

Voters Guide – City of Omaha Election

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER OMAHA



Primary Election Date: April 6, 2021
General Election Date: May 11, 2021

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The election for Mayor and City Council in Omaha is officially Non-Partisan. The candidates are not running based on political party affiliation. The top two candidates from the primary election-- no matter which political party they belong to--will advance to the general election.



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Omaha Mayor

Mark Gudgel: <http://www.gudgelformayor.com>

Current Public Office, dates held: None. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: Bachelor's in English Education, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Master's in Theology, Grace University Doctorate in Character Education, Regent University. Occupation: High School English Teacher. Military experience: None. Volunteer experience: Co-founder and executive director of Educators' Institute for Human Rights, Member of Omaha Performing Arts Presenters Circle Board of Directors, Member of Field Club Home

Owners' Association, Board Chair of the vinNEBRASKA committee.

Jasmine L. Harris: <http://voteforjasmine.com>

Education: 1998 - Omaha Northwest High School (High School Diploma); 2005 - University of Nebraska at Omaha (Bachelor of Arts - Biology); 2010 - University of Nebraska Medical Center (Masters of Public Health). Occupation: Nonprofit Director. Volunteer experience: Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, Omaha Community Foundation (AAUF), NE Unity PAC, Women's Fund of Omaha Circles, North Omaha Community Care Council, Urban League of NE Young Professionals, MOTAC.

RJ Neary: <http://www.nearyforomaha.com> 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.

Kimara Snipes: <http://www.kimarasnipes.com> Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha Public Schools Board of Education, 2018 – current. Education: Graduate of Omaha Bryan High School. Occupation: Civic engagement advocate. Volunteer experience: South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance President; Boards for Mode Shift Omaha, Civic Nebraska, Heartland Workers Center, Kroc Center Advisory, Allen Chapel, and One Omaha; Douglas County Land Reutilization Commission

Jean Stothert: <http://jeanstothert.com> 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.

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

Gudgel: As mayor, I will enforce a mask mandate until the city reaches the benchmarks of 5% or less of all positive tests for two consecutive weeks, or until the experts at UNMC determine they are no longer necessary. We would continue the distancing rules for businesses and ensure that any open businesses are adhering to these rules. We will work with the county to ensure that all federal assistance is going to help businesses and will designate funds for rent and utility assistance.

Harris: Omaha needs a proactive response to COVID-19. It is imperative that we create plans that allow us to reimagine proximity, contact and accessibility in public spaces; flatten the curve by continuing to test and track; equitable distribution of the vaccine by eliminating barriers to registration, transportation, and appointment availability; communication of culturally competent information about the mask mandate and vaccine; and facilitating equitable distribution of the CARES Act funding.

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.

Snipes: I believe city leaders should be proactive in addressing a threat to the health and safety of Omahans. When there was hesitancy at City Hall, I organized Covid-19 task forces in both North and South Omaha to address underserved communities where information was lagging and demographics indicated elevated health risks. I supported the use of masks early but was disappointed we were the last major U.S. city to adopt a mask ordinance. Leadership requires courage and the willingness to act.

Stothert: 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.

What are examples of police reform you support?

Gudgel: I plan to create an elected Police and Fire Civilian Oversight board. While civilian oversight exists to an extent currently, the board has only seen 6 cases. We will ensure that this board is able to review all complaints, and will eventually serve as a check on the police and fire departments internal affairs investigations. We have no intention of defunding the police. However, if our teachers have to answer to a school board, our police and fire fighters should have similar oversight.

Harris: The best way to keep our communities safe is to invest in solutions that address why people come into contact with law enforcement such as mental health, poverty, and inequitable access to resources. Prioritizing these services and addressing patterns of police violence and misconduct help reimagine a new community policing model by increasing transparency and accountability of police data/practices, demilitarization, and an approach focused on prevention and not criminalization.

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.

Snipes: I have experience with community policing as a neighborhood leader and as a member of the advisory board for the Southeast Police Precinct. I continue to support expansion of programs that foster better

communication between officers and the public as a path to restore trust lost during social justice protests last summer. I support the transparency measures recently adopted but wish they resulted from leadership rather than settlement of a lawsuit. When we restore trust we make Omaha safer.

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?

Gudgel: First, we will work with local experts to create an actual City Affordable Housing Plan which will include cooperation with housing developers to provide tax incentives to build mixed and low-income housing for every middle to high income project developed. We will change the culture of tax increment financing so that it only goes to projects that legitimately help blighted communities. We will also ensure the right to legal representation for anyone going through an eviction.

Harris: Access to safe and affordable housing should not depend on a person's zip code, income, race or gender. We must apply an equity lens by establishing working definitions of safe and affordable, effective administration of the landlord registry/rental inspection program, revise current zoning laws/restrictions, and innovative approaches such as tiny homes, auxiliary dwelling units and multi-family units to address in-fill and availability in proximity to accessible transportation.

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

Snipes: I believe we must first recognize the need to address the shortage of our affordable housing stock in Omaha. I would be proactive in creating incentives for infill affordable housing projects, building codes to allow tiny houses, and seeking affordable units as part of major new housing and apartment developments. Our code enforcement should prioritize the inspection process to focus on the violations that place residents at the greatest risks to health and safety.

Stohtert: 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

Paul Anderson: <http://1953andersonpaul@gmail.com>
 Current Public Office, dates held: None. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: High School Diploma (1971) Kensington, Ks. Associate Degree Metro Community College (2018). Occupation: Retired US Navy, Railroad (2013). Military experience: Retired U. S. Navy Reserve (21 years) Mobilized Operation Iraqi

Freedom (2004) Mobilized Hurricane Katrina Relief Effort (2005). Volunteer experience: Volunteer Driver with the DAV (5 yrs.) Volunteer (Builder) with Habitat for Humanity (5 yrs.)

Pete Festersen: <http://www.petefestersen.com>
 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.

Sarah Johnson: <http://sj4oma.com> 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.

Tyeisha Kosmicki: No response received.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Anderson: As a member of the city council, I would favor bringing back the position of public safety auditor. The auditor would be hired and be accountable to the city council, not the mayor!

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.

Kosmicki: No response received.

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

Anderson: As a member of the city council, I would like to be the liaison between the Omaha Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and Omaha's Building Code Department.

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!

Kosmicki: No response received.

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

Anderson: I was told by a Metro bus manager, since ORBT was implemented (11/17/20), their ridership is roughly, 1,200 a day. They do expect that number to rise, when the Covid restrictions are lifted.

As a retired railroader I favor Omaha going to an all electric light rail transportation system, on their busiest routes.

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.

Kosmicki: No response received.

Omaha City Council, District 2

Steven Abraham: No response received.

Ben Gray: <http://Vote4BenGray.com> 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.

Jaunita Johnson: <http://www.votejuanita.com> 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 Office s-Nebraska Chapter, Regional and National-Blacks In Government.

Jonathan C. Lathan: <http://www.lathanfor2021.com> Current Public Office, dates held: None. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: High School Diploma. Occupation: Transportation Manager. Military experience: 14 Years, United States Army (SSG) 2 Combat deployments (Iraq -2004, Afghanistan - 2012) Served as a convoy escort gunner. Volunteer experience: Coaching youth football since 2017, Member of Youth Mentorship group.

David Mitchell: No response received.

Cornelius F. Williams:
<http://www.facebook.com/Cornelius.Williams.CityCoun>

cilD2 Past Public Office, dates held: Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, Subcouncil 2. Education: Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, Doctor of Philosophy, Nuclear Physics, 1997 Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, Master of Science, Physics, 1989 Stanford University, Stanford, CA, Bachelor of Science, Physics, 1986. Occupation: Teaching.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Steven Abraham: No response received.

Ben 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.

Jaunita 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.

Jonathan C. Lathan: The first police reform solution that I support is coming to an understanding that police should not be to go-to agency for all types of situations. We need to have other resources available to the community to not only save taxpayer dollars on non-police issues, but to also ensure that individuals with the proper training are showing up to handle certain situations such as a mental health crisis. This would also help limit the over-policing that occurs throughout my district as well. The second solution would be to have an oversight committee independent of influence from the mayor or OPD, and bring back the auditor to the city.

David Mitchell: No response received.

Cornelius F. Williams: Better education in deal with the public mostly

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

Steven Abraham: No response received.

Ben 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.

Jaunita 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.

Jonathan C. Lathan: We can't talk about affordable housing until we address the income disparity that many Omahan's face. Without jobs that pay a livable wage, it's hard to pinpoint what affordable really means. What it's not, is allowing developers to come in and buy homes within the district for low prices, renovate them, and rent them at prices that place a burden our residents. We have to ensure that any new developments in the district accommodate the residents who already live here.

David Mitchell: No response received.

Cornelius F. Williams: The best way to improve affordable housing is to increase the number of higher paying jobs. When we build new housing, the renter or buyer has to be able to pay the asking price to call it affordable. Not everyone is going to lower the price the are asking, so the buyer or renter has to come up to that price. That's why I will put a large focus on job market.

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

Steven Abraham: No response received.

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

Jaunita Johnson: PROPOSED NEXT STEPS: Due to the early completion of the Route the regions Long Term Transportation Plan (LTP) 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.

Jonathan C. Lathan: I do believe that the ORBT system is working well. However, I do believe that improvements are still necessary. I think that other sections of the city could benefit from this type of transit such as a North/South ORBT going across 24th St. This would allow for accessible transportation to other areas of the city that isn't currently available.

David Mitchell: No response received.

Cornelius F. Williams: From what I can see, but it is hard to judge that system under the current environmental conditions.

Omaha City Council, District 3

Gilbert Ayala: No response received.

Jen Bauer: <http://votejenbauer.com> Education: Bachelor of Business Admin w/Concentration in Accounting - Kent State University. Occupation: Continuous Improvement Process Lead - North America. Volunteer experience: President, Aksarben/Elmwood Park Neighborhood Assoc, Restoration Exchange, Neighborhoods USA, Main Street USA (Mississippi).

Danny Begley: No response received.

Cammy Watkins: <http://www.cammy4council.com>

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

What examples of police reform do you support?

Gilbert Ayala: No response received.

Jen Bauer: I support a measured approach to police reform. It's a process that cannot be achieved overnight. I believe community policing is the first step to police reform. There are good programs which focus on our youth through sports and initiating positive police interactions. I support the mental health pilot program through Lutheran Aid, which sends mental health professionals, along with a police escort, to address mental health situations. This needs to become a full time, fully funded, program in all districts. The next step would be education and training in equal rights, holding those accused of abuse of power accountable. This will be culture shift involving the entire city. We must address poverty, substance abuse and mental health issues through community programs supported by the city. An oversight committee, which has been created, needs to be transparent and its findings made public. Human Rights Watch has a 14 point roadmap which should be reviewed and included in this reform.

Danny Begley: No response received.

Cammy 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?

Gilbert Ayala: No response received.

Jen Bauer: The TOD (Transportation Oriented Development plan) should not just be a guideline to planning, but should be amended to be a central part of the Master Plan created by the city. TIF (Tax Incremental Financing) needs to be amended to include more stringent considerations for affordable housing, making it a mission to include affordable and workforce housing in any plan presented for consideration. Affordable housing options need to be focused in areas where employment opportunities exist.

Danny Begley: No response received.

Cammy 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?

Gilbert Ayala: No response received.

Jen Bauer: The new ORBT line on Dodge is a good start and is working as well, given a global pandemic. There is room for improvement of the entire transportation blueprint. It needs to be more robust, with routes that

address Omaha's ever growing footprint. It should include lines that run north and south. Routes should not take 3 hours. We should expand further west, where the expansion of Omaha is happening. Lack of transportation leads to wage insecurity which leads to food insecurity. We can fix this.

Danny Begley: No response received.

Cammy 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.

Ben Cass: <http://www.bencassforomaha.com> Current Public Office, dates held: None. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: Metropolitan Community College, A.S. Computer Programming Technology | Bellevue University, B.S. Computer Information Systems. Occupation: Sr. Software Engineer at Mutual of Omaha. Volunteer experience: Omaha Jitterbugs, Deer Park Neighborhood Association, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, Nebraska Democratic Party.

Vinny Palermo: <http://vinnypalermo.com> 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.

Sarah Smolen: <http://smolen4omaha.com> Current Public Office, dates held: N/A. Past Public Office, dates held: N/A. Education: Bachelor of Science, Secondary Education, English and ELL endorsements. Occupation: Teacher. Military experience: None. Volunteer experience: N/A.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Becky Barrientos-Patlan: No response received.

Ben Cass: The Omaha Police Department provides an essential public service, and I applaud the considerable effort they've made to set a high standard for policing in Omaha.

Our police reform efforts should be focused on training, transparency, and accountability. Officers should be trained in de-escalation techniques, implicit bias, and reporting officer misconduct.

Since we know issues can crop up with individual officers, we need transparency to identify problematic patterns of behavior – including continuing the use of body cameras and creating a public registry of officer misconduct which was reported in good faith.

Our mechanisms for officer accountability need to be independent in order to be effective. Whistleblowers must be protected from retaliation.

Additionally, I believe well-funded mental health care services, crisis counseling, addiction counseling, and school and community services can reduce the need for police intervention in the first place.

Vinny 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.

Sarah Smolen: I'm in support of programs like STAR in Denver and Cahoot in Portland that divert calls to teams of specialized mental health professionals and medics so people can get the help they need during some of their most desperate and vulnerable moments. I also believe community review boards are essential to increasing transparency and accountability from local police departments. Investing in mental health services, homeless prevention, and other community programs would also greatly decrease the need for police to respond to calls that are not of a criminal nature.

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

Becky Barrientos-Patlan: No response received.

Ben Cass: The recent landlord registry ordinance is a great first step, but we need to continue monitoring and adjusting as needed. Having electronic options for flagging issues with landlords and the city will make the program more efficient and accessible.

For affordability, our policies need to help supply keep up with demand by prioritizing higher density housing, especially near our transit hubs, and allowing zoning flexibility for renovations like adding an in-law suite to a house.

Vinny 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.

Sarah Smolen: Implement or support tenant right to counsel in eviction hearings to reduce the number of evictions.

Eliminate source of income discrimination so those with Section 8 or veterans vouchers can find housing.

Increase landlord accountability to enforce maintaining safe living conditions.

Create affordable housing requirements when approving TIF requests.

Promote "missing middle" and mixed income housing.

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

Becky Barrientos-Patlan: No response received.

Ben Cass: I think that the state of Omaha's public transit system is one of the most important things we need to be grappling with now to ensure the long-term success of the city. With that in mind, I think we're still in the early days of ORBT.

Our next steps will be building ridership, looking at new routes and ways to expand the system, and encouraging livable neighborhoods and job opportunities to develop alongside our public transit.

Vinny 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.

Sarah Smolen: The new ORBT bus system is an exciting upgrade to our public transportation system. There is a lot of enthusiasm from cyclists about the ease of loading a bike on and off the bus. To maximize the benefits of the ORBT system, it needs to be expanded to other streets that cross Omaha (L Street, Q street, or Center St.) and include routes that run north and south (24th St, 72nd St, 144th St).

Omaha City Council, District 5

Colleen Brennan: <http://colleenbrennanforomaha.com>
Current Public Office, dates held: Omaha City Council for District 5 January 12, 2021 to Present. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: Music & Fine Arts

Major at UNO & UNL Four Years - No Degree.
Occupation: Marketing Manager. Military experience: None. Volunteer experience: Autism Speaks Special Olympics St. Andrews Children's Choir.

Kate Gotsdiner: <http://kategotsdinerforomaha.com>
Education: Bachelor's Degree - Lake Forest College, Political Science and Philosophy. Currently pursuing Masters of Public Policy from UNO. Occupation: Donor Services Coordinator, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation.

Kathleen R. Kauth: <http://KauthforCouncil.com>
Current Public Office, dates held: NA. Past Public Office, dates held: NA. Education: BA - Criminology/Sociology MPP - Public Policy. Occupation: Mediator and Conflict Coach. Military experience: NA. Volunteer experience: ENOA Advisory Board (Foster Grandparents), Millard Public Schools.

Patrick Leahy: <http://Leahy4CityCouncil.com> 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.

Jeff Moore: <http://MooreforOmaha.com> Current Public Office, dates held: Member of the Omaha Planning Board, 2016 to present. Education: Bachelor of Journalism Degree from UNL. Occupation: Insurance Agent. Volunteer experience: Ambassador for 7 years at the Omaha Visitor's Center. Volunteer at FoodBank of The Heartland. Volunteer and past board member at St. Gerald's Catholic Church. Volunteer for The American Red Cross and the American Heart Association.

Don Rowe: <http://donroweomaha.com> 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.

Destiny Stark: Current Public Office, dates held: None. Past Public Office, dates held: None. Education: Omaha Community Playhouse Theatre, Technology Apprenticeship Program in partnership with Metropolitan Community College. Occupation: IATSE Local No. 42 Journeyman. Military experience: None. Volunteer experience: IATSE Local No. 42 Political Coordinator, Co-Chair Women's Committee, Delegate Omaha Federation of Labor, Delegate Western Iowa Labor Federation, Change of Omaha 4th of July Rally; working with League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha register voter.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Brennan: I support the ongoing efforts of the Omaha Police Department to be more mindful and proactive in addressing issues arising from cultural diversity. In general, I am highly supportive of the professionalism of our Police Department.

Gotsdiner: This past summer has demonstrated that OPD has been asked to go above and beyond the duties of their oath in providing services that are better left to other professionals. This demonstrates an inefficiency in government. It's the job of city council to help perfect the way our local government is run and to lead the conversation on public safety. While our current officials react to public opinion, I plan to guide it by working with police and community members to define community policing specific to my district and Omaha, while also engaging the full range of city + community services in response to the requests made by a diverse group of community members.

Kauth: Our police do exceptional work in a very difficult job. I stress continued support for body

cameras and community policing initiatives such as involvement in Omaha 360, increasing the number of police available to the community and hiring from the communities that are being served. Continuous improvement in training programs, with routine assessments of their effectiveness, are critical to helping officers develop and maintain their skills.

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

Moore: While there have been calls for sweeping reforms of police departments across the country, I do not support many of the proposals that I have heard and read about. I don't believe that you can defund or reallocate funds to make a police department better. To improve our police department, we may need to allocate additional funds to the Omaha PD to ensure they are constantly learning and training so that all people that have encounters with the police are treated fairly and equally.

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.

Stark: Increasing transparency and accountability to ensure greater public safety.

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

Brennan: I am already working with both residents and organizations to improve the quality, safety and availability of affordable housing. Specifically, I am addressing the reporting mechanism for problems and assuring there are protocols in place to protect residents. Further, I am working with developers and city planners to be proactive in zoning and using Tax

Increment Financing as it was intended - to improve low income areas of the city and increase availability.

Gotsdiner: I will work with both the housing authority and organizations such as Tenants' United to find out what areas are deficient regarding safety with Omaha's housing and look at the availability of truly affordable housing. Building new complexes that boast "affordable housing" when the starting rent is over \$700 is not feasible or sustainable for the vast majority of individuals when this does not yet factor in utilities or other monthly needs. Working with the community and organizations is key.

Kauth: Availability can be increased through assessing & re-zoning properties suitable for housing but not currently zoned for it, as well as analyzing codes that may add additional cost but are no longer applicable. Safety can be improved partially w/building protocols such as appropriate lighting and entry/exit mechanisms, but residents have a responsibility to be involved. Neighborhood watch programs, relationship building with local police and other community building efforts should be encouraged.

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.

Moore: As a member of the Omaha Planning Board for the last four years, I have seen many apartment projects that have sought approval and have requested TIF funding. While I am in favor of using TIF for projects, I have continued to ask that the developers include affordable units within the project. It is not a TIF requirement at this time but I believe we are getting there through legislation. Developers can create affordable housing and a profit by using all of the tax incentives available to them.

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.

Stark: Support revitalization improvement projects that protects homeowners from being displaced by gentrification, regulating multifamily rental properties for code violations and the city working with the property owners to bring code violations up to date.

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

Brennan: Most will tell you that ORBT is working very well. However, there are many more challenges to address our overall transportation needs. Improved availability of mass transit to low-income areas; lower or no fees for low income riders; more and improved access to bike and pedestrian lanes are all vital in becoming the city we need to become.

Gotsdiner: It seems like the new ORBT system is working as well as expected, however, it would be great to see it expanded to areas of Omaha so more members of the community would be able to utilize it as an alternative to Uber or Lyft, especially during the weekends. To have it expanded to areas such as Benson, Dundee, Blackstone, and Village Pointe makes those areas of Omaha accessible to all members of the community, which is what we should strive for as a city, unification.

Kauth: After construction delays that pushed the start date into Fall and ridership down in general because of the pandemic, the ORBT system is starting to see progress. Some concerns that should be assessed as the usage grows are if the connections to other means of transportation (regular bus lines, trail heads, park-n-rides) are effective and determine how ridership is growing and from which customers. Much more data and community feedback is needed to determine how the program should be improved.

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

Moore: The ORBT bus system is an investment in the future of Omaha. It will help people move about Omaha without having to own a car. Development along the route will increase and will provide housing, retail and employment opportunities. ORBT will be even better when the route will move north and south allowing even more travel. Finally, I think we will see more people use ORBT as we move past the pandemic.

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.

Stark: The route needs to be expanded North, South and West to connect the city, sidewalks need to be properly cleared of snow or other objects that cause physical barrier's which negatively impact those with limited mobility.

Omaha City Council, District 6

Brinker Harding: <http://brinkerharding.com> 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.

Naomi Hattaway:

<http://www.naomiforcitycouncil.com/> 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.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Brinker 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.

Naomi 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.

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

Brinker 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.

Naomi 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.

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

Brinker 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.

Naomi 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: <http://saraforomaha.com> 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.

Aimee Melton: <http://meltonforomaha.com> 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.

What examples of police reform do you support?

Sara 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.

Aimee 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?

Sara 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.

Aimee 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?

Sara 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.

Aimee 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.

What's my City Council District? Check these sources to find out.

Vote411.org

Douglas County Election Commission <https://www.votedouglascounty.com/>



VOTE 411
ELECTION INFORMATION YOU NEED

Online 2021 Voters Guide

Vote411.org

Voters' Guide-Douglas County
Brought to you by
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Table

If You Live in Douglas County

Return your ballot to the
**Douglas County
Election Commission**
by USPS mail, or use
Drop Boxes at these locations:



Clarkson College Parking Lot 8
42nd & Farnam Sts, Omaha

Goodwill
4805 N 72 Street, Omaha

Ralston Police Department
Southwest corner of building
7400 Main Street, Ralston

Asian Market
321 N 76 Street, Omaha

Milton R. Abrahams Branch Library
South of main entrance
5111 N 90th Street, Omaha

Douglas County Engineer's Office
Near sidewalk by parking stalls
15505 W Maple Road, Omaha

Millard Public Schools Foundation
Northwest corner of building
5225 South 159th Avenue, Omaha

Spring Ridge Shopping Center
178 & Pacific Sts., Omaha

Bess Johnson Elkhorn Branch Library
Northeast corner of building
2100 Reading Plaza, Elkhorn

Douglas County Election Commission
west of main entrance in parking lot
12220 W Center, Omaha

Omaha City/County Building
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
Southwest corner of building
2868 Ames Avenue, Omaha