

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Brian LaMeres

Mayoral Candidate X

Commission Candidate _____

Campaign Committee Name: n/a

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Is this your first candidacy?

No, I also ran for Mayor back in 2017.

Please detail your relevant work and educational history.

I have been a CPA employed in the City of Bozeman's Finance Department for 23 ½ years, currently in the capacity as Controller / Software Application Manager which provides me extensive knowledge of the City's budget process. I also was an appointed member of the CAHAB Community Affordable Housing Advisory Board as the City Finance Department representative and was repeatedly nominated and voted Chair for over 17 years.

I have a Bachelor's of Science degree in Business from MSU-Bozeman in both the Finance and Accounting options in addition to an MBA for the U of M – Missoula.

To maintain my CPA license, I'm required to take on average 40 hours of continuing education classes per year.

My "Better Half" Lisa is a small business owner with a motel in Bozeman and a motel/hotel in Three Forks, so my "Honey Do List" is quite interesting! I can't imagine anybody working harder than she does and I help her whenever/however I can, including bookwork, IT support, building maintenance, and cutting prime rib! This experience helps keep me grounded to the reality and challenges that small business owners face in this town.

Why are you running for office?

I'm running for office because Bozeman residents deserve more transparency and accountability in their City government and now is the time for a City Commission that will stand up to the bureaucracy in order to keep taxes under control.

What are your three top priorities for your term in office if you get elected?

Transparency and Accountability.

Responsible taxation and fee assessment.

Trust building and improved relationships between City Hall and other groups, including the County, Chamber of Commerce, and City employees.

Do you support an increase in taxes to increase the City's General Fund?

I might need more information in order to answer this question better because I'm not sure if you're talking about increasing taxes "to increase the General Fund Balance Cash Reserve" or whether you're talking about "to fund increased spending in the General Fund", but I'll assume you're talking about the latter. In that case, the only way I will support an increase in taxes in the City's General Fund is when it's an absolute need, such as Public Safety with more police officers or more firefighters, and when all other areas of General Fund spending have been scrutinized to determine whether cuts can be made to avoid an overall increase. This latest last-minute addition of 2 mills for Affordable Housing was unacceptable to me and was yet another abuse of the process in my opinion, as it left absolutely no room for even a discussion of where some cuts might be made to cover those 2 mills.

What about taxes for special districts?

While this is a more preferable form of taxation/assessment compared to general taxation, we really need to keep an eye on what's going on with these special districts to ensure that the taxpayer isn't getting double-dipped. With the proposed Parks and Trails maintenance district it's already confusing as to why there's not a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the amount of the reduction in the General Fund for the Parks Budget compared to the amount being proposed for the Special District. Now is the time for a Commission that will "question the answers" here, especially as the conversation continues about a local option sales tax – which again, needs to be a dollar for dollar reduction in the General Fund – and especially as we are now experiencing several years in a row of needing to dip into General Fund reserves in order to balance that budget.

Do you have a plan for improving community housing?

At the risk of sounding lazy, I think now is the time to "wait and see", just for a little while longer. We need to wait and see if 2020 census population count might surpass 50,000 and put Bozeman in the "entitlement community" status to qualify for federal funding and we need to wait and see what the Affordable Housing Working Group's final recommended action plan looks like. And we need to wait and see if the new dormitory at MSU makes any impact next year. In the meantime, the market will be trying to catch up the supply of housing in order to meet demand, and letting the market do its job is going to be the best strategy in the long run.

Why does the City need to be involved in affordable housing?

The last thing I want to do is to subsidize any deadbeats, but it does seem that we have a legitimate workforce housing issue in Bozeman that we can't ignore. I have been impressed by the work of HRDC and Habitat for Humanity over the years, in addition to some of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit project, and my instinct is to continue to provide City support for these and similar efforts. But we need to be open to the idea of condos, rentals, dormitory-style housing, and trailer parks as acceptable forms of affordable housing.

How do you envision your role in directing economic development and promoting responsible growth in our area?

I would encourage economic development to occur in areas where infrastructure, including broadband, already exists or is scheduled to occur, in addition to encouraging infill to address existing gaps along Main Street, etc. Generally speaking with regard to economic development and with regard to housing, I will continue to encourage growing "up" rather than "out" in order to avoid sprawl and the infrastructure and transportation issues that go along with that.

If the market were to slow down and the City had to make budget cuts, where would you recommend the cuts be made and why?

For starters I would look at the upper management budget, where – from what I can gather as I watch the televised Commission meetings and hear Commissioner Krauss talk about the "manager of the manager" – apparently there has been an additional layer of management added in recent years. I would remove this additional layer of management and the result would not only be cost savings but also increased employee morale and engagement, as a flatter organization is truly more consistent with the concept of a High Performing Organization.

I would also look at the Communication Coordinator position, the Neighborhoods Coordinator position, the additional position(s) that have been added to Sustainability and the additional position(s) that have been added to Economic Development. I'm not saying that I would immediately eliminate these positions, but I certainly want to learn more about what they actually do and what value they are adding, since they are funded by the increasingly scarce resources of the General Fund.

What is your position on:

Inclusionary Zoning	OPPOSED
Impact Fees	BEGRUDGINGLY IN FAVOR

Affordable Housing IN FAVOR, to the extent it addresses the WORKFORCE outlined above.
Streamline Transportation IN FAVOR
Sales Tax (tourist, local options, state) IN FAVOR, if it truly is a dollar for dollar “shift” in taxation and not an overall increase. This is where we really need somebody not only with the knowledge but with the courage to stand up to the bureaucracy.

How do you see the relationship between the City and the County?

It’s terrible and it needs to be improved. I don’t know the details but I am embarrassed by how I observe the City behave during televised joint City-County meetings, especially the last one regarding the possibility of a joint Law & Justice facility. The County representatives, both elected and non-elected, behaved how I would expect professionals to behave, while I was frankly embarrassed by how the City representatives behaved, even the ones who I have an overall admiration for and generally respect.

Who knows, maybe the County is indeed impossible to work with, but I’d like to give it a shot. I did run into County Commissioner Seifert last weekend and we will hopefully be having coffee in the near future to discuss this.

Do you want GAR’s endorsement? You bet!

Would you accept PAC money? No. In fact I don’t want any money from anybody. Any decision I ever make needs to be completely my own, and I can’t help but think that no matter how hard I tried I couldn’t help but feel influenced by the money. I did receive some money the last time around and I had to give it back because that is how I immediately felt.