can return your ballot at one of the convenient drop boxes provided by the counties:



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Douglas County

Drop Box Locations

- City/County Building, Located:
Between 18th & 19th on Farnam,
near sidewalk, 1819 Farnam Street, Omaha
- South Omaha Library, Relocated:
East side parking lot, 2808 Q Street, Omaha
- Charles B. Washington Branch Library, Located:
Southwest corner of building,
2868 Ames Avenue, Omaha
- Clarkson College Parking Lot 8, Located:
Northwest corner, east side of parking lot,
42nd & Farnam St, Omaha
- Goodwill, Located:
Southwest end of parking lot, near IHOP,
4805 N 72nd St, Omaha
- Ralston Police Department, Located:
Southwest corner of building,
7400 Main Street, Ralston
- Asian Market, Located:
West end of parking lot, 321 N 76th St, Omaha
- Milton R. Abrahams Branch Library, Located:
South of main entrance, 5111 N 90th Street, Omaha
- Douglas County Election Commission, Located:
Southwest end of parking lot, under light pole,
12220 W Center Road, Omaha
- Douglas County Engineer's Office, Located:
Near sidewalk by parking stalls,
15505 W Maple Road, Omaha
- Millard Public Schools Foundation, Located:
Northwest corner of building, end of sidewalk,
5225 South 159th Avenue, Omaha
- Spring Ridge Shopping Center, Located:
On median when entering at 178th St,
next to post office box, 178th & Pacific St, Omaha
- Bess Johnson Elkhorn Branch Library, Located:
Northeast corner of building,
2100 Reading Plaza, Elkhorn

***If you are planning to vote in-person on Election Day,
you can find your polling place by using the following link:***

www.votercheck.necvr.ne.gov/VoterView

If you have any questions about the upcoming elections, please contact the Heartland Workers Center by phone at 402.933.6095, email us at hwc@heartlandworkerscenter.org, or visit our webpage at www.heartlandworkerscenter.org