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Ames Mayor John Haila, city council candidates answer questions on affordable housing



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As executive director of the Bridge Home, Jodi Stumbo said Ames' elected officials have long told her that homelessness has been "a struggle in our community for years."

"But I think now is the time we need to stop struggling and actually invest in ending the cycle of homelessness in our community," Stumbo said Monday evening at Collegiate United Methodist Church.

Around 50 people — an estimated 30 in-person and 20 virtually, according to event organizers — attended the affordable housing event Monday hosted by A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy.

The group invited every Ames city council and mayoral candidate to the meeting, lead organizer Courtney Dufford said. Mayor John Haila, city council at-large candidate Awein Majak, city council at-large incumbent Amber Corrieri and city council Ward 3 candidate Anita Rollins were in attendance.

Local institutions represented at the meeting included the Bridge Home, Ames' United Church of Christ, the Bethesda Lutheran Church, the Collegiate United Methodist Church, the First Baptist Church of Ames, the First Christian Church, St. Cecilia Catholic Church, St. Thomas Aquinas Church and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ames.

"We know that, by working together and putting pressure on our elected officials ... we know we can make lasting and meaningful change in our county and in our community," the group's co-chair, Jason Paull, said.

Candidates were given three questions to review before the event. They were asked to answer each question with a "yes" or a "no" and given limited time to elaborate on their answers.

Here are the questions they were asked:

1. If elected, will you pledge to financially support further development of permanent, supportive housing?

Both Majak and Corrieri said they would.

Majak began her answer by highlighting her 15 years of social work in the county. She said the topic of homelessness was "very touchy," as she has been assisting more residents struggling with housing insecurity since the pandemic started.

Corrieri said she is "very passionate" about investing in supportive housing because of her work with Mainstream Living, an organization that provides disability and mental health services in central Iowa. Long-term supportive housing is one of Mainstream Living's "core programs," she said.

Rollins answered "yes" to funding more development of supportive housing, as long as resources are available to do so.

Haila declined to give a yes or no answer, saying he needed to know how further development would be funded and where such money would come from.

2. Will you support and help to establish a task force between AMOS and others from the city and community at large to review and evaluate zoning and regulatory impediments to affordable housing development and solutions to overcome those barriers?

All four candidates said they would.

Majak said that even if she isn't elected, she would participate in forming a task force on zoning and affordable housing — "Whether I win or I don't win, I'm still here; I'll fight for the issues that I believe in."

Corrieri added that she served on the task force AMOS led that resulted in the creation of the Story County Housing Trust Fund, an organization that she serves as a board chair.

Rollins said she's committed to hearing from community members. She also said she'd like to "consider various scenarios and models ... and ensure that we consider the current work of community partnerships."

Haila said he's "very happy to participate ... with the understanding that a task force is just that." Any task force findings would be given to city council for consideration, he said.

3. If elected, will you commit to meet with AMOS leaders within 60 days of the election to discuss these and other issues on our agenda?

All four candidates said they would.

Majak did not provide further comments.

Corrieri said she was "continually inspired" by the group's work during her two terms on city council.

Rollins said she's "always open to meeting with community members," and that the group "has a heart and a history of caring about our community."

After answering "yes," Haila added that he "really didn't appreciate that statement 'put pressure on officials.' "

"If we're going to work together ... my door is wide open, and I'm committed to working together, to working on mental health; I've demonstrated that," Haila said. "The point is, is that I don't appreciate pressure, but I do appreciate dialogue and working together."