

Q2: There is broad consensus throughout the city – from planners to the business community to residents - about the need for housing options. What specific ideas or policies do you support to solve the need for more housing options across the price range spectrum?

CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATE

Tim Werner: There is certainly a need for increasing the housing stock (including rentals) available in the Traverse City market in all but the highest price range. As a community we would have already solved this problem if a silver bullet existed. As there is no such silver bullet, it will take the aggregation of many approaches to increase the housing stock in the coming years. I believe what will be key is for projects currently under development to be successful. Such early successes will provide developers with increased confidence to pursue similar developments with similar techniques.

The City can help increase a project's likelihood of success by investing in public infrastructure near the project. For example, the Trailside project will benefit from the City completing the sidewalk network in the surrounding neighborhood, so that new residents of the project can better access local businesses, visit parks, and meet their neighbors.

There are few tools available to the City for addressing the need for housing stock. Two that I support are PILOTs and ADUs.

The PILOT, payment in lieu of taxes, is used on Michigan State Housing Development Authority projects in the City. I generally support the use of PILOTs, and strongly support them when they are applied to infill projects that place only incremental demand on City services.

I support increasing the annual allowable number of new ADUs, accessory dwelling units, from the current limit of 10 to a new limit of 20. With the requirement that the property be owner occupied, I am quite comfortable with this proposed increase. In addition, Traverse City has had an unregulated version of ADUs for over 100 years. There are many corner lots that were divided into two lots a century ago. My family lives in Central Neighborhood, and according to the City Assessor our lot is 0.19 acres. Two of our neighbors are on lots that are 0.12 acres and 0.07 acres. The small house on a tiny lot or an ADU are essentially equivalent, and have proven for a century to be fine additions to our neighborhoods.

Gary Howe: Creating more housing opportunities in all shapes and sizes is critical due to the changing demographics of an aging population, decreasing family sizes, and our need to retain young talent. The City's housing problems are well documented, and it concerns me that lack of housing is inhibiting local businesses from expanding. We have an opportunity to come together to shape the City's future and find ways to welcome new neighbors into our community while being inclusive and sensitive to the needs of people in different life stages and circumstances.

Housing is a critical piece of our infrastructure, and it's important for the City to be a supportive partner to those who are willing and able to build, retrofit, and maintain that infrastructure. I support PILOT requests for affordable housing projects that also help us meet goals related to building quality, redevelopment, and environmental protection with mixed-income housing that is integrated into the community. I'd also like to see us expand our use of the Land Bank Authority's Affordable Housing Trust Fund to help reduce land holding costs during planning, and potentially as a way to include public voices in development designs.

I strongly believe the real test for affordability is that the combined costs of housing and transportation cannot exceed 45% of income. Measuring affordability in this way allows us to make policy decisions that encourage infill development where jobs, services, and quality of life amenities are located: in the City and the urban cluster at its edges. We can do this by reducing impediments to compact housing developments downtown and along our corridors. For instance, we can consider unbundling parking from the cost of housing, so that those who don't require parking do not subsidize those who do. Where appropriate, this can reate more efficient use of land, connecting parking supply to market demand, right-sizing for what is actually needed.

Michele Howard: I am excited about the number of housing projects under construction in the City, and especially those geared toward filling the rental housing gap in our community. I think we need to continue engaging private citizens and also use municipal incentive tools strategically. Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) is one municipal tool that I support to engage private citizens to build housing options. I am in favor of the current ADU permit level of 10 permits per year to add housing but I think we need to work on making sure those permits get used and housing gets built. Part of the housing picture is also transportation. I supported the BATA millage and working with our neighboring municipalities to provide non-motorized and public transportation options into the City. Providing strong transportation networks allow people to live in areas of the City that may be more affordable than the downtown neighborhoods. Finally, I think we need reasonable regulations on short-term rentals, like AirBnB. We want to provide the right balance of allowing the sharing economy but at the same time ensuring that there is sufficient housing stock at reasonable prices for our residents.

Brian McGillivray: The city needs to be part of a regional approach to housing. Our limited land area simply is not large enough to accommodate the thousands of housing units that are needed. Better paying, year-round jobs would also help by strengthening and diversifying our economy. So would reducing or eliminating the ability to convert apartments into short-term rentals. The city also owns some property it could have or should have used to partner with housing agencies for low-income subsidized housing. But that is unlikely to put a dent into the housing needs issue. There are no simple solutions, and cramming the downtown with 10 story buildings won't resolve anything.

Jeff Leonhardt: After speaking with some longtime residents and former civic leaders, it is clear that the "housing options" topic has been around for decades. With increasing expense of property in the city, it only becomes more challenging. I think most reasonable people don't think this issue can be solved by the city alone. One resident and past leader said to me, we need regional cooperation on housing and a transportation system to get people into town and back again. I tend to agree with this sentiment. Affordable housing is a term used in order to get something in return but it seems that the affordable part never quite happens. Traverse City is a small town and land and real estate are expensive. Many workers simply aren't making enough money to live in the city. Wages have stagnated or gone down for decades countrywide. That is a fact that can't be ignored. Some are suggesting that density will allow people to buy in town and it will limit sprawl. In the case of Traverse City, I disagree. Traverse City alone is not going to solve this issue nor will it be solved by presenting solutions that many doubt will help and that don't fit in with the place we live. I question whether it is possible at all in the city at this time. That doesn't mean we don't look for reasonable opportunities to make it happen when we can, but we need to be realistic and honest.