

STREET collective

2021 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Just like in 2017 and 2019, the Street Collective wants to know where Des Moines City Council candidates stand on safe streets and active transportation issues. This questionnaire serves to educate and inform the Collective's members and the public. The Collective is an Iowa non-profit corporation and 501(c)(3) organization, so it does not endorse candidates for office. The Collective will, however, encourage all citizens to vote in the city elections held on November 2, 2021.

After the deadline below, the Collective will post these responses on its website (www.dsmstreetcollective.org), Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms. All responses should be considered public, including a decision not to respond to a particular question or the questionnaire as a whole. We use the terms "walking" and "walkability" as inclusive of people who use mobility devices.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please submit your responses via email to Mike Armstrong at Mike@dsmstreetcollective.org by September 21, 2021.

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name: [Marcus Coenen](#)
 [Bill Gray](#)
 [Indira Sheumaker](#)

Ward or At-Large seat: [Ward 1](#)

PRIORITIES

1. What are three transportation projects you want the City to complete during your term?

Marcus Coenen

- 1) Merle Hay Corridor Study - Merle Hay Road is an essential northwest corridor that provides entry into northwest Des Moines. I would like to see a corridor study for the Merle Hay Road corridor that looks at how safety can be improved while also supporting the various land uses from the residential neighborhoods to the south to the commercial corridor in the north.
- 2) Douglas Avenue Corridor - We are off to a great start on the Douglas Avenue corridor with the reconfiguration of travel lanes. I would like to see additional improvements made to make pedestrian travel easier across and along the corridor.
- 3) Connect Downtown - I would like to see the downtown street network transitioned from one-way streets to two-way streets so we can have a more walkable downtown.

Bill Gray

- 1) Douglas Avenue Corridor
- 2) 6 th Avenue Corridor
- 3) 2 nd Avenue reconstruction and bridge repair

Indira Sheumaker

- a. Building walkable neighborhoods by making our sidewalks walkable and transversable for mobility restricted folks, including adding buffers between the street and the sidewalk and increasing shade cover in neighborhoods that are lacking.
- b. I want to expand our public transportation system to have consistent service throughout the day and for us to make DART stops accessible to everyone.
- c. I want to begin exploring larger transportation systems connecting Des Moines to other important areas in Iowa and other important metros in the Midwest.

2. Scenario: a proposed street project would add a bike lane, a wider sidewalk, or a bus-only lane, but would remove some on-street parking spaces or a car traffic lane. How would you decide whether to support that project?

MC

I would decide to support this project if two things can be demonstrated. First, does the project improve safety for the traveling public? Based on the scenario I would assume there are some safety benefits to be gained through the alternatives identified. If safety on our streets will be improved by the project I would support the change. Second, it appears the proposed project would create a complete street. Having our streets support all modes of travel is important to create a safe, sustainable, and stronger city.

BG

Bike lanes and wider sidewalk is my choice. I have done that in the past along University Avenue and will be doing on Franklin Avenue.

IS

My first move will always be to consult with the residents, transit riders, pedestrians, local employees, and small businesses that are affected by any proposed change. It is important to me to represent the needs of my community directly, and let the people have decision making power over what happens in their neighborhood. With a project like this, the main thing I would want to explore is how much an increase in walkability and transit accessibility reduces the need for cars and parking as a main form of transportation in the area. With this in mind, it will be much easier to reduce on street parking and car traffic lanes in favor of green, community focused, and accessible transportation options.

3. Scenario: a developer proposes a project with affordable housing, but there are no transit lines, grocery stores, or sidewalks nearby. How would you decide whether to support that project?

MC

First, it is great that a developer is proposing a project with affordable housing - Des Moines and the region need more affordable housing. A major component of household budgets that are often overlooked when discussing the need for more affordable housing is the cost of transportation. I would support this project after discussing how the developer intends to address transportation costs related to the location not having transit connections or sidewalks nearby. One item that would help me support this project would be if the developer-funded a shuttle service for residents or identified a vehicle share program for residents. I would also like to see the developer work with the City to build the sidewalk or trail network to help connect the site to services.

BG

Whew. That would not gather much support from me. Affordable housing must be close to transit lines and sidewalks and more importantly, a grocery store.

IS

As a proponent of housing-first models, it is important to me to increase public, affordable, and accessible housing options in Des Moines where there is a desperate need. The need for housing will always come first. However, access to transit, basic needs resources, and a walkable neighborhood make housing more than just a roof over your head. Creating a plan for affordable housing in the region could include requirements for access to transit, sidewalks, and fresh food in new developments. This will reduce the need to push every developer to include these things in each individual project. Working with DART to expand transit options to underserved areas of the city, as well as diversifying our public transportation options can ensure all of Des Moines has access to transportation in the city. Additionally, increasing affordable housing options in areas where these resources already exist will diversify our neighborhoods while providing access to necessary resources for all our residents.

4. **Scenario: a proposed street project would deviate from the MoveDSM and/or Connect Downtown plans for that street. (Note: both were unanimously approved by the City Council and aim to make Des Moines more walkable and bike-friendly.) How would you decide whether to support that project?**

MC

I would support the project if it improves the safety of the traveling public on our streets. I am proposing the need for the City to complete a Vision Zero plan to identify strategies to make our streets safer. If we reduce the likelihood of potential injury or death from our streets we will be moving forward to creating a more walkable and bike-friendly city.

BG

It would depend on the deviation. If the deviation made sense, it would be worth pursuing.

IS

I believe it is important for the City of Des Moines to make a plan that will improve the lives of its residents and stick to it. However, it seems we have made a habit of amending these plans for every new project that comes along. If this is a fault in the plan, that means we need to revisit and build a plan that truly reflects the vision of the people of Des Moines. If projects are consistently exceeding the expectations of the plan and doing better on walkability, bikeability, and access to transportation, I would support updating the plan to be more ambitious. Any proposed projects that do not meet the standards set out in our plan should be updated to reflect the values and intentions set forth by the city. We should not be cutting corners, we should be aiming higher.

WALKING

5. **What investments, if any, do you support that would make sidewalks and crosswalks easier and safer to use for people with disabilities?**

MC

We need to increase our paint budget so we can delineate crosswalks throughout our city. This will help alert drivers that they should expect other users to enter the street. 2) We need to make sure crosswalks at intersections are appropriately designed to accommodate pedestrian crossings. One example of an intersection that needs significant improvements is Euclid Ave and the entrance to Polk County River Place. 3) We need to put more funding toward completing our sidewalk network. 4) We need to identify midblock crossing locations that are frequently used and would be safer with crosswalks and/or pedestrian hybrid beacons.

BG

We are doing that now. Ramps at the corners is being done city wide. Crosswalks with some activated lights make sense.

IS

I support every investment we can make to increase the accessibility of our sidewalks and crosswalks. Our first priority should be to flatten and widen our sidewalks where they exist, and install sidewalks where they don't. We need to do a full assessment of anywhere mobility can be impeded on our sidewalks. For crosswalks we should invest in increased crossing times that cater to our slowest pedestrians, automated voice assistance with appropriate crossing information, highly visible paint colors, tactical warning surfaces, and any other accessibility technology to make our street crossings safer. We should also be evaluating our street corners and crossings for visibility at lower heights to protect younger pedestrians and others who could be impeded. What will be most important is bringing together members of our community with mobility restrictions to make decisions on what they need in their neighborhoods.

6. In 1969, about 50% of American children walked or biked to school. Today, less than 10% do. What should the City do to reverse this trend?

MC

Maintaining infrastructure around our neighborhood schools is essential to increasing walking and biking to school. That means we need to make sure there are no gaps in sidewalks along school walk routes or missing crosswalks at intersections. We also need to work with our school district, school officials, and PTAs to encourage other modes of travel to school for our kids. We need to work to create walking school buses and ensure crossing guards are located at busy intersections.

BG

I was in that 50% in 1969. Making sidewalks a priority near schools and bus stops (which we are already doing) and bicycle paths to get to school and more bike racks.

IS

There are many reasons children are not currently walking and biking to school. Many of our schools do not have adequate sidewalks to ensure safe routes. This needs to be addressed with urgency. We need to make stronger relationships between DSM City Council & DSM School Board to best determine courses of action to reverse this trend. Safety concerns are a big priority for parents when imagining their child(ren) going to school independently. We can make parents feel more comfortable about sending their kids to school by making sure our neighborhoods are safe and children have a safe route to and from school. This means increasing sidewalks and public transit, slowing down traffic speeds, and making communities more walkable overall. Being able to alleviate the concerns of parents by having a communication system informing parents when their child has arrived could also help reverse these trends. Having crossing guards in areas near schools will help ensure students get to school safely and independently. It is critical to analyze the other needs of children transporting themselves to school. Because bikes are a luxury, investing in projects which get more bikes to children at no extra costs would be worth the costs to help reverse these trends. Helmets would be another financial and safety aspect. As well as bike locks. Also, making sure students have adequate walking shoes would help ensure more walkability. Additionally, there is a social awareness component that children must be trained in

order to walk to school independently. Making sure they are aware not to speak to strangers, not to get rides from anyone unexpectedly, and more would need to be discussed to have children navigating safely to school.

BICYCLING

- 7. Many cities have significant public funding for bike share programs. Do you support increased City funding for the BCycle system? Why or why not?**

MC

I would support increased funding for BCycle because it offers access to a mode of travel other than a personal vehicle. However, I would like to see BCycle continue to increase ridership and expand the system further into neighborhoods in Ward 1. We currently only have four stations in Ward 1 which are all located around Drake University. Also, I would like to see the BCycle system become a regional system that allows residents the opportunity to utilize our extensive regional trail network. Therefore, I would like to see regional transportation funding increase as well. I am currently monitoring how the new federal infrastructure bill will make bike share systems eligible for additional funding.

BG

We have supported BCycle while I was on the council. Drake is a prime example of the public/private partnership in that area.

IS

Yes. Bikes are good for public health and the environment. It can be a more accessible way to obtain a bike versus needing to invest in all bike costs. We want to encourage biking as a transportation option.

- 8. Imagine a 10-year old and a 70-year old bicycling on a busy street. What kinds of infrastructure protections would you want in place to ensure their safety and comfort? If there are budget constraints for a street like the one you described, at what point do finances rise above safety concerns for you?**

MC

On a busy street that is used by riders of varying levels of ability, I would like to see protected or separated bike facilities. Ideally, the facility would have a well-delineated buffer between vehicles and bicycles, as well as, bicycles and pedestrians. The new project on Ingersoll Avenue is an example of creating that designated area for all users. Safety must be the top priority for every project on our city streets. Evaluating the life-cycle benefits and costs of a project should be the norm for all city projects. Using a life-cycle evaluation, the long-term safety benefits will likely show that the marginal increase in cost today will reward residents well into the future.

BG

If there are budget constraints for a street like the one you described, at what point do finances rise above safety concerns for you? Protected bike lanes should be installed. About the only financial concern I would have would be if we needed to buy ROW and it put the project out of budget.

IS

a. The most pressing issue for bicyclists in the city today is the lack of connection between various bike paths, on-street bike lanes, and the place they need to go. Connecting all our different biking paths will make the city much more transversable for bikers. Medians or vertical barriers between bike lanes and automobile lanes as well as sufficient signage will provide functional infrastructure protection to increase the safety of bicyclists. Additionally, we should ensure our bike lanes are free of debris that may not affect a car, but can be dangerous for cyclists of any age.

b. Our long-term goal should be shifting the culture of transportation in Des Moines to a less car-dependent model. Updating our infrastructure in tandem with our public transportation system can lead to less traffic, slower traffic, the elimination of "stroads" (wide, multi-lane, high speed street/road hybrids), and more bike friendly roads to connect all neighborhoods and business districts in Des Moines. This should be a financial priority for the city. As long as these priorities are reflected in our annual budget, we shouldn't need to sacrifice safety, environmentalism, or resident happiness.

TRANSIT

9. How can the City help DART improve its bus system and attract more riders?

MC

Foremost, we need to increase density along key transit corridors where appropriate to create transit-supportive corridors. Adding density where we are able will provide DART with potentially more riders on those routes and give those residents more options for how they move through the city. We need to work on getting all local routes to seven-day service. I have previously taken DART to get to work downtown, but was unable to take DART to events I wanted to attend on weekends because the route that I typically take does not have weekend service. Next, we need to work on improving the frequency of buses. Increasing the frequency of buses will improve the perception that you could just walk down the street and hop on a bus - rather than planning your trip, standing and waiting, and then being delayed. Increasing the frequency of buses will attract more riders. Lastly, I would like to see a proposal for making transit free for all riders. This approach has been successful in other cities, so why not see if it is a possibility for Des Moines.

BG

Always a good question. We already have bike racks on busses to accommodate people who want to move about in the city.

IS

Attracting riders comes down to making public transportation more convenient, more accessible, and more reliable than driving. The first steps to this goal would be free or significantly reduced fares, increased routes, and consistent service throughout the day. To get support throughout the Greater Des Moines Area for these improvements, we will need to make DART a staple for commutes between the city and the suburbs. This will mean reducing the number of parking spots downtown that sit empty on the weekends, and incentivizing commuters to use the bus through marketing, promotions, and accessibility.

10. We consistently see DART stops blocked by snow and unreachable by sidewalks. How can the City address this?

MC

The city needs to accelerate the construction of sidewalks throughout the city. We have far too many streets that lead to bus stops that do not have sidewalks. Being able to access public transportation starts and ends with sidewalks. If we do not have them, how can we expect residents to use transit? I think the city can work with DART to make sure snow is removed from boarding and alighting locations. While removing snow from streets is the priority during snow events, it would make sense to me to have our public works team assist with clearing bus stops where needed.

BG

That is frustrating. We need to keep calling DART to let them know they are falling short of helping their ridership get access.

IS

This is a problem that we have heard a lot about from community members who ride the bus in the winter. Last winter, myself and other members of our campaign worked to address this problem by organizing and mobilizing volunteers to wake up early to shovel snow at DART stops. We were able to clear most of the bus stops in Ward 1 through our volunteer effort. However, this shouldn't be something that is left to volunteers and focused on only one part of the city. We should be paying workers during the winter to clear bus stops across the city after every snowfall.

EQUITY

11. What should the role of the police be in traffic enforcement? What is the best way to hold drivers accountable for speeding, blocking bike lanes and crosswalks, failing to stop or yield, etc.?

MC

Traffic enforcement has traditionally been one of the elements of creating safe streets, however, that has changed in recent years as data related to traffic stops not being as effective at improving safety. Traffic stops have also been documented as a tool to arrest individuals for non-traffic-related offenses. We need to design better streets that cue drivers to the behavior we would like to see on streets. We need to design our streets for reasonable speed limits in residential areas. We need to physically separate bike lanes so parked cars cannot block them. We need to paint crosswalks when we have pedestrians crossing.

BG

With regards to speeding, we have a policy in place to do a “traffic calming study” and when it is done, measures can be implemented to reduce speeding. With regards to parking issues, we need to have the public call them in whenever they observe violations.

IS

It is unnecessary for armed and trained police officers to be involved in traffic enforcement. Moving the city to a model with unarmed civilian traffic directors that focus solely on the safety of our roadways will increase the safety of all drivers, pedestrians, and other transit users. Police surveillance leads to racial profiling and can create a system of police targeting residents beyond the needs of enforcing traffic laws, and using alleged traffic violations as an excuse to violate ones rights. b. Additionally we can reduce the need for intervention with changes in our built environment. Things like speed bumps help drivers slow down, digital speed limits signs which inform you of your current speed in comparison to the posted speed in the area can help reduce speeding. Making sure bike lanes are clearly marked and creating signs which advise of fines for parking in these lanes can hold drivers accountable for blocking bike lanes. I am excited to explore more options for building safer streets that reduce the need for police in our communities.

12. Much of Des Moines is zoned for low-density uses like detached single-family homes and commercial properties that require many car parking spaces. What impacts, if any, does this have on the transportation system? What policies, if any, do you support to combat those impacts?

MC

The combination of vast areas of single-family housing and commercial properties with large parking lots supports the notion that to move about the region you need a car and you need to drive. The more you continue to add tracts of single-family housing, the

more land you need to use and the more you encourage driving long distances to get to employment centers. Some cities have eliminated single-family housing in their zoning codes to help add density that could combat. I am not sure this is entirely appropriate for the City of Des Moines as there are still areas targeted for growth within the Iowa 5 Bypass that would make sense as single-family units. I think we can continue to move away from parking requirements and work with commercial property owners to identify better ways to use existing parking when a new land use is being added to an area. We should also move away from requiring traffic impact studies that tell the developer what auto-oriented improvements they need to help fund. Instead, we should implement a Transportation Demand Management policy that requires new developments to demonstrate how they are helping reduce single-occupant vehicle trips by adding amenities like bike lockers, pedestrian connections to transit, and reduced parking stalls.

BG

We need to get vehicles off the streets and onto parking spots that can accommodate the use in that area. If it is residential, provide some driveway or garage that will keep them off the street. Commercial properties need to provide enough parking to keep the streets clear for transportation purposes.

IS

Having many individual properties makes it so driveways or parking lots are built in addition to each individual property. This then creates a culture of parked cars and takes up valuable space which could be used to have more accessible public transit. It also just gets rid of green space which could have multi purpose use. It's not good for the environment. Having a policy of advancing public transit would certainly combat how developers are building. We could require businesses to keep streets accessible and limit their ability to build more parking lots/garages in our city.

13. Neighborhoods where fewer people can afford a car (i.e., those that are poorer and have a higher proportion of people of color) are also those lacking good transit, safe walking and biking, and quality streetscapes (e.g., trees, benches, trash cans, public art, etc.). How would you address these inequities?

MC

To have complete streets in the City of Des Moines, we need to focus on building streets that not only move individuals. We need to create streets that have amenities that make our streets a safe and comfortable location to travel. In neighborhoods that lack good transit, we need to identify routes that can be adjusted to better serve residents. We need to connect homes to transit with sidewalks. We need to invest in neighborhoods to complete our streets.

BG

We are already installing sidewalks in high priority areas and plan to keep this program going until we have the city all sidewalk connected.

IS

These areas are where we should start with plans to increase walkability and access to public transportation. Areas that have good sidewalks, accessible resources, and public transportation access are wonderful at building community, and giving us a sense of place and belonging. We prioritize underserved neighborhoods in our plans and our budgeting. We must start using financing options the city usually reserves for businesses to put our tax dollars directly back into our neighborhoods. In addition to increasing walkability, bikeability and transit, we should invest in planting trees for shade, rejecting anti-homeless architecture, increasing waste receptacles, recycling and compost options, environmentally friendly street lights that are designed to reduce light pollution, and paved and covered DART bus stops.

14. The largest source of climate change-causing greenhouse gases in America is from transportation. What role should the City have in cutting these pollutants?

MC

Electrification of the transportation sector needs to happen as quickly as possible to address transportation's role in climate change. We need to continue to convert our fleet of city vehicles - including heavy trucks - to electric or other alternative fuels. We need to add charging stations throughout downtown to support the transition to personal electric vehicles. We need to set policies for regional funding that requires new bus purchases to be electric. We need to help our school districts convert to electric school buses. We need to convert all of those vehicles and then we need to start generating electricity locally by adding solar canopies over city-owned parking. This will help the city support the transition to an electric fleet, while also offsetting our carbon footprint for the production of the energy needed to supply the electric vehicles. (Another benefit of the canopies is how they protect vehicles from weather events like hail).

BG

Pushing more bicycle friendly routes and turning to EV. The city is setting the example by purchasing more EV than ever before

IS

Shifting from a car-dependent city to a city with diverse, accessible, and green public transportation is the biggest thing we can do to combat climate change and is our duty as a city. Some ideas include:

- i. Wells Fargo and Principal are our cities biggest employers in the downtown area especially. Mandating that these companies provide bus passes to their employees and incentivizing their employees for utilizing public transit instead of having employees all drive to work is one way we can cut pollutants.
- ii. City staff could also be mandated to lead by example.
- iii. Reducing the city's fleet, especially by reducing or eliminating police patrol vehicles, and ending military contracts that provide police with tanks, bearcats, and other large vehicles.
- iv. Transition to all electric busses, and electric trolleybuses

YOU PERSONALLY

15. How often do you walk, ride a bike, or ride transit for your daily needs? Would you accept the Street Collective's challenge to live without driving for a week?

MC

Before the pandemic, I was taking transit and walking quite often for daily needs. One of the reasons we purchased our house was its proximity to a grocery store. Since the pandemic, I have tried to limit my daily trips as much as possible and still find walking to neighborhood businesses very enjoyable. Currently, I walk my daughter to her daycare about a mile away from home. It is a great way for us to spend time together every morning. I think her favorite part is getting to see all the dogs out for their morning walks. I would be more than happy to accept the challenge to live without driving for a week.

BG

I walk every day that I can in my neighborhood – Beaverdale. I think I'll pass on the challenge. Too many places to go and too little time

IS

These days, I mostly drive for my daily needs. Yes, I would accept the Street Collective's challenge to live without driving for a week. However, as someone who has had to rely on our public transit system in the past, I know this challenge would be difficult due to insufficient bus routes and limited schedules. There are plenty of people in our city for whom this is not a Street Collective challenge but an everyday reality. Our city officials can not continue to ignore the needs of so many Des Moines residents. We must work to improve our lacking public transportation, improve walkability and bikeability throughout our city. Public transportation should be free, there are many funds that currently exist that can fill this need.

16. What is your favorite street to walk or bike on in Des Moines? Why do you like it?

MC

I think my favorite street to walk on in Des Moines is Franklin Avenue. The section of Franklin Ave that we usually walk on has nice street trees and transit stops. We can walk to the grocery store, to get dinner, or to get ice cream at Snookies. I also really enjoy biking on the newly restriped section of Franklin Ave with its bike lane and lower speed limit. I know there are still plans in the works to improve Franklin Ave with additional storm sewer work, but knowing that a group of neighbors spoke up to make sure Franklin Ave has a speed limit that is appropriate for the new design really makes that section important.

BG

Franklin Avenue and Beaver Avenue. Great tree canopy, friendly people to meet and usually great weather.

IS

a. I love to walk and bike up and down Urbandale Avenue. It is close to my home and my heart, as I traversed this street all throughout my childhood. Some of my favorite memories are walking in the street in the middle of the night. I always felt safe and peaceful, and I could see a car coming from blocks away. It is also a center of community during Beaverdale Fall Fest when the whole community comes out and walks along the sidewalks, and down the medians toward Beaver Ave. It is truly a cornerstone of my neighborhood.

b. Part of what I love is that Urbandale has a wide bike path for a few blocks that is wonderful for a leisurely walk, or the start of a longer bike ride. It is also an important thoroughway to other parts of the neighborhood, and a small business district that I like to frequent. It actually connects three of Ward 1's neighborhoods before it ends at 30th St! I used to take the bus to work from Urbandale avenue when there was a bus stop here, but it has been long since removed. I would like to see more streets that are pedestrian, transit, and car friendly in the rest of the city.

c. One of my favorite pieces of history about Urbandale Ave. is that it used to be a trolley line, which is why there are such wide medians. One of my biggest dreams for Des Moines is to bring our transit system to a place where we have trains, trolleys, and buses connecting all of the neighborhoods. We can have multiple different options for people to get around the city.